



NEWS RELEASE

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Tucson Water managing flow of Santa Cruz River Heritage Project during Pima County Flood Control sediment removal project

Agencies, University of Arizona collaborate to protect wildlife and habitat while reducing flood risk

On April 23, Tucson Water will temporarily reduce the flow of the Santa Cruz River Heritage Project so that the Pima County Regional Flood Control District can remove sediment from the river channel that has accumulated over the last 30 years. Beginning the week of April 27, the District will remove approximately 85,000 cubic yards of sediment from the river between Silverlake Road and Cushing Street to reduce flood risk in the area. The sediment removal project could take up to three months.

The goal of the Flood Control District's project is to increase the capacity of this stretch of the Santa Cruz River to carry runoff during powerful storms. The accumulated sediment has significantly reduced the carrying capacity of the river, with over 10 feet of sediment buildup in some places. This sediment increases flood risk to hundreds of adjacent residences and businesses. Removing this sediment will reduce flood risk in neighborhoods including Barrio Santa Cruz, Barrio Kroeger Lane, and Menlo Park, and will protect bridges downstream. Sediment from the project will be moved to the long-closed "A" Mountain landfill nearby. After completing this project, the District plans to perform minor maintenance approximately every five years, depending on flood activity.

Tucson Water and the Flood Control District are working closely together and with the University of Arizona's School of Natural Resources and the Environment (SNRE) to minimize the impact to wildlife and protect as much of the riparian vegetation as possible that has grown since the Heritage Project launched in June of last year. SNRE professor Michael Bogan said, "We've found over 40 species of dragonflies and damselflies and numerous native toads and birds since flow began. Although dredging will reduce their populations, our research shows that they will bounce back quickly. This part of the Santa Cruz will always be a managed ecosystem—but we're all working together to maximize biodiversity."

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The agencies are taking several steps to mitigate the environmental impact of the project. The District is preserving areas in the riverbed with dense vegetation and known bird-nesting activity. It is also preserving the area closest to the water outfall of Tucson Water's Heritage Project, where the densest growth of riparian and aquatic plants has occurred. In all, about one third of the vegetation present along the riverbed will be preserved in place. Tucson Water will provide continued but reduced water flow to the outfall area to preserve vegetation and provide a water source for wildlife.

The District will have trained herpetologists finding and salvaging lizards, geckos, and snakes both where the excavation will occur and where the sediment will be deposited. The District will also modify existing grade control structures to create additional habitat for native toads.

Tucson Water is working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Arizona Game and Fish Department to evaluate the potential for native fish to be present in the area fed by the Heritage Project after sediment removal is completed.

Finally, District crews' work will include removing invasive plant species. After completion of the work and the return of water flow to the full reach, Tucson Water will spread native plant seeds to encourage growth of a healthy plant community.

“Since we turned the water on ten months ago, we have been amazed by the response—both in terms of the community's excitement and support, and in the explosion of plant growth and the wildlife that has been drawn in,” said Tucson Water director Tim Thomure. “Everyone involved has brought their care for the river and a collaborative mindset to this important flood control project. We're learning together how to manage a newly-reborn river through the heart of our city.”

For more information:

Pima County Regional Flood Control District – 520-724-4600

https://webcms.pima.gov/government/flood_control

Tucson Water – 520-791-4331

<https://www.tucsonaz.gov/water>

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