

^{CF Wetlands} PV water agency may aid saltwater battle at Elkhorn ^{RP p.1}

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Property owners along the upper reaches of Elkhorn Slough may be getting some help from the Pajaro Valley Water Management Agency

Led by Alex Solano, property owners along the slough east of Elkhorn Slough Road have been trying to get Monterey County or some agency to repair the tidal gates damaged by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

The gates were first installed

four decades ago when Moss Landing Harbor was first dredged and the sandbars that shielded Elkhorn Slough from the daily tidal wash were broken.

The tidal gates — really nothing more than hinged flaps on the ocean side of 24-inch pipes running under the roadway — are supposed to keep the brackish water from the lower reaches of Elkhorn Slough flooding into the fresh water areas at the upper end of the slough.

The flaps open to allow fresh water runoff to flow underneath

the road during winter storms.

For years, families owning portions of the slough or along the waterway informally maintained the tide gates. But there are new owners now, and the old working agreements have broken down.

Without correctly functioning tide gates, thousands of gallons of water pour through the pipes into the once freshwater area, destroying crops, killing trees and contaminating water wells.

Monterey County has the money to repair the gates and is now completing the necessary environ-

mental studies, but county officials don't want to pay for the ongoing, yearly maintenance costs.

Construction of new gates probably won't start until next spring or summer, PVWMA directors were told last night.

Solano first brought the issue to PVWMA directors last summer, asking for assistance because salt water was infiltrating the underground aquifers in the area.

He came back last night to again plead his case.

PVWMA general manager Michael Armstrong said he had

attended a meeting last month with other Monterey County officials concerned about the salt water intrusion problem.

He indicated that a tentative agreement had been worked out among the staff members present for several agencies — the PVWMA, Monterey County Mosquito Abatement District, Moss Landing Marine Lab and the Elkhorn Slough Foundation to make annual contributions into a fund that would pay for annual maintenance and repairs once the gates

are rebuilt.

Armstrong said he may recommend that the water management agency pledge \$1,500 a year — an amount that director Howard Mauthe challenged because it would have little benefit to the Santa Cruz County portion of the agency.

Armstrong said there seems to be evidence that the "chloride-infected" water from lower Elkhorn Slough is flowing into the underground aquifers under the Springfield Terrace from the upper areas of Elkhorn Slough.

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