

Living with Alhambra Creek

Alhambra Creek and the Martinez Community

The most severe storm in recent years dumped a lot of water in a hurry on the Alhambra Watershed last winter. As Alhambra Creek carried this water through our community, it raced through Alhambra Valley and Franklin Canyon, through neighborhoods, through downtown and into Carquinez Straits. Stream banks were eroded, undercutting structures and trees. Floodwaters overflowed in four places, causing significant damage.

Most of Downtown Martinez, however, did not flood. The downtown flood control project was based on understanding how creeks and watersheds work. It succeeded because it provided a proper working channel and flood plain. When we accommodate the Creek, we protect the community. Now we need to apply these principles higher up in the watershed. If we do this right, we will protect the community and enhance the natural creek.

Alhambra Creek Flooding and Erosion Task Force

In the absence of a coordinated plan, some individual landowners have tried to protect their own properties by doing things to the channel bordering their parcels. Many of these projects have either failed or are in the process of failing. In many cases, the projects have made things worse. Some have been done with permits, some have not. Permits are required for any work to be performed on the creek that is below the top of the creek bank. Working in the creek without permits can result in substantial fines.

The Mayor and City Council of Martinez have set up a Flooding and Erosion Task Force to develop a plan for protecting the upstream community. The plan will be based on understanding the watershed as an integrated system. We need this plan to coordinate, design and build projects that will work and that will continue working.

To succeed, projects need to apply these understandings to substantial reaches of the creek rather than piecemeal to individual parcels. We will need to work together as an informed and engaged community to make this happen. We have much better odds of getting money if we have a watershed-function-based community plan. We will also have much better odds of our projects actually providing long-term protection.

Permits:

Working within creeks requires permits from various agencies. There are substantial fines for dumping anything into creeks or working without the proper permits. Some important contacts you should make before planning creek repair are as follows:

City of Martinez Engineering Department	(925) 372-3515
Department of Fish and Game	(707) 944-5500
US Army Corps of Engineers	(415) 977-8462
Water Quality Control Board (SF Bay Area Region)	(510) 622-2300

What can we do?

Making a plan and developing projects will take time, money and involvement. What can we do to protect ourselves while we are doing this? Each creekside landowner is responsible for taking care of the creek bordering their parcel. What can or can't creek side landowners do?

- **DO** inspect your section of creek – look for obstructions, erosion problems, and vulnerability of structures.
- **DO** talk with your neighbors – explore ways to work together.
- **DO** report erosion problems, obstructions or flooding exposure to the City of Martinez Engineering Department.
- **DO** consult with City of Martinez Engineering Department before doing work in the creek.
- **DO** prune trees and bushes to remove low-growing branches, but retain canopy.
- **DO** remove trash.
- **DO** remove obstructions such as fallen trees, lumber, tires, appliances.
- **DO** plant appropriate native plants on the banks for stability. A list of appropriate plants is available.
 - Work within creeks requires permits. The City of Martinez Engineering Department staff can help guide you in the process.
- **DO** report dumping in the creek to 1-800 NODUMPING.
- **DO NOT** build anything that will obstruct flow in the creek or reduce the channel capacity.
- **DO NOT** plant in the streambed.
- **DO NOT** dump any material into the creek such as rock, concrete, building materials, lumber, yard waste, pet waste, gray water or swimming pool drainage.
- **DO NOT** undertake construction work or other streambed alteration work in the creek channel without first consulting with City of Martinez Engineering Department.
 - Work within creeks requires permits. The City of Martinez Engineering Department staff can help guide you in the process.
- **DO NOT** plant invasive plants such as ivy, vinca, Arundo (giant cane). These plants do not stabilize the banks, and choke out other plants that do.
- **DO NOT** place exotic species such as goldfish into the creek.

For more information contact the City Engineer at:

City of Martinez
Engineering Department
525 Henrietta Street
Martinez, CA 94553
(925) 372-3515