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FEATURED

SSCAFCA nears end of flood control project along Unser

Michaela Helean Observer staff writer
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The Riparia Ponds Project sits adjacent to Unser Boulevard, Westside Boulevard and 19th Avenue.

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RIO RANCHO — Construction has taken over the Unser Boulevard corridor and it might be difficult for residents to know which construction is which with big talk around the soon-to-open Market Street, The Village project it is part of, AND more resources for families with patients at Presbyterian Rust Medical Center. There is, however, a plot under construction that has nothing to do — but also everything to do — with development in that area.

There is a simple answer to what is going on at the northwest corner of Westside and Unser boulevards. Southern Sandoval County Arroyo Flood Control Authority is working on the Riparia Ponds project to protect the area from potential flooding. Executive Engineer Dave Gatterman, PE; and NV5 environmental project manager and senior engineer Sheila Johnson, PE, CFM, explained the ins and outs of why the project is so important during a site tour March 25.

"The entire intent of it is to go ahead and eliminate the possibility of that infrastructure being damaged during a flood event," Gatterman said.

Some members of the community have asked if the project is potentially to develop more businesses in the area, but Gatterman says its nothing of the kind.

"We are not doing a development project. We're not building houses. We're not building a mall. We're not building a new supermarket or anything like that. What we're constructing here, we're doing a couple of things. We are constructing three ponds that are up and adjacent to Unser Boulevard, and what they will do is they're going to handle runoff that's coming down the Unser Channel, which is that concrete channel you see running next to Unser," he said.

He said they are also realigning the Black Arroyo around those ponds to provide reinforcement to make sure the ponds aren't damaged during a storm event, which could potentially be catastrophic to businesses and residents in the area.

"If we didn't do anything, there's a possibility of overtopping Unser, that water getting down into the villages of Cabazon, the new development down there and beyond," he said. "With this new project, we are reducing the risk of that occurring."

This project has been in the works for a little more than two decades, according to Gatterman, and Cabezon's development was the catalyst for it.

"There's been land accumulation going on since the 2000s. As things have been developing in the area, we have been kind of looking at this. It's gone into our watershed management plans as a potential project to help attenuate potential flooding downstream and then ultimately the capital Villages at Cabezon development," he said.

Johnson's involvement has been helping the project move forward with minimal destruction to the natural aspects of the area like plants and animals that reside there. She said it can be a challenge to keep them in mind.

"Some of the engineering aspects that we looked at was we were trying to, for one, preserve the the swallow habitat," she explained. "The terraining was kind of challenging, too, in that it goes uphill. You look at it, and it seems kind of flat, but when we started trying to put those palms in there, the terrain was a bit challenging."

Grants and bonds helped pay for the project, including a FEMA grant for design, private funding, money from the New Mexico Legislature and SSSCAFCA bonds. The project costs \$3,438,217.

The Riparia Ponds Project is expected to be complete April 25, marking the end of a five-month process.



Unser Gateway development is booming



Rio Rancho Market Street the first of its kind in NM

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