

Flooding relief on the way

2 projects to begin

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Motorists on Route 17 and business owners in an industrial portion of Carlstadt should see some relief from flooding as two major projects get under way in the first half of 2010.

The removal of 20,000 cubic yards of soil and debris from two very long and very clogged drainage ditches in Rutherford and East Rutherford begins this month with the hope that floodwater will be carried away from Route 17.

A second project, whose funding was approved last month, will replace tide gates on Moonachie Creek to make sure water no longer inundates businesses along Washington Avenue in Carlstadt.

"It's still one of the biggest problems we deal with here," said Robert Ceberio, executive director of the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, which is overseeing the projects. "Every time we have a significant storm like a nor'easter, we



STAFF PHOTOS BY CARMINE GALASSO

Brian Thumpayil, storm-water engineer with the state Meadowlands Commission, surveying a clogged drainage ditch in Rutherford.

see a significant amount of flooding."

Flooding on Route 17 in Rutherford has already been curtailed with new tide gates installed in 2008. Those replaced broken tide gates that acted as dams, allowing water to collect in several key spots.

But while the tide is held

back, water from storms still collects on Route 17, which was closed an average of 12 times a year before the tide gates. The two drainage ditches are key to siphoning water away from the busy roadway to Berry's Creek.

The ditches measure a half-mile and three-quarters of a mile

in length, respectively, but are only 14 feet wide in the area near Route 17. Almost 2 feet of dirt and vegetation have built up in the 40 years since they were built.

"Ideally it will be done by spring," Wai Lee, chief of storm-water management for the Meadowlands Commission, said of the project.

In December, the commission approved a \$414,000 bid by Creamer-Sanzari to install tide gate systems at the Moonachie Creek and Bashes Creek under the western spur of the New Jersey Turnpike, to bring relief to the Carlstadt businesses. The commission also set aside \$150,000 in its 2010 budget to maintain the tide gates.

The problems in Carlstadt began in April 2007, when a levee on the Hackensack River collapsed during a nor'easter.

Parking lots and loading docks along the industrial stretch of Washington Avenue and Meadow Lane frequently flooded even after moderate rainstorms. Whenever the tide was high and the moon was new or full, the floodwaters reached

A tide of progress

Several anti-flooding initiatives in the Meadowlands were unveiled in 2009. Among them:

- Digital tide gate monitors were installed throughout the district, allowing the Meadowlands Commission to monitor whether the gates are working before a storm hits.

- New computer maps show which streets and properties in each of the 14 Meadowlands towns would flood during storm surges of 2 feet, 4 feet, 6 feet and exceeding 8 feet.

- Due to upgrades in the region's tide gates, more than 2,300 commercial, industrial and residential property owners in the Meadowlands are eligible for a 15 percent savings on flood insurance through the Federal Emergency Management Agency.



Debris in drainage ditches causes Route 17 floods.

a foot deep.

One business, Mijack/Jomike Properties, put a 3-foot berm around its property with pumps to discharge floodwater.

An agreement to conduct repairs was reached in May 2008, soon after several businesses threatened to sue the Meadowlands Commission and Williams Energy, on whose property the levee sat.

While it was waiting for state

and federal permits, the commission made temporary fixes, such as shoring up the levee breaches with sandbags and dirt.

"It solved the problem," said Chip Doviak of Alfa Ink, whose Washington Avenue parking lot had been constantly flooded. "When they say, 'temporary fix,' you raise your eyebrows, but they did the job right."

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