Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project

About the Project
The Pajaro River Flood Risk Management Project will provide 100-year flood protection to the City of Watsonville, the Town of Pajaro, and surrounding agricultural areas by constructing levees and improvements along the lower Pajaro River and its tributaries. The $400 million project will be managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers in partnership with the Pajaro Regional Flood Management Agency (PRFMA) and the CA Department of Water Resources. Federal and state agencies are expected to cover 100 percent of project costs. PRFMA is responsible for operating and maintaining the flood system on behalf of its member agencies.

Project Need
The City of Watsonville, the town of Pajaro and surrounding agricultural areas face an unacceptably high probability and risk of flooding from the lower Pajaro River and its tributaries.

- The existing levees that protect these communities were built in 1949 and have not since been significantly improved.
- Today, these levees provide only an eight-year level of flood protection, among the lowest of any federal flood control system in California.
- The City of Watsonville and the Town of Pajaro – the areas with the highest flood risk – are economically disadvantaged. Per capita income in these communities is less than half the state and national averages.

Project Objectives
- Reduce flood risk to human life, safety, homes, local economy and critical infrastructure in the City of Watsonville, Town of Pajaro and surrounding unincorporated lands
- Provide 100-year level of flood protection to the City of Watsonville and the Town of Pajaro
- Reduce local cost burden by maximizing cost-sharing from State, Federal and Non-governmental agencies
- Protect agricultural lands from flood damage
- Provide a vegetated corridor and low flow design to enhance habitat adjacent to the levee and fish passage
- Develop maintenance programs that best ensure the project provides high levels of protection against flooding
Project Status

- A Project Design Agreement was executed in May 2021, and project pre-construction, engineering and design phase (PED) is underway. Construction is expected to begin in 2025.

- PED was fully funded by the federal government with $3.6M in Work Plan appropriations. An additional $149M in federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding has been awarded for project planning and construction.

- The CA Department of Water Resources is funding 100 percent of the non-federal cost share and will provide advanced funding to local agencies to expedite project planning and construction.

Fast Facts

EXISTING LEVEL OF PROTECTION
Approximately 8-year

PLANNED LEVEL OF PROTECTION
Up to 100-year

ESTIMATED PROJECT COST
$400 million
Federal Cost Share: 65 percent
State Cost Share: 35 percent
No local cost share is required, but costs for levee operations and maintenance is a local responsibility.