



\$7.5 million in stimulus funds tapped to fix Santa Paula Creek

Work includes ladder for steelhead

By Zeke Barlow
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After decades of lawsuits, false starts and floods, a project to fix Santa Paula Creek was fully funded Tuesday with \$7.5 million in stimulus money.

"It's been a long-term issue," said Santa Paula City Manager Wally Bobkiewicz, who was one of a handful of local officials who went to Washington, D.C., to lobby for funding. "Overall, residents of Santa Paula are going to be safer because of this."

The \$7.5 million, which will be used to reconstruct a fish ladder, channel the river and shore up a levee, will take Santa Paula out of the flood plain and keep the city safe from a 100-year catastrophic flood, said Jeff Pratt, director of the Ventura County Public Works Department.

"This is pretty big news for the city of Santa Paula," he said.

The money comes on the heels of \$4 million that Congressman Elton Gallegly, R-Simi Valley, helped get into the federal budget earlier this year to clean out more than a mile of debris in that clogged creek.

Pratt said there is a chance all the work could be completed by the next rainy season, when the endangered steelhead trout have historically migrated up the creek.

The project has been discussed for decades, Pratt said, after the city filled in one of the two branches of the creek.

After that, the remaining channel could no longer handle the massive flows of water that can flow during heavy rains.

Though a project to protect the city from flood was approved in the 1940s, a lawsuit slowed it and years of other problems followed.

Finally, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers started the project in 2001 and finished it, until the 2005 floods came and washed away all the work.

Pratt said that because the new work will be done under the same permits the Corps used, the process of getting the work started should be quick.

Bobkiewicz said a big reason they got the \$7.5 million is that the \$4 million that was already allocated to the project.

"The bottom line is with both pots of money, everything we have been trying to do for 10 years will be done," Bobkiewicz said.



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