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San Lorenzo's Flood Control Project To Be Started Soon

By Gordon Sinclair
Managing Editor of The Sentinel
(First of a series of three.)

The greatest public works job in the history of Santa Cruz—the San Lorenzo river flood control project—will soon get under way.

Last Friday in San Francisco, the United States corps of army engineers formally advertised for bids on the big flood control project. Contractors will have 30 days to look over the design plans and specifications, and the site before the deadline for bids closes.

By September 1, officials estimate the project will have been awarded to the lowest bidder and work will get started on the continuing project. It will take 570 days to complete the job.

It is expected that the total construction job will cost about \$4,500,000 and the acquisition of rights-of-way, transfer of utility lines and other non-construction costs will total another \$2 million.

Without question, it will be the largest public works project ever constructed in the county. Previously, the largest job was the Morrissey boulevard to Rob Roy junction freeway, completed in 1949 at a total cost of \$4,190,000.

The San Lorenzo river flood control project will be under the direct supervision of the army corps of engineers in the San Francisco district. Colonel J. S. Hartnett is the new district engineer, succeeding Col. John Graf earlier this month.

Actual construction will be done by a private construction company selected on the basis of the low bid submitted for the project.

Last year Congress allocated the sum of \$307,000 for the corps of engineers to complete their final plans for the project. About \$100,000 of that sum is expected to be used in the early phase of construction.

In the 1957-58 federal budget, the sum of \$1,200,000 has been recommended by the engineers and their recommendation has been followed by committees in the house and senate with expectations that formal Congressional approval of the fund will be granted in the near future and that President Eisenhower will authorize the expenditure.

On the basis of these expectations, the engineers have announced the advertisement for bids.

There's a long and involved history behind the flood control project.

Back on June 28, 1938, the 75th congress, 3rd session, authorized the Flood Control act, Public Law 761. It made possible federal participation through the corps of army engineers in local flood control projects.

On February 27, 1940, the city of Santa Cruz had 207 acres of property inundated by a flash flood in the San Lorenzo River. There were no deaths, but considerable property damage. Total damage estimates for the city and the San Lorenzo valley area ran between \$500,000 and \$1,000,000.

The San Lorenzo flooded again Sunday, February 9, 1941. It was not as bad as the 1940 flood, but the rising waters did cause the evacuation of a number of residents from the lowland around Barson street and in the Garfield street sector.

Once again on February 1, 1945, the San Lorenzo had a flash flood. It didn't cause extensive damage although it just about wrecked a few of the remaining buildings in the city's Old Chintown area behind Cooper street.

Public hearings were held in Santa Cruz December 14, 1938, and again on March 6, 1945 before the corps of engineers to establish the value of a flood control plan for the San Lorenzo river.

The 1945 hearing was held in city council chambers with H. Ray Judah, now manager of the civic auditorium, handling the presentation for the city. At that time both the city and the San Lorenzo Valley county water district were plugging for a multi-purpose flood control project that would provide for dam construction on the San Lorenzo river or its tributaries to furnish both flood control protection for the valley and Santa Cruz and for water supplies for both sectors.

For years flood control became a thing of the past. Then May 28, 1953, the corps of engineers issued their favorable report for the Santa Cruz flood control project.

The report read: "The reporting officers recommend authorization for construction, within the city of Santa Cruz, of levees and flood walls along San Lorenzo river, for a distance of about 2.4 miles, together with minor channel improvements, and improvement and channel rectification of Branciforte creek, for a distance of nearly one mile, at an estimated total project first cost as of February, 1951, of \$3,083,000 of which the federal cost is estimated at \$2,413,000 and the non-federal cost at \$670,000."

Later the report said, "The project would be amply justified by the prospective benefits. The reporting officers conclude that a high degree of flood protection would be accomplished by the recommended project, within the city of Santa Cruz, and that the plan for channel improvements would not interfere with future water supply or related developments in the basin."

Another section of the report eliminated the multi-purpose plan with the statement, "Federal participation for flood control would not be warranted in multi-purpose reservoirs proposed by local interests because the costs for such flood control would exceed the benefits."

On June 23, 1953, the report from the South Pacific division of the corps of engineers, submitted by Colonel P. D. Berrigan, was approved by the board of engineers in Washington, D.C. Little more than a year later (September 4, 1954) when President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the omnibus rivers and harbors bill, the project included the authorization for federal participation in the San Lorenzo river flood control project.

Still to be handled was the \$670,000 "non-federal cost." These funds would be required for changes in two bridges across Branciforte creek, for changes in the old footbridges across the river at Cooper street and across Branciforte creek at May street as well as lowering the sewer crossing near the Riverside avenue bridge and the acquisition of all the right-of-

way along both sides of the river required for the "take lines" of the flood control project.

In the interim, the California legislature in 1945 had passed enabling legislation to allow state participation in federal fund control projects. Such participation of the state providing the cost of all lands, easements, rights-of-way, etc., had to be approved by the state water resources board, official state agency dealing with federal flood control programs.

On December 2, 1955, just 20 days before the Christmas floods, the state water resources board approved the authorization of a \$670,000 expenditure for the San Lorenzo river flood control project after a presentation by City Manager Robert N. Klein.

Then came the flood—the real flood with four persons killed inside the city as a total of eight persons died in the area by the tremendous flood that surpassed all previous floods in the memory of Santa Cruzans.

Total loss in the city was finally set at about \$75 million. Some 410 acres were inundated. Five feet of water swept down Pacific avenue during the night of December 22, flooding basements and leaving the city's downtown business district in a stinking sea of mud and wrecked merchandise.

One week after the flood, the San Lorenzo project was just a proposal recommended by the army engineers. It contained no priority in congress. A group of leading Santa Cruzans along with Mayor Tom Polk Williams Sr. and City Manager Robert N. Klein signed an eight-page telegram to Senators Knowland and Kuchel and Congressman Charles S. Gubser, urging putting the project on emergency status.

The appeal was successful and through outstanding work of our representatives in Washington, the San Lorenzo flood control project was sailing on its way through the rough channel of federal bureaucracy.

On March 16, 1956, the state legislature approved Assembly Bill 55, appropriating the sum of \$1,000,000 for state participation in the flood control project.

In July, congress authorized the sum of \$307,000 for final plans and preliminary construction in the 1956-57 budget.

Final plans have been completed by the engineers and the project is ready to begin.

(Tomorrow, recap of the flood and what has gone on in the planning and engineering stages of the flood control project.)

Beach Erosion Project Nears Realization

Both the state of California and Congress took steps today which brings the \$1,573,000 beach erosion program for the crumbling coastline from West Cliff drive to 49th avenue nearer to realization.

The house public works committee today approved a bill to authorize future construction of numerous water projects costing slightly less than \$1.5 billion. Included in the bill was \$516,000 for the beach erosion project.

California's Gov. Goodwin Knight signed legislation authorizing the state on beach erosion control projects authorized by Congress and requiring local participation, to pay half of the local construction costs. The bill was introduced by Sen. Donald Grunsky (R-Watsonville).

The house bill is quite similar to the one which Congress passed last year but which President Eisenhower subsequently vetoed. Last year's veto measure carried project authorizations totaling \$1,619,292,000.

Under the house bill, if passed by Congress, the federal government would foot one-third of bill and local government would pay the remaining two-thirds. The state legislation allows the state to pay one-half of the local costs, but does not authorize the money. This would have to be done in the future by the legislature.

Locally, the remaining one-third would probably have to be split up between cities of Santa Cruz and Capitola and the county government.

An army engineer survey of the area showed the sea is chewing away the shoreline at varying rates that reach a foot a year in the Santa Maria Del Mar sector.

The house bill also authorized a cost allocation study of Soquel creek for flood protection.

Obtaining Of Burning Permits Urged By Chief

Uncontrolled grass fires sent fire department pumbers on six calls yesterday, four to lots where residents had failed to get burning permits and take proper precautions.

Fire Chief Jack Sinnott said his department has been lenient on issuing citations to persons burning without a permit in the past, but as the dry season lengthens and fires are less easily contained, action may be necessary.

Burning without a permit after noon is classed

City Plans Condemnation Of Property

The city will institute condemnation proceedings against property owners who have not signed over right of entry along the path of the first segment of the San Lorenzo river flood control project.

City Engineer Robert N. Klein added he has been with how much land may be involved in the proceedings as some owners are still in progress. The negotiations "mostly a difficult idea involves the land involved in the negotiations."