

San Rafael Inner Canal District

County: Marin

Risks: sea level rise, storm surge and tidal flooding

The San Rafael shoreline and levees are diverse—with expansive areas vulnerable to projected sea level rise. There are number of large geographic areas of San Rafael that are at risk for flooding during storms and will be dramatically impacted by sea level rise. These geographic areas include valley floors, properties with low-lying elevations (some at sea level), and areas that are now filled and were once marshland. The Inner Canal (areas bordering the San Rafael Creek) is especially flood-prone and includes areas such as the Central San Rafael Basin and the southern portions of Downtown San Rafael extending from the San Rafael Canal/Creek westward.

This site encompasses complex ecological conditions: fragile wetlands, wildlife corridors and migratory corridors. It also include parklands, trails, and developed infill. Diverse communities abutting the Bay in this part of San Rafael: immigrants from Mexico, and Central America living in dense communities in the Canals and other low lying flood zones. Middle class and upper class people living in wealthier enclaves ringing the shoreline. Downtown San Rafael and surrounding businesses catering to a diverse population of local residents from those communities are in threatened areas. Civic organizations and activists are poised to be further engaged in cohesive, innovative efforts to respond creatively to the threats of storm surge, sea level rise and other environmental consequences of climate change. Public agencies are currently conducting research, developing long-range strategies, and collaborating to mobilize the community.

There are numerous areas of San Rafael that are prone to flooding and are within the two FEMA flood zones. Areas within the flood zone are near or border waterways. They are typically former diked baylands and marshlands encompassing low-lying areas that were filled in the last century and border the Bay. Projected sea level rise maps show the entire flood zones being inundated.

The dense immigrant communities living in the Canals are the most vulnerable. Pickleweed Park, at the edge of the bay is one of the hubs of community life. The buildings, streets, schools and public spaces in the residential community in the Canals, and downtown/industrial areas will all be impacted by sea level rise and increased flooding from storm surges and storm events.