
SECTION 2: PROJECT OVERVIEW

2.1 BACKGROUND

The quality of an urban creek is dependent upon the interaction of many physical and biological processes. Over the years, a loss of native vegetation and improper bank stabilization along San Francisquito Creek has caused severe bank erosion in several locations. In addition, invasive non-native plants have displaced many of the native plant species. These non-native plants reduce the diversity necessary to support a rich riparian habitat, and may have limited erosion control properties as compared to native, woody species. This combination of unplanned bank stabilization and the uncontrolled spread of non-natives influenced the creek's capability to successfully withstand flood events. A properly designed bank stabilization project will be an effective method of reducing erosion and flood damage while at the same time improving habitat, limiting maintenance costs, and minimizing effects on water velocities. Replacement of non-native plant species with native species will help improve water quality and promote proper absorption of rainfall, reducing erosion and damage to property.

A creek in its natural state enhances the urban area by providing shade, wildlife habitat, and aesthetic quality, building value in the community and enhancing property values. A 1985 study compared the tax value of similar homes located along two nearly identical creeks, different in one way: one's banks were mostly natural and the other's banks were engineered. The value of homes adjacent to the natural channel were assessed 331 percent higher than the homes adjacent to the engineered channel (Riley, 1998). By implementing environmentally sound and aesthetically pleasing stabilization measures where possible, landowners will minimize the creek's threat to existing structures, reduce erosion, increase property values, and restore habitat. An additional benefit of compliance with Report recommendations includes an implementation program that streamlines the permitting process for landowners whose projects are consistent with the plan.

Landowners who choose not to comply with plan recommendations will be required to obtain permits from each individual regulatory agency, a time-consuming and potentially expensive process. Those who do not comply will also not be eligible take advantage of the proposed mitigation bank and will be required to fund their required mitigation independently (refer to Section 9 for more information). Additionally, an alternative treatment not considered as part of the overall plan may disturb bank stability at adjacent properties.

Because compliance with the plan is elective, there is no assurance that public or private landowners will implement any specific recommendation. The recommendations do not imply public responsibility for improvements

on private property. In general, individual landowners will be responsible for funding improvements on their property.

2.2 REPORT USE AND APPROVALS

2.2.1 REPORT USE

The Master Plan and Existing Conditions Reports are the property of the sponsoring agencies: the Cities of Menlo Park, Palo Alto, and East Palo Alto, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, and County of San Mateo. They are public documents, available at the main libraries of the participating cities, on city web pages (www.menlopark.org or www.city.paloalto.ca.us/sfcreek), and at the library of the Peninsula Conservation Center (3921 East Bayshore Road, Palo Alto).

Permitting agencies use these documents as a tool to evaluate the general suitability of proposed bank stabilization treatments to a given site. Proposed projects that comply with Plan recommendations will be preferred by agencies, as there is general consensus that the menu of recommended treatments for a given site are the least damaging to the overall health of the creek. Landowners who choose not to comply with the recommended treatment for their site will be required to provide compelling proof that the treatment they propose is more appropriate. Recommendations herein are general and require individual landowners to consult with the appropriate trained professionals - such as geomorphologists, engineers, geologists - to develop a detailed project design, construction documents, and maintenance plans.

This document is based on site evaluations conducted during late 1998 through early 1999. Issues that have arisen since then, such as the Chinese mitten crab (*Eriocheir sinensis*) infestation, may have a significant impact on bank stability, but are not referenced in this document. For this reason, the Existing Conditions Report and this Master Plan are loosely bound, dynamic documents that can be easily updated. Appendix D contains an outline of the methodology used to guide the application of the stabilization/revegetation treatment alternatives. This methodology may be replicated to update recommendations as site conditions change.

To clarify, station points are used in the text to maintain precision in referencing exact locations on the Master Plan maps. On each 100-scale map (1 inch = 100 feet), the creek centerline is marked with a station (e.g., 98+00, 99+00, etc.). Stationing increases in the upstream direction, with station point 0+00 at the mouth of San Francisquito Creek. A station point of 99+25 indicates a location that is 25 feet upstream of station 99+00; station point 89+75 falls 25 feet downstream of station 99+00.

2.2.2 REPORT APPROVAL PROCESS

A Joint Powers Authority or JPA was formed in May 1999 as a cooperative effort to improve community storm preparation and flood management at San Francisquito Creek. The JPA, comprised of representatives from several cities and government agencies/municipalities with interests along San Francisquito Creek, is functioning as the central oversight body on this project. Upon completion and acceptance by the funding agencies, the Master Plan documents will be presented to the JPA Board for acceptance.

In December 1999, consultants presented a summary of the project at a monthly gathering of representatives from regional state and federal regulatory agencies involved in the permitting of projects on San Francisquito Creek. The group discussed the project and agreed it would be a potential candidate for a Regional General Permit. If adopted, the document will undergo a CEQA analysis and public review, and will be refined further to include recommendations on mitigation and monitoring programs. The CEQA process will help identify a quantifiable, permissible project, which will then be submitted to the environmental review agencies for Regional General Permit consideration.

2.3 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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2.4 REFERENCES

Riley, A. (1988). Restoring Streams in Cities. Washington, D.C.: Island.