

Napa County “Living River Strategy” to Provide Flood Protection

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The Napa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have designed a “living river strategy” to protect Napa County from periodic flooding. As part of this strategy to reconnect the Napa River to its flood plain, over 300 parcels of land will be purchased along a 6.9 mile stretch of the river. \$43 million dollars in funding will come from state and federal grants, and the remaining \$175 million will be shared equally by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the district. The district’s share has been financed by the issuance of sales tax supported bonds and the receipt of a low-interest Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan.

At one time, the Napa River supported a dense riparian forest, provided significant wetland habitat alongside the river, and included significant spawning areas for fish such as salmon and steelhead. However, the pressures of urbanization, agriculture, and grazing have degraded these habitats and the quality of the natural environment around the river so that the existing natural drainage system provided by the Napa River and Napa Creek is not sufficient to prevent extensive periodic flooding and associated property damage in the project area. Since 1862, more than 27 major floods have plagued the Napa Valley, resulting in significant loss of life and damage to property. Among the most damaging was the flood of 1986 which caused more than \$140 million in damage and led to the evacuation of 7,000 residents. The 1995 flood damaged an estimated 227



businesses and residences at a cost of over \$100 million.

This project was designed by a coalition that included members of 27 local community organizations, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, EPA Region IX, and 25 other federal, state and regional environmental agencies. The project is designed to provide flood protection by reconnecting the Napa River to its flood plain and creating wetlands throughout the area while maintaining fish and wildlife habitat and retaining the characteristics of the river.

The project’s “living river strategy”, based on the natural processes and characteristics of the river, tries to accomplish the following geomorphic goals: to maintain the natural slope, width, and depth of the river; to maintain and/or restore the connection of the river to its flood plain; to allow the river to meander as much as possible; to maintain channel features such as mudflats, shallows, sandbars, and a naturally uneven bottom; and to maintain a continuous fish and riparian corridor along the river.

Napa County “Living River” Project

Project features will include dike removal, channel modifications, biotechnical bank stabilization, a dry bypass channel, limited set-back levees and floodwalls, bridge relocations, pump stations, utility relocations, building demolition, maintenance roads, and recreation trails.

The county has received grant funding from the State Department of Transportation, State Coastal Conservancy, State Lands Commission, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Federal Highway Administration.

The county will repay its bond obligations with the proceeds of a half-cent sales tax, which was approved by Napa County voters by more than a two-thirds majority on March 3, 1998. The sales tax is projected to generate over \$120 million in 1998 dollars over 20 years. All sales tax revenues in excess of bond debt service requirements will be allocated to local cities, towns, and unincorporated areas to finance local watershed projects.

A one-half cent sales tax will generate over \$120 million over 20 years for the implementation of a “living river strategy” in the Napa River watershed

