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Arroyo Grande Creek Flood Control Channel Vegetation Management Project
(Sept 8, 2005 updated version)

The Big Picture

In order to put into context the selective vegetation thinning project proposed for the Arroyo Grande Creek flood control channel for fall 2005, it is necessary to understand the roles of agriculture, flooding, and development in that watershed. In addition, it is important to understand the truly dire consequences, both financial and environmental, that may result if this season’s vegetation maintenance project is not viewed as a success by the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors. For these reasons, below is provided a brief summary of the history of agriculture, flooding and development in the La Cienega Valley, and the Arroyo Grande Creek flood control channel.

Agricultural Production

La Ciénega Valley and the Arroyo Grande Valley have long histories as one of California’s most productive agricultural regions because of the mild climate and rich soil. In the 1900’s the Arroyo Grande Valley produced bumper crops of cabbages, carrots, beans, peas, pumpkins, onions, and other vegetables. The local farmers won so many cash awards that they boasted that this was the only valley in the world to be barred from national seed contests by reason of its prolific soil (Olsen, 1976.)

Both valleys are farmed by families who have been on the land for generations. Many are of Japanese decent, whose lands were preserved intact by their neighbors when they were subject to internment during World War II. This area continues to be an important part of San Luis Obispo’s economy and heritage.

Today, agriculture in the Arroyo Grande Valley is generally intensive commercial production by experienced growers, many of whom represent third- or even fourth-generation farming families. The mild climate allows for year-round production. Most fields are able to produce up to 2 1/2 - 3 crops each year. In 1996 the fertile soils of the 2500 acre Arroyo Grande Valley yielded approximately $10 million in crop value. Arroyo Grande is a major shipping point for broccoli, Brussel sprouts, celery, cabbage, endive, cabbage, lettuce, onions, peppers, spinach, squash, tomatoes, cherry tomatoes, and strawberries. A small portion of the area is also occupied by orchards, including both avocados and walnuts (CASP, 1997). The Pismo Oceano Vegetable Exchange ships more than 3.75 million boxes of produce by truck each year.

Flood Control

In the years leading up to the 1950’s, repeated severe flooding from Arroyo Grande Creek resulted in losses to prime farmland. At the time, Arroyo Grande was a rural community of less than 5,000 residents. The Arroyo Grande Creek Flood Control Project, a joint USDA-Soil Conservation Service/Arroyo Grande RCD project, was completed in 1961 to protect homes and farmland in La
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Ciénega Valley. (These organizations are now known as the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Coastal San Luis RCD, respectively.)

Figure 1. Arroyo Grande Creek flood control channel shortly after construction - original design.

The main feature of the project is a levee system which constrains Arroyo Grande Creek from its confluence with Los Berros Creek downstream to the Pacific Ocean. Runoff from Pismo Lake, traveling through Meadow Creek, enters Arroyo Grande Creek through a pair of flap gates near the Pismo Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area. The total length of the flood control channel is 2.8 miles, with a current width of approximately sixty (66) feet between the levee toes. Currently, the height of the levee wall averages 15 feet above the bankful stream terrace.
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Figure 2. Zone 1/1A Flood Control District (black outline) receives runoff from the entire Arroyo Grande Creek Watershed (red outline).
Maintenance of the project is the responsibility of San Luis Obispo County Flood Control District Zone 1/1A, under the purview of the County Public Works Department (Figure 2). Landowners within the zone are assessed fees to support the maintenance work. The Zone 1/1A Advisory Committee is made up of agriculturalists and other landowners within the zone, and has been meeting regularly since June 2001.

**Current Factors that Affect Coastal Agriculture in La Cienega Valley**

**Rapid Urbanization**

The natural features that make the Arroyo Grande Valley such an abundant agricultural area also make it desirable for urban and suburban centers. American Farmland Trust has identified the coastal portion of San Luis Obispo County as an area with a large amount of high quality farmland and a high rate of development (AFT, 2003). During the late 1990’s, 625 new home sites were approved in the City of Arroyo Grande in a period of 5 years. This number represents an increase of almost 10% in a city with only 6,750 housing units (US Census, 2000.) This rapid urbanization puts development pressure on agricultural land conversion. The current population of Arroyo Grande and Oceano alone totals over 35,000 (increased from fewer than 5,000 in the entire valley in the 1950’s), with more than 13,000 households.

Much of the current building construction takes place on steep and/or highly erodible soils. This ground disturbance results in accelerated erosion which contributes sediment to the creek. This sediment settles in the creek further downstream, raising the creek bed and reducing the channel’s capacity to transport water, causing flood events. This affects agricultural production, where fields are intended to be protected from flooding by the existing flood control levees. In addition, sediment movement throughout the Arroyo Grande Creek watershed is detrimental to water quality, the health of steelhead trout (federally listed as a threatened species) and California red legged frog, (federally listed as an endangered species), and to the overall health of riparian habitat.

Additionally, the increase in impermeable surfaces that accompanies housing and business development in the watershed creates changes the flood hydrograph, increasing the peak flood volume of water directed through Arroyo Grande Creek during storm events, thereby increasing the flood hazard.

**Flood Threats**

The present configuration of the channel was “state of the art” when it was designed almost 50 years ago, but requires periodic sediment removal. Due to a combination of increased upstream erosion, increased impermeable surfaces, and decreased channel maintenance due to increased costs and regulations protecting endangered species and their habitat, the flood control channel is now clogged with sediment. The US Army Corps of Engineers estimates the system currently has 15% of its design capacity and can only carry runoff from a 2-year to 5-year storm event. Larger storms would cause flooding (USACoE, 2001).

On March 5, 2001, the levee system broke on the south side during a moderately large storm event,
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flooding hundreds of acres of farmland and several residences (Figure 3). Luckily, the northern levee did not breach. Otherwise, the regional wastewater treatment plant that services the communities of Arroyo Grande, Oceano and Grover Beach, and many more residences and mobile home parks would have been flooded.

Figure 3. Flooding resulting from April 2001 levee breach on AG Creek flood control channel.

Today's regulatory requirements will make any attempt to restore the flood capacity of the channel to its original design a very lengthy and extremely expensive proposition. The county Public Works Department estimates a cost of between $2 to $7 million dollars. Therefore, flooding is a very real threat to agriculture in the La Cienaga Valley.

Identifying the Long-Term Solutions: The Arroyo Grande Creek Erosion, Sedimentation and Flooding Alternatives Study

During late 2002 the San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (SLOCFCWCD) allocated $180,000 for a Program Evaluation and Engineering Alternatives Analysis Study of lower Arroyo Grande Creek flood control channel. This study was intended to evaluate a wide range of flood control alternative projects and provide a plan to manage flooding at the most downstream section of the creek.

Unfortunately, when the SLOCFCWCD vote in April 2003 to relinquish maintenance of the channel (more below) over to the State Department of Water Resources (DWR), it also withdrew the funding for this crucial study. The Zone 1/1A Advisory Committee, comprised of agriculturalists, local residents, and other stakeholders, actively lobbied the county Board of Supervisors to restore this funding so that
In July 2003, the California Coastal Commission approved a Coastal Development Permit for the SLOCFCWCD to perform sediment removal in the channel to improve its flood carrying capacity (Permit Application No 3-02-072). The SLOCFCWCD had applied for this permit prior to the vote to relinquish to DWR. A condition of the permit was that within 3 years of the sediment removal project, the permittee would submit a “comprehensive analysis of the alternatives available to protect public safety and existing development from floods, accompanied by a proposed strategy and timeline for implementation of the least environmentally damaging feasible method(s).”

Fifteen months later, in June 2004, the SLOCFCWCD approved funding in the amount $150,000 to the RCD to conduct “The Arroyo Grande Creek Watershed Assessment and Flooding Alternatives Analysis.” The County grant was matched by $150,000 from the State Coastal Conservancy, and augmented by $15,000 from the State Dept of Parks and Recreation Off-Highway Vehicles Division, for a total of $315,000.

The consulting firm of Swanson Hydrology and Geomorphology (SH&G) was contracted by the RCD to conduct the study, and began work in February 2005. The Alternatives Study is now nearing completion, with a draft report due at the end of September 2005, and the final report due at the end of November. The Study has focused in depth on erosion sources, sedimentation and hydrology as they relate to recurring flooding in the lower reaches of the creek. The final outcome of the study will be a set of feasible projects or actions which will effectively manage flooding along lower AG Creek [1]. Thus, the permit condition set forth by the Coastal Commission in 2003 will be satisfied by this Study, overseen by the RCD and financed in part by SLO County, even though the SLOCFCWCD never executed the CDP permit.

The Flooding Alternatives Study is complemented by the Arroyo Grande Creek Watershed Management Plan (AGWMP) developed by Central Coast Salmon Enhancement (CCSE), which focused more on watershed characteristics as they affect steelhead trout habitat. The AGWMP included data on AG Creek watershed geology and hydrology which will be built upon in the Flooding Alternatives Study.

The final report of the Arroyo Grande Creek Erosion, Sedimentation and Flooding Alternatives Study is eagerly awaited by the local community and will provide the blueprint for protection of the Creek’s natural resources as well as successful long-term management of sedimentation and flood risk along the flood control channel.

**Flood Control Channel Maintenance Responsibility Relinquished to the State [2]**

At its April 1, 2003 meeting, the County Board of Supervisors, sitting as the San Luis Obispo County Flood Control and Water Conservation District (SLOCFCWCD), passed a “Resolution to Relinquish the Arroyo Grande and Los Berros Diversion Flood Control Channels and Appurtenant Structures to the State of California.” County Public Works Department staff recommended that maintenance...
responsibilities be turned over to the state Department of Water Resources (DWR) because the SLOCFCWCD had not been able to maintain the channel. Current regulatory requirements made it very difficult to restore its design capacity, the yearly revenue assessed landowners in the flood control district is inadequate, and future liability costs are potentially significant.

The State is mandated to accept this responsibility under Water Code Section 12878. In fall 2004, the responsible entity, the Division of Flood Management at DWR, initiated the process of establishing a new Maintenance Area for flood control along lower Arroyo Grande Creek. On February 14, 2005, DWR issued its Statement of Necessary work, and planned to begin work on the channel in July 2005. The Water Code is clear in its mandate that DWR maintain the channel by restoring it to its original 1958 design, a trapezoidal shaped channel, as shown in Figure 1 above. However, to attempt to implement that original design in the face of current environmental regulations will require DWR to expend a great deal of time and money seeking environmental permits, in part because the channel is home to at least two federally protected aquatic species, steelhead trout and redlegged frogs. Implementation may also involve costly mitigation measures to compensate for habitat loss, with costs passed on to the rate payers of the flood district. While DWR will likely eventually obtain permits to perform some sediment removal in the channel, they will almost certainly not be permitted to return the channel to its original trapezoidal shape. Nonetheless, they are required by the Water Code to continue to pursue that goal. There is no provision in the Water Code which allows DWR to study or implement other acceptable flood control designs or option alternatives that would also be more environmentally acceptable.

DWR has estimated the cost of work during the first year, 2005-2006, to be $898,600, and the cost of work during the second year to be $1,711,300. Under current rules for payment of assessment fees, these costs will be borne solely by the approximately 450 property owners in the maintenance area, or “zone of special benefit”, delineated by DWR (this area includes most, but not all, of the Zone 1/1A district). This would mean that a residential property owner who has been paying less than $10 per year to the Zone 1/1A flood control district would be owe over $850 the first year under DWR, and approximately $1500 the second year. This would be a tremendous hardship to local residents, the majority of whom are elderly and on limited incomes. There would be similar financial burdens on the local small business, and there is concern that the greatly increased costs could force farmers in district to sell their land, thereby opening the possibility of losing extremely productive agricultural land to development.

DWR has stated that once they accept maintenance responsibility for the channel, it would be very unlikely that they would be able to return management of the channel to a local entity in the future, given the legal liability that would be involved, unless the County itself were willing to take back the channel, which the Board has indicated is very unlikely, again because it doesn’t want to bear the legal liability. In essence, relinquishment of the Arroyo Grande Creek flood control channel to DWR, if it occurs, is likely irrevocable.

One-Time Only Opportunity:

One chance only to retain local control of the flood control channel, and manage the file:///C|/Documents%20and%20Settings/Julie/My...%20description%20updated%20Sept%2008%202005.htm (7 of 16) [9/9/2005 6:13:33 PM]
channel in an economically viable and environmentally sound manner

When Zone 1/1A residents, farmers and business owners learned of the potential for economically devastating increases in assessment fees if relinquishment to DWR went forward, they organized to develop an alternative proposal to the County Board of Supervisors to maintain local control of the flood channel. On June 14, 2005, the group presented their proposal to the Board of Supervisors, and the Board voted unanimously to request a one-year delay in relinquishment to DWR. They also voted to allocate $150,000 for channel maintenance and flood prevention activities to be performed before the 2005 wet season.

During this one-year reprieve, the Zone 1/1A community must organize a new flood maintenance district, develop a source of funding, and produce a long-term maintenance plan for channel management. The most viable way to raise funds for long-term maintenance will be via a Proposition 218 election to be held before July 2006. The results of the Alternatives Study, due in November 2005, will provide the basis for long-term management planning for the channel, and indicate both the level of protections possible with various projects, and the funding required to accomplish those projects.

In July 2006, the Board of Supervisors will again consider the question of whether to relinquish responsibility for maintenance of the Arroyo Grande Creek flood control channel to DWR. If the Zone 1/1A Advisory Committee and Task Force has not proven to the Board’s satisfaction that it has developed the institutional structure and the funding mechanism for channel maintenance, as well as developed a feasible long-term plan, the Board has made it clear that they will go forward with relinquishment.

The Board will likely be very rigorous in their analysis of the plan put before them, because if they decide to forego relinquishment to DWR, and maintain local control, DWR officials have made it clear that it is very unlikely that DWR would be willing to consider accepting relinquishment again in the future. They offered the 1-year delay as a “one-time-only” opportunity to the County and the Zone 1/1A landowners. If the County foregoes its opportunity to relinquish the channel in 2006, it may never have another opportunity.

The proposal before the California Coastal Commission to allow vegetation maintenance in the original jurisdiction portion of the channel in fall 2005

When the County Board of Supervisors considers in 2006 the question of whether they should take their last chance to relinquish the AG Creek flood channel to DWR, or whether they should vote to maintain local control, one of their questions will be how effectively their $150,000 allocation in 2005 was spent to improve channel maintenance and reduce flood risk. The RCD accepted the responsibility for coordinating selective vegetation thinning with a portion of those funds. It is important that this effort be as effective as possible in order to reduce the chance that the Board will choose to proceed with relinquishment.
To reiterate: relinquishment to DWR would result in actions damaging to the riparian habitat and sensitive species in Arroyo Grande Creek. In addition to imposing a great financial burden on 450 property owners, relinquishment to DWR would mean that they would be forced to operate the channel under the original 1955 Operation and Maintenance Agreement, which means henceforth DWR would be doing battle with environmental regulations in an attempt to restore the channel to its stripped-down trapezoidal design, without the option of considering other more environmentally sound options. For the sake of protecting the habitat and species within the channel, in addition to the financial well-being of local residents and farmers, it is vital that this season’s vegetation management program be as successful as possible, to reduce the likelihood that the County Board of Supervisors will vote in 2006 to proceed with relinquishment.

Project proposal for selective vegetation thinning in Arroyo Grande Creek flood control channel, Fall 2005

The Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District, in cooperation with the California Conservation Corps (CCCs) and local residents and property owners, plans to selectively trim and remove vegetation within the bed and on the banks of the Arroyo Grande (AG) Creek and Los Berros Creek Flood Control Channels. These creeks pass through the city boundaries of Oceano and Arroyo Grande. The purpose of this project is to reduce the potential for flooding of adjacent residential areas and farmland. In many areas within the Zone 1/1A Flood Control District, the bed and banks of both creeks have become crowded with willows and other vegetation that can catch material moving downstream, creating debris jams and causing the streams to backwater and overflow their banks, in turn flooding local farms and residences, as occurred in the winter of 2001.

This is a one-time only project proposal for work to be conducted during fall 2005. A long-term channel maintenance plan will be developed following completion of the Arroyo Grande Creek Erosion, Sedimentation, and Flood Alternatives Study, now underway. The CSLRCD is committed to submitting to the Coastal Commission a copy of the completed Alternatives Study no later than January 1, 2006.

Relevant information from the Alternatives Study

The consulting firm of Swanson Hydrology and Geomorphology of Santa Cruz, California, is conducting the Alternatives Study. They are drawing on their successful experience in designing the San Lorenzo River Management Plan, which includes an innovative vegetation maintenance component. The San Lorenzo River vegetation management program was approved by all of the involved regulatory agencies. The Alternatives Study, due to be completed in November 2005, has already finished much of the data-gathering and analysis phase. Among the findings that are relevant to this project proposal are the following:

- The Arroyo Grande Creek flood control channel in its current condition only provides protection from the 2 to 5 year flood event, or 2,800 cfs (cubic feet per second). This agrees with the findings of the 2001 Army Corps of Engineers study.
- The original design capacity of the channel was for 7,500 cfs, which was believed
to be the 50-year flood. The 100-year flood was believed to be 10,120 cfs.

- Due to changes in the watershed resulting from development, and also an increased period of record for precipitation, the 100-year storm is now calculated at 19,200 cfs. Even if the channel were now restored to its original design through sediment and vegetation removal, the maximum channel capacity of 7,500 cfs would only provide protection against the 10 to 20 year storm.

The first and most fundamental flood reduction management tool which the Alternatives Study will propose be enacted to increase the channel’s capacity to handle flows, while preserving habitat for listed species, is vegetation thinning:

“Maintain 10 foot vegetated buffer around low flow channel; remove remaining vegetation; limb up vegetation within buffer to encouraging taller vegetation overhanging the channel.”

This is vegetation management practice is part of the regular maintenance used in the San Lorenzo River project. This single management action of vegetation thinning would increase channel capacity from 2500 cfs to 4000 cfs, or from a 2-5 year flood capacity to a 7.3 year flood capacity. We are proposing a modified, less intensive version of this practice for Fall 2005.

**Proposed Work Plan**

Construction on the AG Creek flood control channel was completed in 1961. Since that time, there has been a long history of channel maintenance which has included excess sediment removal and vegetation thinning. Because of this management history, there are no large, mature cottonwoods or sycamores within the channel. Woody vegetation largely consists of native willows, which resprout readily if the root ball remains intact.

- Crews from the California Conservation Corps would use hand tools such as pruning shears and chainsaws fueled with environmentally friendly, biodegradable oils to remove vegetation.
- Branches of trees on the banks of the active channel, from the toe of the active stream channel uphill to a distance of 10 feet from the channel, will have horizontal branches trimmed to a height of not more than six feet from ground level. Trimming the trees on the banks in this manner will encourage growth in the upper canopy of the trees, improving their ability over time to shade the creek.
- Willows and other trees less than 6” diameter on the levee banks and benches more than 10 feet from the active flow channel would be cut at or within 6 inches of ground level. Willows and other trees 6” or greater in diameter will have horizontal branches pruned to a height not greater than 6 feet.
- No trees will be removed. All root balls will be left intact to enable resprouting.
- All vegetation trimmings from non-invasive species would be removed from the channel and chipped onsite.
All invasive exotic plant species shall be removed from the project site and disposed of properly.

Large woody material within the creek channel will be cut or notched at 6-foot intervals and left in the channel to provide woody habitat that would break into smaller pieces should it become jammed against bridge abutments.

No heavy machinery will enter the channel.

There shall be no use of Rodeo or other herbicides.

All vehicles, including those pulling the chippers, will remain on the roads on top of the levees, and shall not enter the channel.

Rationale for this approach to vegetative thinning:

Trimming the lower branches on the willow trees within the 10 foot buffer area adjacent to the stream encourages the willows to put their growth into the tops of the trees, thereby providing more effective shade for the stream, and improving habitat for the steelhead trout.

This work is not being conducted during the bird nesting period, so bird reproduction will not be disturbed.

In the area outside the 10-foot buffer, where willows less than 6” diameter will be pruned to within 6 inches of the ground, this will increase the channel capacity during the winter when flows are high, and when birds are not nesting. In the spring, the root balls promptly and vigorously resprout, restoring availability of habitat during nesting season. This is demonstrated in photographs taken of AG Creek flood control channel vegetation in summer 2005, showing lush regrowth following the pruning and thinning in December 2004 (Figures 4, 5, and 6).

When channel capacity is reduced, water is forced to a higher level in the channel, increasing the amount of the channel that is disturbed. Currently, the channel has only a 2-5 year flood capacity, meaning that it is likely to approach overtopping the levee walls every 2-5 years. And during most winters, water flows reach a depth of 6 feet or more, and all vegetation within that depth, where we are proposing to prune, will be flooded. This flooding results in flushing of bird nest, beaver dams and other materials to the ocean. It is in the spring and summer, when water flows are low and willows are regenerating, that vegetation close to the ground is available as habitat.

Example of vegetation thinning on Arroyo Grande Creek flood control channel to increase capacity before winter storms in December 2004, and recovery of vegetation by August 2005.
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Figure 4. Before vegetation thinning December 2004.

Figure 5. After vegetation thinning December 2004.
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Figure 6. Recovery – vegetation in August 2005

- If a broader buffer zone of 15 feet were used, with no vegetation to be thinned within that zone, that would mean that 30 feet, or nearly 50%, of the channel would not have vegetation thinned where the vegetation is most dense. This would seriously compromise the effectiveness of this flood risk reduction effort, not only in this stretch of the channel, but for the entire reach of the flood control channel, because this unthinned section would act as a bottleneck, slowing flows and backwatering the channel upstream, thereby increasing the risk of flooding of upstream and adjacent farmland and residents.

**Endangered Species Protections**

- Before work begins, surveys consistent with protocols established by the USFWS shall be conducted to determine the presence of California red-legged frogs (RLF).
- On the first day of work, a qualified biologist shall conduct training sessions for the CCCs crews to familiarize the crew members with identification of California RLF, their habitat, general provisions and protections afforded by the Endangered Species Act, measures implemented to protect the RLF, and a review of project boundaries.
- While the crews are engaged in thinning the vegetation, a qualified biologist shall monitor all activities by the crews within the flood control channel. If California RLF are found to be present, all work activities shall cease within 25 feet in any direction of the frog.
- If the monitor identifies ideal RLF vegetative habitat, the crew will be instructed to avoid all work activity on or near that habitat.
- No weedwhackers will be used by crews, in order to reduce the risk of harming red-legged frogs.
- We are proposing a 25 foot buffer around any California RLF because this provides
a 50-foot diameter area that protects the frogs from impacts, and has been approved and is consistent with protections required by both the USFWS and the CDFG. A much greater buffer of 100 feet is unnecessary to protect the redlegged frogs, and has the capacity to render the vegetation thinning project ineffective, because for each frog found, no work could be performed for a channel length of 200 feet (recall that the channel is only 66 feet wide between the levees). Given the high density of vegetation, the very short length of channel within the original jurisdiction zone, the occurrence of just 2 or 3 frogs could eliminate the ability to thin vegetation in much of the channel. A 25-foot buffer is a well-established practice and provides effective protection for California RLF.

As discussed earlier, in July 2003, the California Coastal Commission approved a Coastal Development Permit for the SLO County Flood Control and Water Conservation District to perform sediment removal in the Arroyo Grande Creek flood control channel. As stated in the project description of their CDP application, “a surface area of approximately 12 acres would be impacted by the project…The total impact area within the Coastal Zone is approximately 4 acres (1.5 acres in original jurisdiction, 2.5 acres in county appealable jurisdiction).” Of course, not only would sediment be excavated if this action were carried forward, but all covering vegetation would be completely removed, roots and all. This much more intensive form of management was approved by the Coastal Commission. We are proposing a much gentler, regenerative form of management to improve channel capacity, while retaining environmental values. We will not be removing sediment or root balls or disturbing the existing channel. Larger willows will have lower branches pruned and smaller willows will be cut back close to the ground, to regenerate in spring, and trees will be available for bird nesting in the late winter, spring and summer.

**Timeline:** Work during 2005 is scheduled to begin on September 6, 2005, and must be completed not later than October 31, 2005. All efforts will be made to complete the work as early as possible, in order to complete the project prior to the onset of heavy rains and increased streamflows.

**Project extent:** The project will include the portion of the flood control channel beginning approximately ¼ mile upstream of the confluence with Meadow Creek, or 0.15 miles below Guiton’s Crossing (shown as marker 1918.453 on Figure 7), and work upstream. Regarding the need for work below Guiton’s crossing: The 0.15 mile stretch below Guiton’s crossing continues to be very constricted, as is shown by the topographic contour lines on the aerial photo in Figure 7. This aerial photo and topo map were created based on high resolution aerial photographs.
Figure 7. Marker 1918.453 marks the area below Guiton’s crossing where the channel widens. Vegetation thinning is proposed upstream of marker 1918.453, where the channel is more constricted and prone to flooding.

taken earlier this year, in spring 2005. Seaward of that 0.15 mile point (shown as the 1918.453 marker on Figure 7), the channel widens. For that reason, both the NRCS consultant working with us on this project, Susan Litteral, and the Swanson Hydrology and Geomorphology project manager for the Alternatives Study, John Dvorsky, stated that clearing to the 0.15 mile point below Guiton’s crossing was important, and below that not necessary. The portion of the channel within the Coastal Zone Original Jurisdiction has not had vegetation maintenance performed since the mid-1990’s, and for that reason poses the greatest flood risk to adjacent properties.

Conclusion

The RCD and the Zone 1/1A community share the values of the Coastal Commission: to manage the watershed in an environmentally sound manner, maintaining the natural resources of Arroyo Grande Creek and its sensitive species, while protecting the agricultural resources and community immediately adjacent to the creek. If our efforts to manage the channel are not successful this year, the County Board of Supervisors can determine that the relinquishment of channel management to the State Department of Water Resources is the best approach. In that case, Arroyo Grande Creek and the entire watershed will have an uphill battle to maintain their environmental integrity.

We ask for your support of this modest vegetation thinning program to begin September 2005.
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[1] To see the complete scope of work for the Erosion, Sedimentation and Flood Alternatives Study, go to http://www.coastalrcd.org/Scope%20of%20Work%20for%20Alt%20Study_files/FinalCombined-ScopetoCounty092704.pdf.