

NEWS CLIPS

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**Resource Conservation and Public
Outreach**

Organized by date

Ojai hoping to hire water coordinator

Claudia Boyd-Barrett USA TODAY NETWORK
Special to Ventura County Star 9/28/2018

The City of Ojai is looking to hire a water resources coordinator to keep the city informed about the valley's water situation and to work with local agencies, businesses and nonprofit organizations on water conservation efforts.

At its regular meeting Sept. 25, the council directed city staff to issue a request for qualifications to find possible candidates to fill the position. In the meantime, the city has applied for grant funding through the state's Wildlife Conservation Board that could be used to pay for the coordinator, City Manager Steve McClary said.

The city expects to hear in February whether it has received the grant. Council members agreed to hold off on actually hiring a water coordinator until the grant situation becomes clear.

"As much as I would like to get this started tomorrow, I recognize the need to wait," said Councilman Randy Haney. "I'd like to see it funded through the grant process. I think it's probably a better way of funding it."

Ojai residents have become increasingly nervous about the future of the city's water supply after years of drought. The city has two main sources of water: the Ojai Valley Groundwater Basin and Lake Casitas.

As of Wednesday, the water level in Lake Casitas was at 31.5 percent. The groundwater basin is in better shape: It's currently about two-thirds full, partially because of improved efforts to conserve water in the city, Haney said. Nevertheless, he noted that the basin stores considerably less water than the lake.

A proposal to connect Ventura to the State Water Project could take some pressure off Lake Casitas, but that solution would be expensive and is still years out. In the meantime, the city is pursuing four projects aimed at capturing stormwater runoff and recharging the aquifer, Haney and Councilman Bill Weirick said.

If hiring moves forward, the water resources coordinator would be paid between \$70,000 and \$85,000 per year, McClary said. The city is looking to hire a consultant for the job rather than a full-time employee. The job would be temporary, lasting between three and five years, city officials said.

"I know everybody's nervous about water and what we're going to do," said Mayor Johnny Johnston. "If there's money out there specifically for this purpose, great, if we can take advantage of it. If it competes with the salaries for our own employees and having the City of Ojai be the basis of the funding, I think that that's quite a burden for us to take on." The coordinator's job responsibilities would include collecting city and valley-wide data on water issues and keeping the city informed about them. Whoever is hired would also be asked to work with schools, local nonprofits, businesses and farmers on identifying ways to use water more efficiently. Another part of the job would be to seek out and apply for funding for water efficiency projects. Requirements

for the job would include 10 or more years of water agency experience or equivalent, knowledge of water conservation programs, experience procuring grants and excellent communications skills.

Haney said he already knew of four or five people who would be interested in applying for the position. The councilman said there are dozens of individuals and agencies working on area water issues, but having one person who can communicate with the city about what's happening will be much more efficient. "We're definitely going to be able to give the community facts, that's the most important thing," he said. "Fear of the unknown is what creates chaos and problems, so if you can educate people on what you're doing and what you're trying to achieve, then they can acknowledge that and they can also do research on their own and provide additional information."

LETTERS



MEL MELCON Los Angeles Times

SUSANNA DANNER of the Eastern Sierra Land Trust stands near a canal serving local pastureland.

Another water war

Re "Ranchers may be left high and dry by DWP," Nov. 24

Before the 20th century, much of the Owens Valley on the eastern edge of California was uninhabitable swampland, which shows how much water the Sierra Nevada are capable of producing. Starting in 1913, the city of Los Angeles began draining the Owens Valley, resulting in the high, dry desert we have become.

Now, the Department of Water and Power is going after the meadows that rest high in the Sierra. It has informed local ranchers that it may soon no longer put water back into the environment they depend on.

People from all over the world vacation in the Eastern Sierra. They come because of the beauty and the splendor. They come to ski, fish, hunt, hike and camp. They come to enjoy the silence and the wonder of the mountains. Drying up our meadows will harm us irreparably.

I realize it is an impossible dream for the water to be returned to the Owens Valley, but why not help us stay green in areas? Please, Mayor Eric Garcetti, help protect the delicate ecosystem of the Eastern Sierra — for the benefit of not only Los Angeles but the entire state.

GENETTE CLARK
Bishop, Calif.

As reported in the article, the DWP has been annually flooding the lush plains of the Eastern Sierra, allowing ranchers, hikers and nature seekers a way of life they otherwise would not enjoy.

However, as with so many other changes people must now make, we have to give up our current lifestyle, whether we live on a ranch, in the forest or in a city. We cannot continue to use water as if it is going to always be there. We need to learn how to take shorter showers, plant desert cactus instead of grass, rid ourselves and our homes of plastic.

Although we are sad for the changes the Owens Valley ranchers will have to make, Los Angeles cannot continue flooding the area.

LINDA R. TODD
DITTMAR
Chicago

Creek busters clean up Las Virgenes

Stream restoration almost complete

By [The Acorn Staff](#) | on September 27, 2018

By Ian Bradley



RIVER WALK—Top left, a worker tends the vegetation growing along the banks of Las Virgenes Creek in Calabasas. Improvements to the waterway include walking paths and a gazebo, above. At left, natural stone replaces old concrete in portions of the creek.

As Los Angeles County underwent development through the years, many of its creeks and streams were turned into concrete-filled channels that could better accommodate the winter flooding that sometimes occurs.

But slowly, over time, the concrete deteriorated, broke apart and turned some of the area's most scenic waterways into a jumbled concrete mess that were not only an eyesore but a detriment to the environment.

Over the past decade the City of Calabasas has removed the concrete from two large sections of Las Virgenes Creek and restored the stream to a more natural state.

The results are in full bloom.

A \$1.24-million project in 2008 saw the removal of more than 1,500 tons of concrete and other nonnative material from a portion of the creek between Highway 101 and the Agoura Road bridge in west Calabasas. A 400-foot portion of Las Virgenes Creek was liberated from its concrete shell installed more than four decades ago as a flood control measure.



Photos by IAN BRADLEY/Acorn Newspapers

Today, passersby see green plants and wildlife instead of graffiti and trash.

It was a mammoth undertaking that took some nine years from start to finish.

Currently, the city is completing \$3 million in restoration work along a 1.5-mile stretch of the creek where it flows toward the city's southern boundary.

Work included removal of the concrete channeling near Lost Hills Road and Meadow Creek Lane.

The city imported 1,100 tons of rocks and 150 cubic yards of new concrete to stabilize the banks of the creek, which after 50 years had faltered under the weight of nearby Lost Hills Road. One of the channel's original walls had shifted into the middle of the creek and water was shooting by on both sides.

Workers also eliminated a 10-foot drop that kept fish and other aquatic life from moving freely in the creek. Workers layered rocks and dirt to create a series of stepped pools, each one a foot lower than the one before. Alex Farassati, Calabasas environmental services supervisor, said the restoration allowed the red-legged frog to return to the creek. The endangered species hadn't been seen in the area in 20 years.



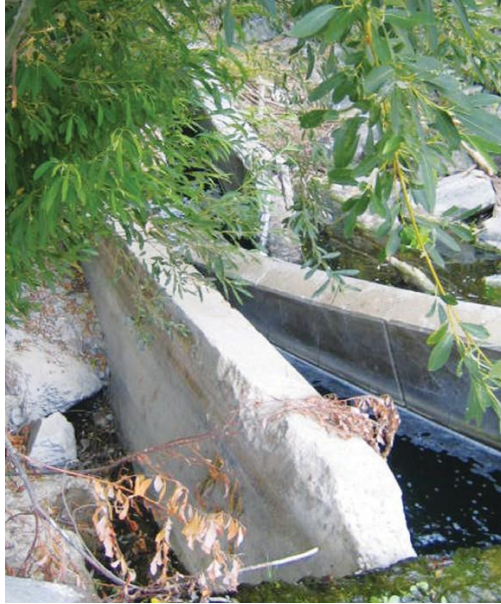
The work began last February as the city created new walking trails, stabilized the banks of the creek and planted more than 1,000 oak trees along the creek.

Adjacent to the El Encano homes at Lost Hills and Las Virgenes roads, an access trail and gazebo lead down to the creek.

There are two trails that follow the creek. They run adjacent to several apartment complexes on Lost Hills Road, which raised the concerns of residents, Farassati said.

“We have 250 homeowners. Some thought it would enhance the property, some were very scared that it would bring a lot of foot traffic and unwanted guests to their backyard,” Farassati, said.

“The compromise was that we told them we’d build a fence along their property. That’s going to the City Council next week. That’s for their protection, behind their property,” he said.



**EYESORE—Old and crumbled concrete such as this was removed from the stream.
Courtesy photo**

EDITORIAL —

Deconstructing our local streams

By [The Acorn Staff](#) | on September 27, 2018

It's bone dry out there, nary a drop of water in sight, but that doesn't mean our local streams should be ignored and left unprotected. Locally, Medea and Las Virgenes creeks trickle valiantly despite the scorching sun and remain a key part of the Malibu Creek watershed, the riparian habitat that feeds the ocean.

As our cities grew over the years, workers and builders changed the course of both creeks, filling them in with concrete channels to control flooding and lining them with nonnative trees.

The mossy, meandering creek that flows amid the trees and rocks adjacent to Chumash Park in Agoura Hills belies the fact that for decades it was simply a concrete water channel built for the utilitarian purpose of transporting water.

Over time, however, the concrete crumbled and outlived its usefulness. Two years ago the city spent \$1.7 million to remove the concrete lining along one 450-foot stretch of Medea Creek and brought it back to life.

In Calabasas—for the second time in the past 10 years—the city either tore up or repaired much of the concrete-lined surfaces along troubled Las Virgenes Creek and restored the waterway to its mostly natural state. Work began last February on a \$3-million project to restore the creek habitat between Agoura and Lost Hills roads on the west side of town. In addition to its deep concrete walls, the creek was filled with debris, dead brush and invasive trees that impeded the flow of water. (See today's story on Page 1.)

Calabasas got its feet wet on this sort of stuff in 2008 when workers completed the removal of 440 feet of concrete channeling in Las Virgenes Creek next to the Albertsons shopping center on Agoura Road.

Both the Agoura Hills and Calabasas projects stem from a 1985 commitment by the state to assist communities with returning their creeks and streams to the way they used to be, while making sure the waterways still serve as capable flood-control channels.

Who knew we could still have smart flood control without all the unsightly concrete—and have creeks and streams that look and function like they did for thousands of years before Los Angeles County began its rampant development.

Has anybody seen what the concrete-wrapped L.A. River still looks like?

Our local cities are to be commended for recognizing that concrete is good for building tall buildings, but not for shoring up stately streams. These projects represent taxpayer money being put to excellent use, and for that we should be thankful.

Melting ice among reasons Earth wobbles as it spins, NASA says

USA TODAY

The Earth doesn't just spin while on its axis, it wobbles. And scientists at NASA say they've identified three reasons why that happens.

A study published in the November issue of the journal Earth and Planetary Science Letters said the wobble – scientifically labeled as “polar motion” – is caused by three factors: melting ice in Greenland, land area rising as ice sheets melt, and changes in Earth's mantle, a mostly rocky layer inside Earth between its outer crust and the core.

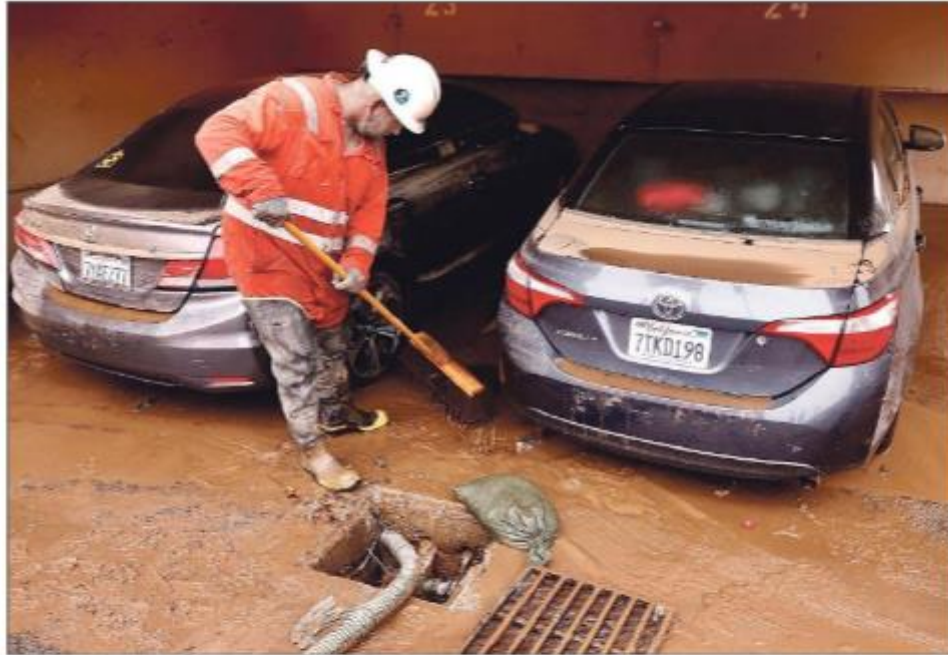
Rising temperatures during the 20th century have caused ice to melt in Greenland. Researchers say 7,500 gigatons of ice – equal to the weight

of more than 20 million Empire State Buildings – melted into the ocean over that time.

The ice melt, combined with Greenland's location on Earth, plays a role in how the Earth wobbles.

Several studies have suggested global warming has contributed to an increase in ice melt in Greenland, Antarctica and other parts of the world.

Ventura County Star 9/26/2018



AL SEIB Los Angeles Times

AFTER THE DELUGE

DWP worker Daniel McKenna cleans up as water is drained from a Van Nuys parking garage where two vehicles were submerged after a water main broke Tuesday morning, flooding the street and disrupting service.

Los Angeles Times

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2018

Ranchers may be left high and dry by DWP

Agency slashes water for grazing near Yosemite



SUSANNA DANNER of the Eastern Sierra Land Trust stands next to a canal serving Mono County pastureland shared by cattle and sage grouse. (Mel Melcon Los Angeles Times)

By Louis Sahagun
LA Times 9/24/2018

MAMMOTH LAKES — The lush plains east of Yosemite National Park offer a window into a bygone California — a place where sage grouse welcome the arrival of spring with theatrical mating rituals and cattle graze on verdant pastures.

For nearly a century, these lands have been made green thanks to annual flooding by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, helping maintain cattle forage and keeping alive a culture of ranching in southern Mono County.

But those days may have come to an end in August.

Citing climate change, the DWP this year shifted its irrigation policy, saying ranchers who lease grazing areas on its 6,400 acres near Crowley Lake should no longer bank on the promise of ample water when they renew.

Officials say the change is necessary as decreased snowmelt leaves them little water to spare. But the move could turn grasslands brown, rattling ecosystems, the local economy and a way of life, ranchers warn.

“Without irrigation, we’d be looking at mostly cheatgrass and tumbleweeds, which are good for nothing,” said Kay Ogden, executive director of the nonprofit Eastern Sierra Land Trust, as irrigation water flowed ankle deep across pasturelands edging U.S. 395.

“Does L.A. have the right to destroy habitat and the livelihoods of families, friends and neighbors who have lived here for generations?” she said.

The DWP has for seven decades provided several lessees in the area about 5 acre-feet of water per acre per year, which made their pastures nutritious through the summer and added luster to the area’s hiking, biking and angling hotspots. (An acre-foot of water equals about 326,000 gallons, more than enough to supply two households for a year.)

But as the agency prepares for a future with less snow, more rain and prolonged periods of drought, the prospect of flooding pastures with enough water to serve 50,000 families annually has lost its appeal.

The DWP said it would have to spend about \$18 million to replace the amount of water requested by ranchers and the lost hydropower it could generate — an unacceptable burden for its Southern California ratepayers of about \$30 per family per year.

Beyond that, water officials say, irrigation was never a guarantee tied to the leases held by ranchers, who pay an average \$10 to \$15 per acre per year to graze on irrigated pastures.

As it drafts new 20-year leases for 10 longtime ranchers in area, the department says lessees should anticipate that little to no water will be available for them.

The agency said it would continue diverting about 1,000 acre-feet of water a year to protect the estimated 600 sage grouse in the area, a segment of a subspecies found only along the California-Nevada border.

The amount of water needed to sustain the bird, and whether any of it will be available to ranchers, will be determined by an ongoing environmental review, officials said.

The cutbacks have enraged residents in a region defined by water wars since the early 1900s, when Los Angeles city agents posed as ranchers and farmers to buy land and water rights in Mono and nearby Inyo counties. Their goal was to build the aqueduct system needed to meet the needs of the growing metropolis 300 miles to the south.

Bob Gardner, chairman of the Mono County Board of Supervisors, summed up the tensions in a recent letter to Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti.

“We refuse to accept that climate change and ratepayer obligations justify the impacts to our natural environment and regional economy,” he said. “Quite simply, LADWP’s arbitrary plan is nothing more than a veiled water grab.”

On Aug. 15, the county filed a lawsuit against the city and the agency asserting that they violated the California Environmental Quality Act by altering management policies without first analyzing their potential effects, including the increased risk of fire on dewatered pastures.

Three weeks later, the water district initiated its environmental review. Mel Levine, president of the DWP’s board of commissioners, said negotiations with the county ceased after its lawsuit was filed, but talks continue with ranchers over “trying to get into more efficient irrigation practices.”

In late August, a drone flown by a contractor for the DWP crashed on grazing land near Crowley Lake, sparking a fire that charred 10 acres. That land was leased by cattle rancher Mark Lacey, whose ancestors settled in the region more than 130 years ago.

“The DWP never ceases to amaze me,” grumbled Lacey, one of several lessees in the area who have reacted to the coming water reduction by reducing their herds, sending cattle up to Idaho, Wyoming, Nebraska and Oregon.

“My operation is down by about 40%,” Lacey said. “That means I have three full-time employees — including myself — instead of five, and I’m spending a lot less on lunch, gasoline and auto parts at local businesses.”

Matt and Maria Kemp, whose children are destined to become the sixth generation of ranchers to run cattle on 1,600 acres of private holdings and land leased from the DWP, said they could lose half their spread.

“There’s a long tradition of livestock grazing in Mono County,” Matt Kemp, 40, said. “I’d like to negotiate a compromise.”

The effects of the shift remain to be seen in the county where local ranchers increased their cattle and calf production by 16% over the last year, according to an economic survey conducted by Cal State Chico.

Inyo-Mono Agricultural Commissioner Nathan Reade estimates that the loss to the Mono County economy may be as high as \$8 million a year.

Locals say the policy shift illustrates a broader vulnerability of a region with only 14,000 residents and where 94% of land is owned by city, state and federal agencies — all of them preparing for a drier future.

Alicia Vennos, economic development director and film commissioner for Mono County, expressed the sentiments of many residents this way: “We need to stay green.”

Doing so, some locals say, would help protect the sage grouse, whose strongholds overlap with irrigated pastures.

Although the bird has the sympathy of many in the region, there is less support locally for mandatory conservation efforts, which some fear would lead to land-use restrictions.

Few residents were pleased when a federal district judge recently overturned the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's decision not to consider petitions from environmental groups to place the bird on the endangered species list.

Plaintiff's organizations, however, including the Center for Biological Diversity, were elated by the ruling that also proposed a designation of 1.8 million acres of critical habitat across the Western U.S.

A species that once numbered more than 1 million may be down to a few hundred thousand birds scattered across parts of 11 states. About 80% of the sage grouse's historic nesting grounds have been lost to human development, including ranches and farms.

On the issue of listing the sage grouse, the DWP and some local conservation organizations, including the Eastern Sierra Land Trust, this time find themselves unified in opposition.

"It's not in the department's best interests to have this species listed — or to have ratepayers' land made critical habitat," said Dave Martin, an environmental affairs officer with the DWP. "That's because it would give outside agencies a say in how we manage Los Angeles' land and water resources."

The sage grouse would be better served, Martin suggested, by removing a Mono County landfill that is a gathering place for predatory ravens that feast on their chicks and eggs.

Laura Cunningham, an artist and biologist who has studied the ecological rhythms of life in Mono County for decades, described the challenge of accommodating sage grouse, cattle ranchers, the local economy and L.A. ratepayers as "one of the most complicated and multifaceted environmental controversies I've ever seen."

"Everyone needs to step back, take a deep breath and start trying to replace their biases with information gathered from scientific research," she said. "Otherwise, the sage grouse will spiral into oblivion while people with clashing agendas fight over the effects of climate change."

Levine could not agree more.

"We are committed to protecting the sage grouse," he said. "But we have concluded that it's not fair for ratepayers to subsidize unnecessary extra water for Mono County ranchers at a time when we're facing climate change issues, drought and regulatory requirements regarding water conservation."

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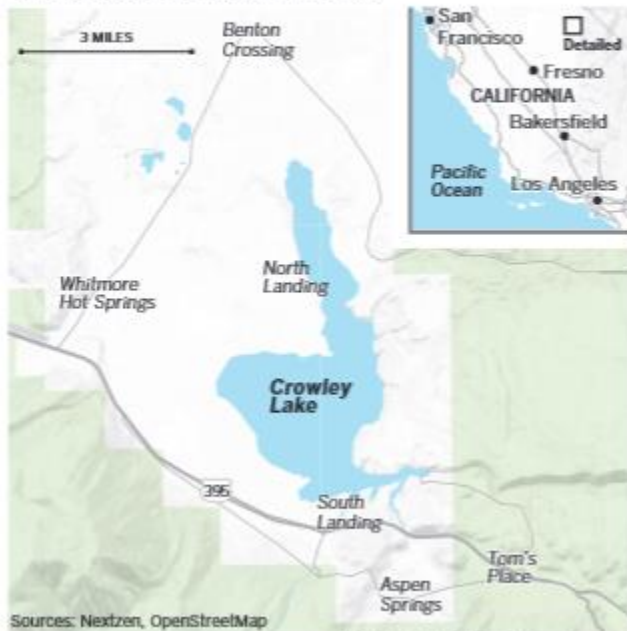


Photographs by MEL MELCON Los Angeles Times

“THE DWP never ceases to amaze me,” said rancher Mark Lacey, walking by an irrigation ditch on land he leases from the Department of Water and Power. He’s one of several lessees who have reduced their herds, sending cattle to Idaho, Wyoming, Nebraska and Oregon.

High and dry

Lush pastures in the eastern Sierra Nevada between Crowley Lake and Highway 395 will lose most of their annual irrigation water from the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power as of this year.



Sources: Nextzen, OpenStreetMap

PAUL DUGINSKI Los Angeles Times

VENTURA RIVER

Why levee needs work

Without action, flood barrier in Ventura could collapse, experts say

Arlene Martinez USA TODAY NETWORK
Ventura County Star | 9/23/2018

Thousands of residents live in homes protected by a levee that stretches 2.65 miles along the Ventura River, between the Pacific Ocean and Shell Road.

In the more than 3,500 residential, commercial and industrial structures lie an estimated \$2.157 billion worth of infrastructure and property, according to studies prepared for the Ventura County government.

Experts with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers say that without rehabilitation, it's likely the levee could in time breach or collapse entirely.

"Failure of the levee could result in millions of dollars of urban infrastructure and commercial/residential property losses, not to mention the potential for significant loss of life – particularly if a portion of the levee were to collapse suddenly during the night," a Corps of Engineers appraisal released in August 2013 shows.

On Wednesday at 6:30 p.m., the county Watershed Protection District will hold a meeting at Bell Arts Factory in Ventura to update residents on the levee rehabilitation project. A recent state grant, which included a county match, means work is getting started on the design and engineering phase.

"There's deficiencies along the whole stretch," Peter Sheydayi, deputy director of the Ventura County Watershed Protection District, said as he stood along the levee on a recent day. The most significant deficiency is that "this rock does not extend deep enough in the upper two-thirds of the levee," Sheydayi said.

Built with shortcomings

When the initial levee was built in 1948, one thing not considered was the loss of sediment likely to result from construction of Matilija Dam, which had been installed on a major tributary only the year before, the corps noted. There also have been other significant changes to the area since then, including construction of Highway 33, added and changed bike paths along the river, several "drainage penetrations" and a building and retaining walls put up by adjacent property owners, according to a draft white paper by the corps.

Damage could be significant in the event of a failure, but a compromised levee system could lead to substantial losses to property owners and residents even without any help from Mother Nature.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency at some point will update its flood maps. With the deficiencies, the area could be mapped a hazard zone. That would require homeowners to get costly flood insurance and render it ineligible for the National Flood Insurance Program.

Property values could in turn drop substantially.

Sheydayi said it's not clear when FEMA could do that remapping.

The Ventura River drops down

In the 70 years since the initial levee went up, the Ventura River has become incised, meaning its base has lowered.

"Basically, the foundation of the levee is higher than the potential bottom of the river," said Paul Jenkin, Ventura County campaign coordinator for the Surfrider Foundation.

That means in a flood or high-rain event, the river could flow under the base of the levee, causing it to fail. The change has been notable. Initially, the levee was made with 8 feet of toedown, which means rocks extended that far below where the riverbed meets the base of the levee. Today, there is "minimal to no toedown protection," the corps noted.

The drop in the river has other impacts, as well, said Jenkin, who is also founder of the Matilija Coalition, a group advocating for the dam's removal.

A river under normal conditions will meander in a floodplain, providing nutrients to the ecosystem's vegetation and habitat for the critters that live in it, he explained. If the Matilija Dam comes down, the sediment that it traps could have an impact as far as the project area, traveling down to the beach and restoring the health of the floodplain, Jenkin said.

The biggest part of the levee project involves going below where the current levee meets the riverbed and reinforcing it with rock. Another retrofitting operation near where the levee meets the Pacific Ocean would involve raising the concrete wall that abuts the bike path.

The levee was built to withstand a greater than 100-year flood, Sheydayi said. That means there's a 1 percent chance of a storm that size happening in any given year. There hasn't been a storm that size in the levee's history.

By contrast, Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Gulf Coast in 2005, was a one-in-400-year event, scientists concluded.

It was that devastating event, in which dozens of levees failed, that caused federal engineers to take a look at the system in communities across the country.

Residents 'thrilled' work is getting started

In 2012, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers rated Ventura's levee "minimally acceptable." That means elements of it are "unacceptable" but those wouldn't prevent it from working as it's supposed to in the event of flooding.

Of the four alternatives identified by the corps, the “grouted riprap toedown extension” is the favored one. It carries a cost of \$26 million. Funding for that has not been identified, Sheydayi said.

Sheydayi said the county asked the corps if it would be willing to help pay for the work. There was, he said, “no interest.”

Work on the design and construction phase has started, thanks to a state grant the county received last year. The roughly \$2.4 million cost of this phase was split between the state, which pitched in \$1.3 million, and the county, which had a match of \$1.1 million.

The need to upgrade the state’s aging infrastructure is vast, far exceeding available resources, but this project has a benefit-cost ratio of 3.91, according to the 2015 preliminary economic analysis report prepared for the county.

That means for every dollar that goes into the project, there’s a potential savings of \$3.91.

“That would indicate this is a very good candidate for public investment,” Sheydayi said.

From 1998 to 2015, the county has spent an average of around \$35,000 operating and maintaining the levee, the report notes.

Soil and other environmental studies will start soon and continue into next year.

The Westside Community Council represents residents, business and property owners along Ventura Avenue.

The group has been closely tracking the project for years, said James Forsythe, the group’s vice chair.

“A lot of our low-income residents are near the river,” he said.

Between the hillsides and the levee, residents have been concerned what flooding or rain could do to their safety and homes.

“We’re happy this is happening finally,” Forsythe said. “We understand it’ll take time, but we’re thrilled this is actually happening.”