

American River Flood Control District
District Approach to Urban Camps on the Levees
Staff Report

Discussion:

The incidence of urban campsites along District levees has skyrocketed exponentially in the last three years. The District should foresee the problem continuing and develop a strategy on how to lessen the deleterious impact to District levees. There are a number of possible approaches to mitigate this impact and it is likely that a combination of methods will be required.

The immediate concerns presented by urban camping are:

1. Digging/excavation damage to the levees
2. Belongings/debris obstructing the District's ability to perform maintenance
3. Hazardous waste at campsites and potential contact with District workers
4. Dangerous interactions with campers and their dogs

Past Operations

In previous years, direct communication with most campers yielded good results with campers staying off the levee footprint and toe road. Due to the growing magnitude of the camping population, this approach is no longer successful along some reaches of levee. The NEMDC and Arcade Creek levee reaches are examples of especially high urban camping populations.

Another tool the District has used in the past was to coordinate with City and County authorities to relocate campers and their belongings to allow District crews to mow, trim, and spray herbicides. This was also done to grant District crews access to repair camper damage. It has become increasingly difficult to get City and County support as they have become overwhelmed with the magnitude of the camping population.

Lastly, the District General Manager has been reluctant to task District crews with direct contact with camper trash and belongings but has been keen on supplying District crews and equipment to load debris collected and bagged by City and County work crews. The District then pays to haul and dispose of the collected debris at a landfill. This provides support to agencies and authorities with the primary role of addressing urban campers. This approach is no longer able to keep up with the volume of trash being generated and maintenance work is being delayed or reduced.

Potential Methods to Address Impacts

The immediate need that must be met is regain access to mow the levees during the summer mowing season. High incidence of campsites equates to extremely high volumes of debris and belongings in the path of the mowers on the levee slopes. The District's first preference would

be to have the City or County authorities clear the area of campers and then bag up their trash. Absent of that occurring, the District needs to have the City/County authorities evict the campers so the District could pursue a means to have to debris and belongings sorted and removed. It is the General Manager's highest objective that this task not be conducted by District personnel. District staff is not trained, compensated, or recruited to sort through homeless camp detritus. The General Manager recommends that the District contract with an appropriate contractor to process the materials and debris. The District crews could then load the bagged materials and debris into a dump truck with the backhoe and dispose of the waste at a landfill.

Another approach that is currently being promoted by RD 1000, is to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the City, County, RD 1000, SAFCA, and ARFCD to cost-share for additional law enforcement and clean-up efforts on flood control facilities. Paul Devereux from RD 1000 has circulated a draft MoU that begins to outline various commitments of all parties to get more law enforcement presence and attention on the levees. It is not yet clear how much this could cost ARFCD, what services could be expected from law enforcement, and how reliable the services would be.

Recommendation:

The General Manager recommends that the Board of Trustees provide funding in the budget for contracting on urban camp cleanup and continue to work out the details of a MoU with other flood control stakeholders.