

City of Merced Bear Creek Infrastructure and Flood Protection Initiative

Project Overview

The City of Merced is seeking continued federal support for the Bear Creek Infrastructure and Flood Protection Initiative, a project designed to strengthen flood protection infrastructure and restore riparian habitat along the Bear Creek corridor while preparing the corridor for future safety and connectivity improvements.

Bear Creek is the primary stormwater channel for the City of Merced and plays an important role in protecting nearby neighborhoods, public facilities, Downtown Merced businesses, and surrounding agricultural lands that support the regional economy. Over time, vegetation overgrowth, sediment accumulation, aging infrastructure, and more frequent severe storm events have reduced the creek's capacity to safely carry stormwater during major storms.

Two major storm events in 2023 caused significant flooding and exposed vulnerabilities along the Bear Creek corridor. These events demonstrated the need for permanent flood mitigation improvements to protect homes, businesses, and public infrastructure.

The City previously sought federal support for this project through the congressional earmark process. The effort builds upon \$6 million in state funding secured through the leadership of then Assemblymember Adam Gray, which supported early project phases including geotechnical investigations, environmental review, and preliminary engineering. Most recently, Representative Adam Gray secured \$3.15 million in FY2026 Congressionally Directed Spending funding to support continued progress on the Bear Creek Infrastructure and Flood Protection Initiative.

Building on this state and federal investment, the City is requesting additional federal support to complete final design and construction of critical flood protection improvements along the Bear Creek corridor. Completion of this infrastructure will provide the foundation for a future phase of improvements that will enhance safety and accessibility along the Bear Creek multiuse path.

Public Safety Need

The Bear Creek corridor plays a critical role in protecting public safety throughout the City of Merced. The flooding events of 2023 demonstrated the risks posed by limited stormwater capacity and aging infrastructure along the creek.

Without targeted improvements, future storm events could result in flooding that threatens homes, businesses, transportation infrastructure, and agricultural lands that support the regional economy. The proposed project will improve stormwater conveyance, stabilize creek embankments, and restore riparian habitat to strengthen the creek's ability to manage severe weather events.

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Completing this infrastructure phase will also allow the City to advance a future project focused on improving safety and accessibility along the Bear Creek multiuse path. In several areas along the corridor, pedestrians and bicyclists must currently cross busy roadways due to gaps in the existing trail network. These crossings create safety concerns for residents who use the path for recreation and transportation.

Future improvements will include solar powered lighting along the multiuse path, pedestrian undercrossings at key roadway intersections, and additional multiuse path connections that allow users to travel safely along the corridor without crossing high traffic streets. Completing the current flood protection infrastructure is a necessary step that will allow these safety and connectivity improvements to move forward.

Project Budget and Local Commitment

The total estimated cost of the Bear Creek Infrastructure and Flood Protection Initiative is \$13.8 million which includes environmental review, final design, construction, and project management.

Budget allocation includes construction costs of \$7.9 million contingencies of \$2.4 million engineering and environmental costs of \$1.6 million, and construction management and support costs of \$1.6 million

The project has already secured \$9.15 million in combined state and federal funding, including \$6 million in state funding secured through the leadership of then Assemblymember Adam Gray and \$3.15 million in FY2026 Congressionally Directed Spending secured by Representative Adam Gray. These funds have supported early project development including engineering analysis, environmental surveys, and preliminary design.

The City of Merced is requesting \$4 million in funding to complete final design, permitting, and construction of the flood protection infrastructure necessary to stabilize the Bear Creek corridor and prepare the area for future multiuse path safety improvements.

Fiscal Responsibility and Community Impact

The Bear Creek Infrastructure and Flood Protection Initiative represents a responsible investment in infrastructure that protects public safety and strengthens the regional economy.

Investing in proactive flood mitigation reduces the risk of future flood damage and helps prevent costly emergency response and disaster recovery efforts. Strengthening the Bear Creek corridor will protect homes, businesses, transportation corridors, and agricultural lands that are vital to the Merced region.

Completing the current infrastructure phase will also position the City to implement future improvements that enhance safety and accessibility along the Bear Creek multiuse path.

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Planned lighting, pedestrian undercrossings, and trail connectivity improvements will provide safer travel options for residents and create a more connected recreational corridor.

By leveraging existing state and federal investment, this project demonstrates strong fiscal responsibility and will deliver long term infrastructure improvements that benefit the Merced community and surrounding region.