

Status Report

Murrieta Creek Flood Control, Environmental Restoration and Recreation Project

January 2007

Murrieta Creek poses a severe flood threat to the cities of Murrieta and Temecula. Overflow flooding from the undersized channel has periodically wreaked havoc on the communities – most recently in 1993 when nearly \$20 million in damages was incurred by the public and private sectors. As the area continues to develop, the potential damages (direct and indirect) will only continue to increase.

With a drainage area in excess of 220 square miles, Murrieta Creek traverses the cities of Murrieta and Temecula in Riverside County, before confluencing with Temecula Creek to form the Santa Margarita River, which flows through the Camp Pendleton Marine Base and to the Pacific Ocean.

In 1997, at the request of the Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers initiated studies on the Creek. The outcome of this endeavor was Congressional authorization in 2000 of a \$90 million, multi-faceted project known as the Murrieta Creek Flood Control, Environmental Restoration and Recreation Project. What was once viewed only as a needed local flood control project was now a federally cost shared, community endorsed corridor project that would not only safeguard the two cities from the ravages of uncontrolled flooding, but would celebrate the unique character of the communities by restoring and enhancing the environmental distinctiveness of the Creek bottom, utilizing the top of the river banks for hiking, biking and equestrian trails and developing a 240-acre flow attenuation basin that would encompass 160 acres of new environmental habitat and a 50 acre sports park.

In 2003, the project received its first construction funding and on November 12, 2003 a ground breaking ceremony was held. In attendance were Congressman Ken Calvert, Congresswoman Mary Bono and Assistant Secretary of the Army, John P. Woodley. Phase 1 was completed in December 2004.

While funding for design has kept the project moving forward, no additional federal appropriations toward construction have been realized to date. As the local sponsor, the Riverside County Flood Control District had requested \$11 million in Phase 2 construction funding for 2007, but Congress failed to pass a budget before the Fall '06 elections and indications are now that a series of continuing resolutions (with no provision for Murrieta Creek construction funds) will see us through the balance of the current fiscal year. The District plans to again petition Congress for Phase 2 construction monies in the 2008 budget.

The funding discussed above has been in regard to the federal share of this jointly funded project. However, the Congressional authorization garnered in the Fall of 2000 mandated a cost sharing formula of 65% federal and 35% local. While this cost split heavily favors the local area, given that the Flood Control District derives less than \$1.5 million annually for capital expenditures in the Murrieta/Temecula area, this obligation is still very onerous. In addition to its share of ad valorem tax revenues, the District has also created partnerships with both cities to help defray the local cost share. Also, the District continually investigates State and Federal grant programs and has been somewhat successful in garnering some financial support. Another source of funding is California's Flood Control Subvention Program administered by the Department of Water Resources. And although the Murrieta Creek Project has been deemed eligible for the Program (which can fund up to 70% of the local share), in approving the project, the State Legislature conditioned that funds could not be made available until at least 2013.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the rapid increase in construction and land costs over the past several years has increased the estimated cost of the project by more than \$20 million. This trend is expected to continue at least into the near future.

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