

CHORRO FLATS: Floodplain Sedimentation Processes Restored to Save Morro Bay

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

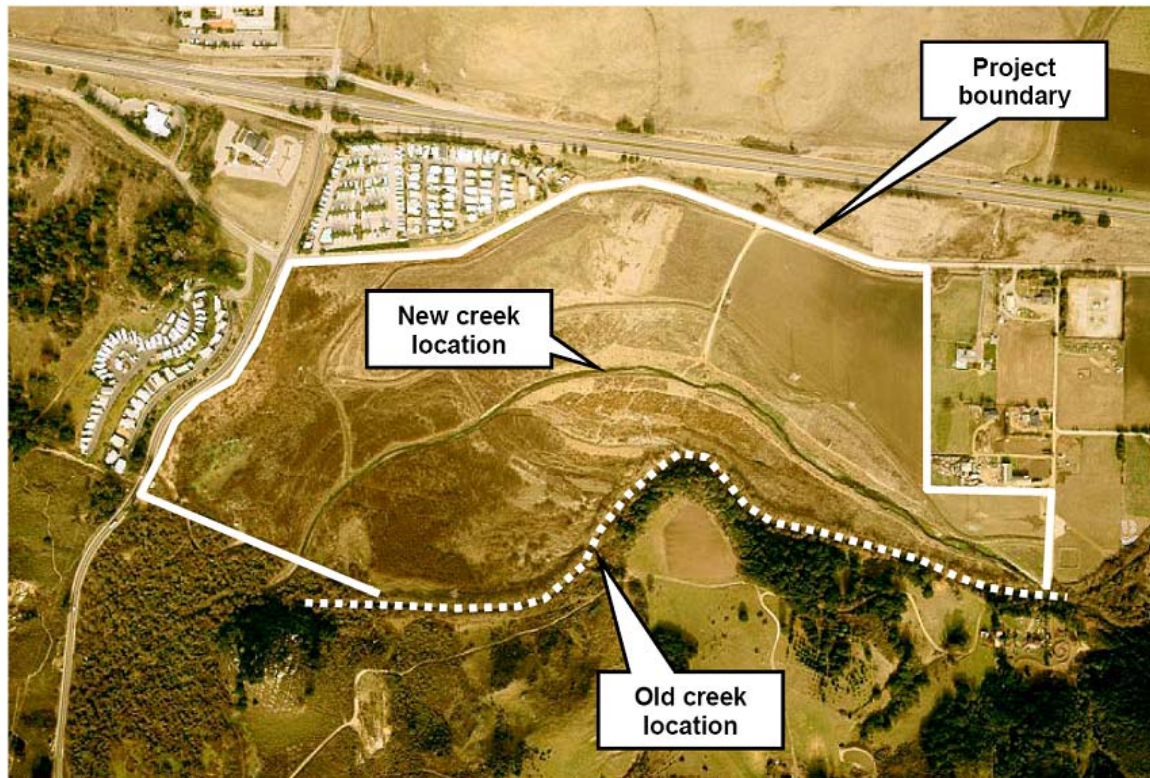


Figure source: Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District (2002)

What was done and why?

The Chorro Flats restoration project was a floodplain reconnection project that eliminated flood control levees in order to allow sediment deposition within the Chorro Creek floodplain, upstream of Morro Bay. The long-term viability of Morro Bay has been threatened by human-accelerated erosion and sediment delivery to the bay, notably from Chorro Creek. In addition to erosion-control efforts in the upper watershed, sediment delivery to the Bay could be reduced by restoring natural processes of overbank flooding and fine sediment deposition on the floodplain. At Chorro Flats, the landowners had moved Chorro Creek to a straightened artificial channel at the southern edge of the floodplain, flanked by a levee that prevented flows from overflowing onto the floodplain. The Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District purchased Chorro Flats and made a pilot breach in the levee in fall 1994. High flows in 1995 resulted in sediment deposition on the floodplain. Encouraged by this initial success, the District constructed a pilot channel across the floodplain, thereby reconnecting the channel and floodplain and including substantial overbank sediment deposition.

Who was involved?

This project was initiated by the Coastal San Luis Resource Conservation District. Design of the restoration was completed by Philip Williams & Associates, Crawford Multari & Starr, Jones & Stokes Associates, Habitat Restoration Group, and John Parker and Associates. Support was also provided to the project from the California Coastal Conservancy, the California Water Resources Control Board, and the California Department of Transportation.

Where can I see the restoration project?

The Chorro Flats restoration project is located in San Luis Obispo County on Chorro Creek, approximately 2.5 km (1.6 mi) upstream from Morro Bay. The site is located east of South Bay Boulevard and South of Highway 1 (35.35936N; 120.8234W). Collected documents, as well as general project characteristics, may be viewed at the NRRSS Chorro Flats website: http://landscape.ced.berkeley.edu/~kondolf/NRRSS/Chorro_Flats/

Why is this a model project?

The Chorro Flats project is a model project because it used the concept of floodplain reconnection and floodplain sedimentation processes to reduce sediment delivery to Morro Bay, helping to sustain the Bay's ecosystem, and significantly increased the ecological complexity within the restored reach of stream, yielding improved habitat.

For more information on these projects, please contact:

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