



# COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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## NEWS RELEASE



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### NACo ADOPTS COUNTY FLOOD PROTECTION PROPOSAL

The National Association of Counties (NACo) on Friday voted unanimously to include equitable flood protection for disadvantaged communities in its national advocacy efforts, integrating a policy first proposed by Santa Cruz County.

Proposed by Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors Chair Zach Friend, the resolution passed Friday calls on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to implement changes to its cost-benefit analysis for proposed flood control projects that have traditionally disadvantaged communities like Watsonville. The County was the first to receive unanimous approval for this resolution four years ago and has successfully kept it in NACo's advocacy platform since then.

"For decades, Santa Cruz County led the fight for improved flood protection along the Pajaro River but were challenged by federal funding formulas that favor wealthier communities," Friend said. "Now that we are on the verge of finally moving into the design and construction phase, we do not want to see other communities subject to high flood risk left behind."

Through the Zone 7 flood control district, the County has invested millions in flood prevention projects to preserve channel capacity and prevent new breaches on the Santa Cruz County side of the Pajaro River levee, including multiple flood fight projects during the height of winter storms in 2017 and 2023.

Completed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1949, the Pajaro River levee first failed in 1955 and was deemed inadequate in the 1960s. Through intensive advocacy, Santa Cruz County led efforts to successfully convince the federal government to approve a redesigned levee that will significantly enhance flood protection for communities along the Pajaro River and its tributaries.

The Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project is expected to complete design work in Spring 2024.