

# Politicians gather to discuss Pajaro River clearing costs

By JOHN ROBINSON  
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WATSONVILLE — As the Pajaro River meanders back and forth across county lines it creates a bureaucratic tangle when it comes to determining who should be responsible for flood control.

Should it be the Army Corps of Engineers, the state Department of Fish and Game, Flood Control District 7 or 2, or Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito or Santa Clara Counties — or the farmers?

Maybe all of them, according to state Senator Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, who said Saturday at a meeting at Watsonville City Hall that he wants to form a new government agency to manage the Pajaro River.

"The flood will happen again if we allow the same condition to happen again," Mello said.

"The problem with multi-county agencies is that everybody wants to protect their own pocketbooks. They have to realize it is part of all of our economy — that your neighbor's welfare is your welfare."

Mello and other politicians, including U.S. Rep. Sam Farr, D-Carmel said a new benefit district encompassing the Pajaro River could help ease problems of flood control projects that have recently arisen.

For example, the Santa Cruz County side of the river has been bulldozed and cleared of nearly all vegetation — which should allow the river to channel flood waters without it breaching the dikes.

Across the now shallow river, however, the Monterey County bank is still thick with rushes, willows and other trees — vegetation that some claim encourages water slowing and dike

destroying snags.

The reason is simple — money.

The Santa Cruz side of the river is in Flood Control Zone 7 which has tax assessments of \$250,000, money used to clear the banks. The Monterey side, however, is Flood Control Zone 2 which raises only \$47,000 in assessments — leaving Monterey County unable to pay for river clearing.

Monterey County officials want to use herbicides and hand tools to control plant growth, while Santa Cruz favors heavy machinery such as bulldozers.

Others would like to see the Pajaro River kept somewhat natural and wild.

"People are going on like this is going to be the L.A. River — that you should cement the banks so that it is not a river but a drainage ditch," said Frank Bardacke, of Watsonville.