

EARTHQUAKE '89 - Watsonville

✓ Pajaro levee repair starts

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WATSONVILLE — The reconstruction of a nearly mile-long section of the earthquake-damaged Pajaro River levee from Watsonville to the Pacific Ocean began Monday.

The 7.1 earthquake ripped apart segments of the levee, creating cracks up to 8 feet deep and 2 feet wide in some areas.

Without the repair work, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spokeswoman Marilyn Guelden said heavy winter rains could "cause the levee to fail and spill flood water into Watsonville and nearby farmland."

The work is being done by

Granite Construction Co. of Watsonville under the auspices of the Corps of Engineers. It will cost approximately \$1 million to repair, with the work expected to be wrapped up in a month, Guelden said.

"We must work quickly to repair that damage," said John Azeveda, the corps' resident engineer.

"The levee cracks are very susceptible to erosion from rain and river seepage," he said. "A weak levee could fail during high water and cause flooding."

About 4,700 feet of the levee was damaged by the Oct. 17 earthquake. The corps has identified 46 sites to be completely reconstructed.

Most of the damage was sustained to the part of the levee that

runs from the Riverside Drive bridge, through Watsonville to the rivermouth.

In addition, the repair work will include three sites along Corralitos Creek, which feeds into the Pajaro River.

Many of the cracks go 30 feet or so, to the water line. Guelden said the corps will have to dig to water line, clear it out and recompact the soil.

The cost of repairing the levee system, which was built in 1944 by the Corps of Engineers, is covered by a special federal disaster-assistance fund, Guelden said.

Because the river divides Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, both share responsibility for maintaining the waterway.