



Hemet-San Jacinto

Lawmakers rally behind regional projects



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The Press-Enterprise

SAN JACINTO - Elected state, county and city officials converged Friday on San Jacinto to jointly flex their muscles on behalf of two projects they contend are critical to the region's health and safety and economic future.

Regional lawmakers gathered at Hofmann Park shortly before noon to sign two resolutions that will be carried by Assemblyman Paul Cook, R-Yucca Valley, to Sacramento.

One urges the state to stick to the timetable for realigning Highway 79, the main north-south route between Beaumont and Temecula that cuts through the San Jacinto Valley.

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San Jacinto Mayor Jim Ayres, left, organized a ceremony at which state, county and city officials signed two resolutions Friday.

The other seeks \$5 million in state Prop. 1E levee and flood-control bonds to help pay for a 3½-mile stretch of levee along the south bank of the San Jacinto River.

"With Highway 79, the only thing we've asked for is for the state to keep it on the timeline the Riverside County Transportation Commission has scheduled it to -- the year 2011," San Jacinto Mayor Jim Ayres told the crowd. "It's not that far off, and there's a lot of work that needs to be done."

Ayres, who organized the joint signing ceremony, said the two resolutions were a way of stimulating bipartisan support in Sacramento to meet local needs.

On hand besides Cook were Riverside County 3rd District Supervisor Jeff Stone and mayors, vice mayors and city council members from Banning, Beaumont, Canyon Lake, Hemet, San Jacinto, Lake Elsinore, Murrieta and Perris, as well as representatives from the Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians Tribal Council and the San Jacinto Unified School District school board.

Temecula officials, who were previously committed to a charity golf tournament, did not attend.

When the San Jacinto River last breached in 1980, it flooded more than 11 square miles of the northern area of the city and closed major streets such as Ramona Expressway, State Street, Sanderson Avenue and Highway 79.

San Jacinto has been working with the Riverside County Flood Control District for several years on proposed levee improvements.

The district has allocated \$7 million toward design and construction, but the latest cost estimates for right-of-way acquisition and construction put the project at \$25 million.

Ayres, Stone and Cook said the region has a better chance of getting state money by presenting a united front.

In addition to enhancing public safety, the levee project would also free up almost 2,000 acres of land for future development, while increasing the amount of wildlife habitat, Ayres said.

Last September, San Jacinto City Council members took a major step toward turning 1,900 acres of flood plain south of the river into prime real estate.

The council introduced an ordinance that would require developers to participate in a special-tax district to finance construction of the levee system along the San Jacinto River initiated decades ago by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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