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Trail detour reopens after emergency repairs

Water district's restoration of collapsed Steven Creek trail segment will start next year

by Kevin Forestieri

Hundreds of bicyclists and pedestrians can get off the streets and back onto Mountain View's creekside detour after emergency repairs to the crumbling bank along Stevens Creek Trail north of El Camino Real were completed earlier this week.

The Santa Clara Valley Water District announced that the fix, aimed at preventing further soil erosion in the area where a huge portion of the bank has slid into the creek, finished up a week ahead of schedule, according to water district board member Gary Kremen. The city's trail detour, through an adjacent hotel property between El Camino and Yuba Drive, reopened Monday afternoon, city staff confirmed Tuesday.

The segment of the popular Stevens Creek Trail has been closed since January after a heavy storm system and "controlled releases" from the Stevens Creek reservoir weakened the soil along a steep embankment, causing a landslide and creating a nearly vertical 25-foot drop just inches from the edge of the trail. Soil erosion unexpectedly worsened during the spring and summer months, eventually causing a 60-foot portion of the trail itself to collapse into the creek bed.

In August, water district CEO Norma Camacho declared the bank erosion an emergency after a memo revealed that, barring immediate repair work, soil loss had the potential to cause further damage to the creek bank, and threatened to erode the city's trail detour and undermine several nearby redwood trees.

The district hired Blue Iron Foundations and Shoring to create a "soldier pile wall system" to preserve what remained of the bank along the problematic portion of Stevens Creek. The strategy is a short-term fix to stop further erosion and is separate from the major repair work needed to restore the paved creek trail itself, which is not expected to begin until next year.

Kremen said the emergency work was originally estimated to cost \$494,700, and that the actual price tag will be available sometime in the next few weeks as the contractor submits invoices. Costs are expected to increase because of inclement weather, which resulted in extra work on the trail.

The Mountain View City Council agreed in April to set aside \$175,000 for an asphalt trail detour through the Extended Stay Hotel property, which opened to the public as an alternative to the closed-off trail segment in June. But because of the extensive erosion damage and the repair work, the detour was also closed, starting in late September, forcing people to take a roundabout route along El Camino Real and Yuba Drive to get back onto the trail.

During the emergency declaration in August, Mountain View residents, city officials and business leaders sent comments to the water district urging the agency to save the bank and the creek trail, calling it a vital commute path and recreational resource that thousands of people enjoy every day. John Igoe, Google's real estate director, wrote in a letter that Stevens Creek Trail is an important

commute alternative to local streets and Highway 85, and that it would be a "tremendous loss" if immediate action wasn't taken.

For now, residents will have to settle for the detour. The water district typically does creek repair work during the dry spring and summer months, not during wet season period which extends from Oct. 15 through June.

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Halluk Ozdemir looks at the new repairs to an area of Stevens Creek trail that collapsed earlier in the year. The repairs allowed a trail detour to reopen, but a permanent fix for the damaged section of trail will have to wait until next year.

Photo by Michelle Le

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The Santa Clara Valley Water District completed repairs to prevent erosion on the Stevens Creek Trail. Photo by Michelle Le

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