

Board rejects halt to river cleanup

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By LANE WALLACE
STAFF WRITER

Flood prevention + control

SANTA CRUZ — A plea by environmentalists to stop clearing of the Pajaro River channel until more study is done was unanimously rejected yesterday by county supervisors.

The emergency clearing prompted by the March 11 Pajaro flood isn't necessary, five environmentalists told the board.

The clearing, which began last week, will mean "almost a complete removal of vegetation," said Christine Johnson-Lyons, representing Wetlands Watch, a South County environmental group, and the Community Action Board.

Johnson-Lyons said the clearing "will most likely eliminate the opportunity for one generation of species." She urged a more selective clearing of the river bank.

Jim Van Houten, a retired engineer and member of Wetlands

Watch, said, "there are a number of alternatives on how to increase the flood control" capabilities of the river.

Marilyn Hummel of the Sierra Club said a delay shouldn't do any harm, because another flood is unlikely at this time of year.

But County Administrative Officer Susan Mauriello said she is "greatly concerned" about how soft the ground is from the flood, adding that rain is forecast for the weekend.

While voting to continue the cleanup, Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt said the environmentalists "have legitimate concerns" and said she wants to see a long-range

management plan for the river.

County Public Works Director John Fantham said he will be soon meet with state Department of Fish and Game representatives to work out a master plan.

The plan won't be as comprehensive as the \$380,000 study required by Fish and Game that the county authorized four days before the flood.

The contract was canceled, and the money allocated for cleaning the river.

Fantham said no vegetation is being cleared within five feet of the

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water line; above that, mostly everything up to the levee is being cleared. The project is expected to take three weeks.

The clearing work is not an entire "clear-cutting." Trees are being marked every 75 feet for preservation, Fantham said.

The work is only being done on the Santa Cruz County side of the river, because the \$380,000 is from Zone 7 Flood Control District funds, which come from a fee on Pajaro Valley land in Santa Cruz County.

Watsonville-area Supervisor Ray Belgard, who pushed for formation of Zone 7 three years ago, said 1.75 miles of the river were cleared in the last two years. "If we had been able to clear five miles, we wouldn't have had the problems we had" in the flood.