

August 13, 2014

State of California
Regional Water Quality Control Board
San Francisco Bay Region
1515 Clay Street, Suite 1400
Oakland, CA 94612

Dear Board Members and Staff:

I am writing to request expedited approval of the recently updated Water Quality Certification application submitted by the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority for flood control, environmental, and recreational enhancements in the reach of SFC between Highway 101 and the bay. This timely approval is critical so that construction on the project can begin this coming year to finally protect thousands of residents and property owners in East Palo Alto from a very high creek flow during an extreme tide, to improve the quality of water reaching the Faber Tract marsh and bay, and to create more areas of high quality wetlands as habitat for endangered species. This Hwy 101 to bay project is also a pivotal prerequisite to implementing flood control and environmental remedies upstream of Hwy 101 for other neighborhoods severely affected by flooding caused by limited bridge capacities (especially the Pope-Chaucer bridge), and other obstructions in the creek channel.

In 1998, floodwaters from the biggest SFC flow on record (7,200 cubic feet per second) damaged some 1,700 properties in the cities of Palo Alto, East Palo Alto, and Menlo Park, and shut down Hwy 101 and other thoroughfares for several days. The estimated damages were \$28M, and the video records of that event are mind-boggling. Fortunately no deaths occurred.

I have lived in the Crescent Park neighborhood of Palo Alto for almost 30 years, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the Pope-Chaucer bridge. I was away on a business trip when I received a call at 3:00 AM from my wife that February 3, 1998, saying that over a foot of water was surging through our yard and crawl space. Based on the hydrograph recorded by the USGS for that event, almost 500 acre-feet of water overflowed the creek at the Pope-Chaucer bridge, severely damaging homes and properties in the Crescent Park and Duveneck/St. Francis neighborhoods — this was in addition to the terrible devastation that occurred further downstream around Hwy 101 and the bay reach near East Palo Alto. Should a 100-year flow occur (estimated to be about 9,400 cfs), over three times as much water would escape the creek around the Pope-Chaucer and Middlefield bridges

For years, the urgency and causes of these threats have been known. Other heavy creek flooding events (peak flows greater than 5,000 cfs) have occurred in earlier years (e.g., 2012, 1982, 1956, and 1911). Homes along the creek have suffered repeated flood damage during these events, especially in East Palo Alto where, most recently in December 2012, water overtopped and seeped through the creek's uncertified levees.

We understand that the important function of the Regional Water Quality Control Board is to protect the state's waterways against pollutions and environmental damage. As a citizen who has not attended any of the meetings between the RWQCB and SFCJPA, it is hard to pinpoint the reasons for what has been an extraordinarily protracted consideration of the certification application – almost 17 months. It appears to us observers that the SFCJPA and its professional contractors have attempted to steer a well-considered and responsively optimized set of trade-offs among the complex constraints of flood control, ecology, recreation, and aesthetic goals. There will undoubtedly be disagreements about how this optimization should weigh various factors, but in the big picture, it is essential that we break through whatever technical, communication, and negotiation difficulties may exist to get this crucial flood control project underway to protect lives and property and to improve water quality.

We are also aware that you are being asked to act on a project in what may be considered a piecemeal fashion – now considering the Hwy 101 to bay reach project in parallel with Palo Alto golf course modification project, and later future upstream enhancements, and possible agreements with

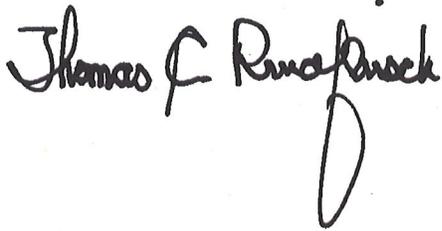
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Stanford about sediment management and upstream detention. The fact of the matter is that separating these components makes logical sense because of the diverse (but cooperating) agencies and parties involved, the very different time frames for decision-making, and the practical exigencies of obtaining and taking opportunistic advantage of local and state funding sources, given that overarching federal funding does not appear to be in the cards.

I am a member of the Stanford Advisory Group on the future of Searsville dam and know firsthand that the considerations of alternatives, and the development and implementation of a specific plan that might be factored into lower creek flood control will take years. I should mention that if or when Searsville is modified in a way that impacts the creek downstream, that future project will have to mitigate its own impacts and we should not expect the SFCJPA project to prospectively mitigate such currently unknown factors that would not be a result of the project under consideration.

In summary, I believe that we are at a point where a favorable decision on the part of the RWQCB to support the SFCJPA project is justified and urgent. Leaving the matter pending while we persevere longer will continue to put East Palo Alto residents' lives and properties at risk as well as raise the prospect of sending polluted water into the bay and into the Faber Tract marsh. Please act now and approve the updated SFCJPA Water Quality Certification application.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this commentary to you on this important topic.



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