

9-12-2060

LOS ANGELES TIMES

VENTURA COUNTY NEWS

TIMES

ROCKS: Speeding Up a Natural Process at Beach

Continued from B1

Before the 190-foot Matilija Dam was built in 1947, Surfers Point and beaches south stretched three times as far from the shore as they do today, officials said. But years of swift currents pounding the point gradually eroded the beach.

The new rocks should help. Waves will gradually work them into the sand, where they will serve as anchors, holding the remaining beach in place, Raives said.

Surfers Point will never be as stable as Emma Wood State Beach just north of the river's mouth, which does not get pounded by the same harsh conditions, but at least the erosion will be slowed, Raives said.

The mostly basketball-sized rocks are being shipped in from a county project to remove debris from under the Santa Ana Road bridge in Oak View and create a deeper channel for flood control.

"It's material that, left alone, would work its way down the river and naturally replenish the beach," Raives said. "We're just speeding up that process."

About 65% of the county's shoreline is fortified with concrete walls, wooden pylons and granite

boulders—the highest percentage in the state—and no local beach is getting the amount of sand it should, said Paul Jenkin, chairman of the Ventura County chapter of the Surfrider Foundation, a coastal environmental group.

In an effort to preserve at least one beach, Jenkin and members of other environmental groups have been meeting for years with city officials, members of the California Coastal Commission, Seaside Park and other agencies in a coalition known as the Surfers Point Working Group, to discuss the beach's fate.

This week's project, paid for by a

state grant, is one result of those meetings, Raives said. The money allows for a stretch of beach the length of a football field to receive a blanket of boulders as a test for a larger project, and to protect the most threatened portion of the bike path.

Eventually—when the agencies can raise \$6 million—a fresh layer of rocks will cover all of Surfers Point, Raives said. Then the damaged bike path and the beach's parking lot will be torn up and rebuilt 100 feet farther inland.

Early Monday morning, before anyone arrived except the surfers, 16 dump trucks rumbled down to

Surfers Point in platoons to pile more rock on the already rocky beach.

All day, as swimmers, joggers and sea gulls looked on, trucks backed up to the edge of the eroded bike path, heaved mounds of rocks onto the beach below, then drove off for more, leaving skip-loaders to smooth out the piles.

Surfer Paul Smith, 27, of Santa Barbara, who said he hits the waves at the point several times a week, watched the trucks at work.

"It's a good thing, I'm sure, as long as Surfrider has their eye on it," he said. "Ventura's very environmentally aware. I'm sure they know what they're doing."



STEVE OSMAN / Los Angeles Times

without reinforcement of the beach, officials say.

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Photos by STEVE OSMAN / Los Angeles Times

Waves will gradually work these rocks into the sand, where they will serve as anchors and slow erosion, officials say.

Rock Delivery Shores Up Surfers Point

By GAIL DAVIS
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

VENTURA—Seeking to undo decades of man-made damage to Surfers Point, city and state agencies Monday began to pile rocks on the beach to keep it from washing away.

With 50 years' worth of rocks and sediment trapped miles upstream behind the aging Matilija Dam, the beach is starved for replacement sand, say city officials. They describe the \$250,000 project, which calls for placing 8,000 cubic yards of rocks on an eroded section of Surfers Point, as "beach nourishment."

Rick Raives, Ventura city engineer, predicts that without the rocks another section of the beach's bike path could be washed away this winter if the county gets hit by heavy storms.

Such beach rebuilding is needed, he said, when roads, bike paths or anything else man-made is built too close to a beach like Surfers Point. The area, adjacent to the county fairgrounds at Seaside Park, is actually the remnants of the Ventura River's delta and constantly gets rearranged by the river and competing offshore currents.

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A surfer goes about his business Monday while rocks are dumped on the beach at Surfers Point, above. Below, people watch a load slide toward the sand.



Officials to view removal project

MATILIJA DAM: *High-profile audience for demonstration might help garner funding.*

By Charles Levin
Staff writer

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt will join state and local officials next month to demonstrate a possible way of tearing down Matilija Dam.

A 90-foot chunk of the 53-year-old dam will crumble on Oct. 12 when Babbitt, California Resources Agency Secretary Mary Nichols, Rep. Elton Gallegly, R-Simi Valley, and other local officials watch a crane do the job.

But Matilija stands 198 feet high and spans more than 600 feet, making it the largest potential dam removal project in the United States. Officials lack good data for removing such a large dam. Hence, the demonstration project.

Ventura County is splitting the \$435,000 cost with the cities of Port Hueneme, Oxnard and Ventura, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and California Coastal Conservancy.

Total removal could cost between \$22 million and \$200 million and take 10 to 40 years, according to a U.S. Bureau of Reclamation study. Ventura County doesn't have that kind of money, said Supervisor John Flynn.

The presence of Gallegly and high-profile federal and state political appointees could raise awareness of the county's need for getting enough money needed to complete the job.

"These are the main players," said Flynn. "They have their hands on the money."

Environmentalists argue that Matilija is useless, depriving coastal beaches of sand and preventing endangered steelhead trout from reaching spawning grounds upstream on the Ventura River.

Officials estimate it traps more than a third of the sand the river normally sends downstream, now estimated at 5 million to 7 million cubic yards of silt.

Efforts to tear down the dam gained more attention in April when American Rivers, a Washington, D.C.-based environmental group, rated the Ventura River third on its list of rivers most threatened by dams, pollution and other ills.

— Charles Levin's e-mail address is clevin@insidevc.com.

VCStar
9-19-2000