



THE SAN FRANCISQUITO CREEK JPA
Creek Authority News

Board of Directors: San Mateo County Flood Control District • East Palo Alto • Menlo Park • Palo Alto • Santa Clara Valley Water District
Associate Members: Stanford University • San Francisquito Watershed Council

Message from the Executive Director

It's truly hard to believe that summer is here and we're half way through the calendar year !

Well, another winter has passed us by and we were fortunate to have received good rains without flooding. However, we did come close! It was enough rain to crest at Chaucer Street Bridge and at Alpine Road at the confluence with Los Trancos Creek. The levee project downstream was completed just in time ~ the December rains were held within the banks (albeit the top of bank!).

Also to that end, we have come a long way since January towards moving a localized flood control project with the Corps forward. A very special thank you to all of those who made the difficult task of selecting a project area, more successful! Although the process was expedited, I think we've set a strong foundation for working together as a community in the future.

In this edition of the *CAN* we are excited to offer links to numerous documents on our web site that have been produced since December, and a new feature item on page six and seven! Here we elaborate a bit on the language used to describe the environment and work we do, and two wonderfully reflective "sound bites" from interviews with two women of the community are presented. These are people who are passionate about the creek; people we need to learn from as we plan ahead. We will do more of these in the future, and we hope you enjoy them.

Since the December edition of the *CAN*, another milestone for the JPA was the Board approval of the budget for FY2003-04. This agency was affected by the tight economic climate that has caused difficulty for budgets everywhere.

And consequently, the JPA offices will be closed in August as a cost savings action. This is considered a one-time measure; we will be planning over the next six months, the following year's (FY2004-05) budget, and how to improve the situation. (More detail is given in the enclosed article).

With the office closing for a month, projects will slow down a bit, but our workload will not diminish. We will return in September with a full agenda for the Annual Board meeting. Staff is here through July if there is anything you need to go over with us before we leave for the month.

Have a safe and happy summertime,

Cynthia D'Agosta



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JPA Project Updates

Partnering with the COE

In our last issue we gave a complete history of the concept and efforts to that date (December 2002) of partnering with the COE on a comprehensive, watershed wide, flood management and habitat preservation project. Since that time, a significant amount has occurred with regards to moving the project forward. Primarily, we now have both a **CAP 205 (local) project underway**, and a **General Investigation (GI)** which is the long- term project, **in the President's proposed federal budget** for 2004-05!

The **CAP 205 project** is intended to address a localized flooding problem and will be funded from the San Francisco District Office of the COE. Between January and May 2003, the JPA convened a 'CAP Management Team,' worked with neighborhood leaders, conducted public meetings, and held a process for community decision making, to identify where to ask for the CAP 205 project. At the May JPA Board meeting, it was determined that the area downstream of West Bayshore Road would be the focus of the project.

We are now awaiting final funding allocation from the SF District office. Once approved, the first step the COE will take is to conduct an Initial Assessment (IA.). The purpose of the IA is to justify the Section 205 CAP project. Generally speaking, the SF District looks at as much existing information as possible to see whether the proposed project fits within the CAP authority and to determine if there is likelihood of a federal interest. This effort concentrates on providing the SF District with the necessary Hydrologic and Hydraulic information to broadly define the area being damaged by flooding and to roughly calculate the financial damage from flooding.

If the IA concludes that there is enough federal interest to justify a project, then we (JPA with SF District) would proceed to generate a Project Management Plan (PMP) and negotiate a Feasibility Cost Sharing Agreement (FCSA). All of these efforts are federally funded and take approximately twelve months.

The **GI project** has two steps that must take place to get started in the watershed. The COE must be *authorized* by the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, and *funding must be approved* in the Federal COE budget as a 'new start'. Both are Congressional actions. The authorization was received in June of 2002, and in February 2003 the project was included in President Bush's proposed budget. We are quite fortunate, in that our project is *one of only five new starts for the COE across the nation*. If all goes well, the project will remain in the budget and the budget will be approved in October of this year. This will allow the COE to conduct the first phase (Reconnaissance) of three or four phases of the project. It is amazing that we have such a chance at a new start!

Over the next few months, the JPA Board will be deliberating whether the community can fund the local match of both of these projects, or just one. No decision needs to be made until the IA of the CAP is completed. The CAP Management Team will be meeting again this month to discuss procedures for working with the COE and the community through this process.

Please plan to stay informed and let us hear from you as we move through these discussions and call our offices for clarification. We welcome the opportunity to talk with you about it. Or you can visit the web site to find reports and more information on both of the COE projects.

Operational Budget Passed

The Board approved the Fiscal year 2003 – 2004 JPA operational budget in March after a four-month deliberation process. The approved budget is \$368,334. This is a 5.15% overall budget decrease from the previous year. This may mean that the JPA will be postponing some projects or planning efforts due to lack of consultant funding. Staff will be closing the JPA offices for the month of August due to budget constraints. A Budget planning cycle for FY2004-05 will be presented at the July 2003 Board meeting.

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Watershed Sediment Reduction Plan

The JPA is coordinating this planning effort for eight watershed stakeholder agencies (co-permittees) and working through a Technical Advisory Committee for product development and review. The co-permittees were required by the State Water Resource Control Board (SWRCB) to conduct a watershed analysis and an assessment of management practices, and to prepare and implement a sediment reduction plan within the SF Creek watershed through their National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting process.

The project is scheduled to be completed by December 2003. The *Watershed Analysis and Sediment Reduction Plan* will prioritize erosion control and sediment reduction measures to be implemented throughout the watershed. The first phase Task 1, Historic Conditions can be seen on line at the JPA web page or through contacting our offices.

Funding for the project has been provided in part through a contract with the SWRCB pursuant to the Costa-Machado Water Act of 2000 (Prop 13) and any amendments theretofore the implementation of CA Nonpoint Source Pollution Control Program.

Searsville Study - Board Action

At the May 22 Board meeting, the JPA responded to Stanford University’s request to make a determination if the increase in sediment resultant from the lowering or removal of Searsville Dam is tolerable in the downstream environment. This determination follows a review of Stanford’s *Searsville Lake Sediment Impact Study* conducted by Moffat – Nichols Engineers courtesy of the State Coastal Conservancy. The URL is:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/cityagenda/publish/jpa-meetings/1836.pdf>

The determination was that the increase in sediment is not tolerable. This determination means that the increase in sediment will need to be managed to insure that communities downstream of the dam site are not put at a higher risk of flooding. JPA staff will be working closely with Stanford and other watershed stakeholders as discussions for long-term management options for Searsville progress.

Website Upgrades

Thanks to staff at the City of Palo Alto, the JPA website has matured! It now includes meeting agendas from January 2003, staff reports, meeting minutes and JPA studies and publications. Each Board meeting packet will be posted one week prior to the meeting date with direct links to staff reports and related documents capable of being accessed.

In addition to the Bank Stabilization and Revegetation Master Plan and the Levee Restoration Project Environmental Document, the website now includes the following publications produced in the last six months:

- Flooding FAQ’s Response Publication,
- CAP 205 Project Analysis & Recommendations Report,
- Fiscal Year 2003/04 Draft Financial Plan,
- Searsville Sediment Impact Study Review,
- Historical Conditions Analysis (Section 1) of the Watershed Analysis and Sediment Reduction Plan.

Please visit the site at www.cityofpaloalto.org/jpa.



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Member Agency Project Reports

At the June Board meeting, Member Agencies gave reports on relevant projects that they independently are undertaking. For more information on these projects, see the June JPA Agenda on our web site.

- Santa Clara Valley Water District *Ordinance #83-2*
- East Palo Alto *Flood Plain Management Study*
- Menlo Park/Palo Alto review and project approval status on *Sand Hill Road Bridge project*.
- Menlo Park *Willow Street Pedestrian Bridge*

Exhibits at the Mayor’s office, City of Palo Alto

JPA staff has organized two art exhibits in the Mayor’s office this year. From January through May, JoAnne Horsfall Beasley and Karen Truesdell displayed paintings and ceramics of the creek and currently John Freeman Todd is showing several photographs of the creek environment. These artists show their work around the Bay Area. Visit these sites to see their work on line:

<http://www.artistsforopenspace.com/>

<http://www.johntodd.com/>

We’d like to do more of these type exhibits around the watershed in the future!

USGS Open House

The JPA teamed up with staff from USGS, the Watershed Council, Palo Alto Regional Water Quality Control Plant, and the City of East Palo Alto to create an entire display room dedicated to San Francisquito Creek at the USGS tri-annual open house May 31 to June 2. The open house received an estimated 15,000 visitors and the “creek room” was a huge hit! Many thanks to the volunteers who made it a success and special thanks to Katie Pilat, Jim Johnson, and Alicia Torregrosa for organizing the volunteers and display.



Photo by John Freeman Todd

Joint Powers Authority Remaining 2003 Board Meeting Schedule

Date	Location	Type of Meeting
July 21, 2003 9-9:45 a.m. closed session 10-12 Study Session	Palo Alto Council Chambers	Special Meeting
September 25, 6 -8 p.m.	Menlo Park Council Chambers	Regular Annual Meeting
November 20, 6-8 p.m.	East Palo Alto Council Chambers	Special Meeting

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Envisioning the Creek

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.” Marcel Proust

How we look at the landscape of the watershed and the creek requires not just changing our view, but altering the vernacular, or words we use as well. A vision for the future will not evolve without change.

Consider for a moment how the language we use, impacts the way we view and think about our environment, about the creek. For example, are steelhead trout really just “fish” ~ or are they “a threatened and endangered population”? Other general terms to contemplate might be:

flood control ~ flood management ~ stream maintenance ~ creek clean up ~ channelization ~ hard edge ~ soft engineering ~ embankment ~ levee ~ dikes ~ arroyo ~ creek ~ channel ~ bed ~ bank ~ riparian ~ sinuous ~ curvy ~ sediment regime ~ erosion control ~ habitat ~ species of concern ~ quality of life ~ threatened homes, businesses and lives

More specifically, we should look at the following terms to alter our language and assist us in how we view and approach our work.

“URBAN & GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE”

We might all be clear on what is urban infrastructure, and what our natural resource is we’re working with. But how do we describe it, when one becomes another? How do we treat the resource as a component of infrastructure? How do we change our language to describe the system and how does that change our thinking about it?

Infrastructure means the basic facilities that are the foundation of a modern community, such as streets and highways, schools, and water, sewer, and storm drainage systems.

Green infrastructure means natural areas that provide basic facilities or are the foundation of a modern

community, such as waterways, parks, greenways, baylands, and open space.

Our creek meets both definitions. It provides utility of a basic facility (conveys storm waters) and is a foundation of the community. Like the street or utility systems, it is a series of connected parts providing directional flow. Our urban community infrastructure is thought of as a *system*; creeks act as a *system*. A city or region would never build infrastructure facilities as described in the first definition piece by piece; many communities including our own are preserving land to create a green infrastructure as described in second definition (this has had to come piece by piece.)

The San Francisquito Creek truly acts as “*green infrastructure*.” In as much, we cannot plan a change on one area of the creek system without considering the other; we are not able to have individual jurisdictions manage one piece without considering the implications on another; and we must consider it as a “multi-use facility.”

“MULTIPLE-USE FACILITY” & “GREENWAYS”

In urban community planning the term “multiple-use facility” is generally used to describe a building or area that can accommodate more than one type of function. i.e. a playing field that functions as floodwater detention basin; a community hall where concerts or receptions can be held.

The creek currently functions as a “multiple-use facility” in that it conveys stormwaters and supports habitat. As we plan for the future, we should be looking to the creek to become more of a “*multiple-use facility*” for the community; envisioning a recreational corridor, a habitat corridor, providing flood conveyance, while supporting education and respite. When all of these things are found together in one multiple-use area, it becomes a “*greenway*.”

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“WATERSHED CHARACTER-ISTICS”

Characteristic ~ A distinguishing attribute, distinctive and typical.

Character ~ The qualities that distinguish one person from another ~ Moral or ethical strength ~ Reputation ~ An eccentric person ~ A person portrayed in a drama or novel ~ A symbol in a writing system.

Using the definitions above, it could be said that the creek is a character onto itself ~ it does have a reputation, has been called eccentric, and exhibits a great deal of strength. More traditionally, the creek is described though its characteristics. The Santa Clara Basin Watershed Management Initiative (WMI) delineates the physical aspects of the creek’s character in their 147-page “Watershed Characteristics Report.” The report distinguishes the spatial, demographic, land use and natural features of the SF Creek watershed.

By describing the creek though its physical characteristics, or even allowing it a character, is a limited emphasis, which leaves out the very important human element. The “characters” of the watershed, those who live near, on, or for, the creek, do help define the watershed characteristics.

And so with this introduction of a CAN feature on the “Creek Character – istics,” we salute the multitude of distinctive characters of the San Francisquito Creek Watershed. This issue begins with thoughts from two such “characters” that have long lived on the creek and for whom the creek is a part of their daily lives. The opinions expressed are of the individuals and do not represent those of the JPA..



Keisha Evans believes that the Creek adds a rhythm to our lives that we cannot neglect. Four mornings a week, this East Palo Alto resident walks along the levee adjacent to the baylands and the mouth of the creek. Here she witnesses the sunrise, and some mornings counts as many as 25 species of birds in a one hour walk; Black-crowned Night, and Great Blue Herons stand still in her path.

She sees the creek as providing tremendous recreation and learning opportunities for the community. Evans, who was a science teacher for six years, recognizes that the creek not only supports a diversity of plant and animal life ~ but also the vitality of the community. In her vision for the Creek, she talks about the environment not being limited to what we can see today, but what’s possible; perhaps someday a learning center focusing on the creek will come.

She’s concerned about what she feels is the largest threat to the creek’s well –being; the construction of a currently proposed road - the concept for the road has it running along the creek levee as a southern corridor to the Dumbarton Bridge. This idea has been heard by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. This is the same levee she walks on in the mornings. “Roads are forever after all, and this one would really be detrimental to the Creek,” she says.

Keisha’s inspiration comes from Harriet Tubman who escaped from slavery to Canada and then helped 300 slaves to freedom through the Underground Railroad. Evans says, “Tubman was a strong, positive and self motivated woman. She always said ‘I can, I can’ and then ‘we can, we can’ and she did. Look what she accomplished; and now 150 years later it’s irresponsible to say we can’t, we can’t. Our responsibility is to maintain the creeks environment. We have to preserve the last piece of open space in our community.”



Janet Davis has vigilantly participated in looking after the Creek for the last 40 years. Her Menlo Park home is situated along a bend in the stream that allows her to interact with the manifestations that Creek goes through on a daily basis.

She devotes a great deal of time to working with the critters on the Creek such as Pacific Tree Frogs. Often she sees bobcats, quail, deer and coyotes come through her property. She says that the abundance of wild life in the upstream area is a sign of good health for the Creek, and hopes that the creek can continue to maintain its natural feel.

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“I enjoy the beauty and life affirmation that it provides. When you are down in the channel and fish are nibbling at your toes, you can’t hear all the outside noise. It’s very peaceful. The Creek offers a great contrast to the people honking and swearing up on Alpine Road.”

Davis is passionate about one thing: “People need to be careful about the things that go into the Creek.” In the late 1960’s, she witnessed a huge fish kill in the swimming hole near her house. “There were hundreds of big silver fish laying all over the place in the Creek,” she says. She suspects that an unknown toxic substance dumped into the Creek caused it.

Similarly, she says a ‘Dustac’ incident of 2002 in Portola Valley was a real crisis moment for the Creek. A dust-control agent flowed from parking lot drains at Ford’s Field into Los Trancos Creek, an upper watershed tributary of the Creek. “I knew right away that something was wrong. The usually brown colored water was red like someone had poured blood into it.” She sees the spill as an example of the need for quick responsiveness in Creek emergencies.

Pointing out the cars along Alpine Road and Hwy. 280 contribute to the runoff into the creek; she advocates that there should be no roads near the creek, as well as no parking directly beside the creek. She also states that people don’t seem to understand that storm drains go directly into the Creek. In general, she talks about the need for more intelligent planning with regards to these issues. “While development within 150 feet of the creek bank has been the focus of proposed ordinances, the wider web of human activity within the watershed has to be considered. People need to get together to discuss these big issues that affect the creek.”

Davis, a native of England, recognizes the need of balancing flood control and environment. She says the fact that developers were allowed to build in the flood zone shows that the proper respect for the creek’s potential was not there. “In the end, we need to let the Creek do what it wants and, as much as possible, accommodate our needs to its natural flow.”

Please forward any thoughts you might have on the subject of altering our vernacular, and changing our way of looking at the creek.

? ARROYO AUTHORITY ?

It was 1777 when Father Sierra first named the San Francisquito Creek as a boundary line between Missions’ Santa Clara and San Francisco de Asis. The creek’s name, which was Arroyo de San Francisquito, has been Anglicized, and the language used to describe the environment around the creek more urbanized. But has the fundamental language we use to describe both the creek and our efforts to balance this urbanization with nature, been adequately altered to reflect how we wish to approach the challenge?

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