

Mindful of Harvey, volunteers kick off North Richmond flood control project

The Wildcat-San Pablo Creeks Levee Project will raise and improve the existing levee system, among other flood-control measures



Courtesy Contra Costa Flood Control Supervisor John Gioia and other county officials prepare to remove vines from a creekside tree at the Aug. 29 dedication of work to lessen flood dangers in North Richmond.

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RICHMOND — As the nation stood in awe over catastrophic floods in Texas produced by Hurricane Harvey, a group of officials and community volunteers this week were taking steps to protect against lesser but nonetheless significant flood dangers in North Richmond.

The Wildcat-San Pablo Creeks Levee Project, which will kick into gear in September, “will raise and improve the existing levee system in the area, reducing the risk of flooding and recertifying flood protection capability for the community,” the Contra Costa County Flood Control and Water Conservation District said in a news release.

County officials and community members officially kicked off the project on Tuesday, doing site preparation at the Urban Tilth farm along Brookside Drive. After speeches by dignitaries, they went to the shore of nearby San Pablo Creek to symbolically cut some of the overgrown vegetation beleaguering the waterway.

“This is another example of the benefits of local government working with the community, and asking organizations and volunteers to join us in keeping their neighborhoods safe from flooding,” Contra Costa County Supervisor John Gioia said in the release. “The work we do now in advance of winter storms will help us identify problem areas, and ultimately improve the quality of life of our residents.”

Components of the project highlighted at the kickoff include:

- The Wildcat and San Pablo Creeks Levee Remediation Project will increase the height of the levee by an average of 1.5 vertical feet with earthen berms, sheet pile walls, and concrete walls, to comply with the Federal Emergency Management Agency requirements enacted after Hurricane Katrina in 2007. The importance of levees has been further highlighted by the past winter’s flooding in San Jose, the release noted.
- The Fred Jackson Way – First Mile/Last Mile Pedestrian Connection Project will include a sidewalk eight feet wide over a distance of three-tenths of a mile between Grove Avenue and the Wildcat Creek Trail, and widening of the road for another three-tenths of a mile north of the creek to accommodate a pedestrian path and bike lanes connecting to Brookside Drive.
- The North Richmond Watershed Connections Project, a collection of urban greening projects including rain gardens, street tree planting and implementation of Clean and Green Adopt-a-Tree, Adopt-a-Block Cleanups and Watershed Connections Route programs.

“Early flood control efforts used to rely upon concrete dams and other structures, often without much regard to the community in which they were located,” county Deputy Public Works Director Mike Carlson said in the release. “In Contra Costa County, we have been focusing on more than just improving flood protection, including protecting native habitat and ensuring community needs are met along the way.”