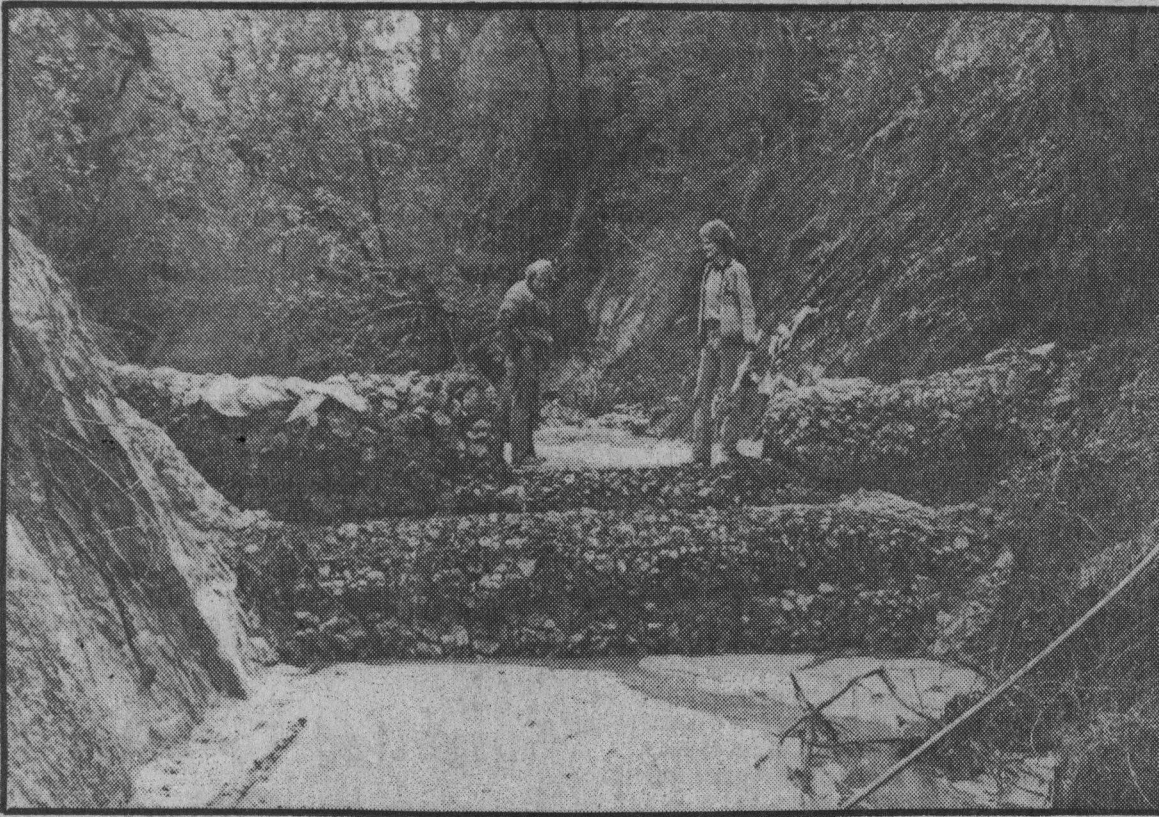


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Al Haynes and Peter Cota-Robles check out one of the check dams.

# Homeowner Thankful For Check Dams

By KEITH MURAOKA  
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At least one Ben Lomond homeowner is thankful for the county's action involving the big storm. In fact, their creekside home could easily have been wiped out were it not for the county.

Some 3,000 cubic yards of mud and sediment were trapped in a series of so-called check dams just above the home of Robert and Susan Gomez of Glen Arbor Road in the Quail Hollow area.

The dams were built last fall by the county through its Environmental Planning

sector, working with a \$300,000 grant from the state Department of Fish and Game.

"We would have been wiped out for sure," stated Susan. "We really feel the county pulled us through."

The Gomez home sits only a few feet away from a severe bend in a natural drainage culvert that carries runoff water from the homes above into Newell Creek.

The residence was "inundated with mud, sand and water," according to Susan, just two years ago in a storm that was much less severe than this one.

Fish and Game became involved since the six check dams were really built for the benefit of the fishery habitat, explained county Watershed Analyst Al Haynes.

The dams, each made up of cyclone fence and about 50 cubic yards of rock, were to control the erosion of the drainage culvert and the "chronic problems with sediment," said Haynes.

"Protecting the fishery habitat from sedimentation was the prime purpose," he added. "Flood control to residences was an added benefit."

Layers of sand was trapped behind the walls of the check dams. Further above, a large basin built in 1977 by the county, trapped even more sand and water.

"We really didn't expect the dams to keep so much water out," said Haynes. "I'm tickled pink it worked so well. It definitely slowed the water up, as well as trapping more sediment than we had hoped."

Peter Cota-Robles, an assistant civil engineer with Environmental Planning, noted that the check dams also served to benefit landowners adjacent to the culvert. Much of their land was saved by the stabilization of the banks and slopes.

Both admitted, however, that large amounts of sediment still went into other Valley creeks, hampering the future fishery habitat.

Expansion of similar projects is hoped for, but they are dependant on the availability of state and federal funding.

New, future problems, though, shouldn't be adding to sedimentation build-up, according to Cota-Robles.

It is felt the county erosion control ordinance of two years ago will now prevent residential developers from allowing runoff into such natural drainage culverts. On-site retention facilities are now required whenever feasible, he said.

Work on this so-called "pilot project," however, is

not over.

Remedial work will continue this summer, as well as the installation of outfall drains below the Gomez residence. Quail Hollow School, which contributes a significant amount of runoff due to its large hard surfaces, will also be the recipient of on-site retention facilities as part of the program.

Ironically, while the Gomez home was probably saved because of the preventive steps taken, the Gomez' do have litigation pending against the county for failure to maintain the drainage culvert two years ago, which added to the damage incurred.

"Areas like these will always be susceptible to large storms," concluded Haynes. "However, we have seen how programs like these can minimize damage to both wildlife and residents alike."