Internal
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River project ready to flow

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A 2011 flood resulted in Sevier County being declared a disaster area, but with that declaration came an opportunity.

The disaster declaration qualified the county for some $3.5 million of Natural Resources Conservation Service funding, which allowed for a project that stretches along the Sevier River's banks from Joseph to Redmond.

"We identified the critical areas," said Tooter Ogden, Sevier County commissioner. "You only get to do this kind of project once or twice in a lifetime."

Rocks mined out of a quarry located east of Annabella were used to armor the banks of the river. In all, 88,933 tons of rock were used in the project. Some areas of the banks were built up, while other areas in the river were dredged — all with the goal of helping the water move downstream.

"We couldn't change the course of the channel," Ogden said.

One area of emphasis is the removal of hundreds of Russian olive trees that have contributed to clogging of the river during flood seasons. Dozens of piles of debris removed from the river, including the olive trees, are piled up in various locations.

"We're going to let them dry out for a year, and then we'll have the state fire marshal help us burn them," Ogden said. He said the county's weed department is prepared to help spray for new growth of Russian olives along the banks of the river in an effort to keep the waterway clear.

Ogden said while the project may not be able to solve all problems with flooding, it's designed to mitigate as much damage as possible to roads and private property.

Secondary berms were placed in various locations to direct the flow of water during high water years. Several low water passing areas were installed in the dirt roads surrounding the river. In flood years, the gravel in a low water passing can be removed so that water can keep moving downstream without damaging the roads, Ogden said.

The county had to match the federal NRCS money with 25 percent of the total cost of the project. Ogden said this match was met with material and manpower, rather than cash.

Three general contractors have been working on the project, including Perco Rock, Panguitch, which

worked along the banks of the river from Joseph to State Route 119 near Glenwood. Feller Enterprises LLC, St. George, has been working on the portion of the project from SR 119 to Redmond.

A third firm, Progressive Contracting, St. George, handled the rock extraction from the county's quarry.

Most of the work on the project is now complete, and the rock quarry has been reclaimed, Ogden said.

"We should have it all wrapped up in a couple of weeks," Ogden said. "I don't think it will solve all the problems, but it should help."

Completion of the project hinged on working on 217 different parcels of land, and with 131 private property owners.

"Most people are very eager to cooperate and get it done," said Cynthia Nielsen, Sevier County's geographic information systems supervisor. She said conversations with property owners were productive, because they resulted in the uncovering of helpful data for the project's completion.

"Some asked some in-depth questions and were instrumental in giving us information," Nielsen said.

Nielsen said the project required constant communication between the county, design firm Jones & DeMille Engineering, the NRCS and even the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

While not a cure-all, Nielsen said the project will make a tangible difference the next time the Sevier River floods.

"During the floods of 2011, we saw the effects of the flood mitigation work we did in 2005," Nielsen said. "Every time we get funding, we reevaluate and look at what we can do."