

Debris caused by Sandy removed from Saddle River

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PHOTO COURTESY OF THE PVSC

Superstorm Sandy debris has been removed from the Saddle River.

The Passaic Valley Sewage Commission (PVSC) announced on June 4 the completion of the year-long abatement and removal of Superstorm Sandy debris from the Saddle River in an effort to alleviate flooding.

The agency, along with the Mosquito Control, Division of Public Works of Bergen County (BCMCD), initiated the project last year following the completion of a comprehensive survey that identified "significant flooding risks" to communities along the Saddle River.

PVSC officials said at the time that the survey was taken in response to local flooding concerns and the impact that Sandy debris would have on the environment.

The survey initially identified 19 sites along the seven-mile stretch of waterway in Paramus, Rochelle Park, Saddle Brook, Lodi and Wallington that posed varying degrees of concern.

The project grew, however, to include more than 35 different areas that have now been de-snagged, PVSC officials said in a press release. The additional sites that needed de-snagging were discovered during work at the original locations, and were most likely caused by wind or rainfall.

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PVSC Executive Director Michael DeFrancisci said that they sought out areas containing fallen trees, boats, vegetation and other material that could exacerbate flooding of the Saddle River. Removing the debris increases the river's ability to convey water, and ultimately, mitigates the flooding that devastates surrounding municipalities.

The agencies itemized and documented all problem areas along the river using GPS and photography equipment. Problem areas that posed the greatest flooding risks were prioritized and cleaned first.

In a press release, PVSC and BCMCD officials said that the maintenance of the river "is a laborious project that requires constant attention." Crews may have to return to the area in the future to monitor the condition of the river.

Saddle Brook Mayor Karen Chamberlain said that she's noticed a small difference since the cleanup was completed.

"We've been fortunate, getting these quick downpours," she said.

Approximately 17 percent of Saddle Brook is in a flood zone. There are 47 repetitive loss properties in Saddle Brook that have been flooded out in recent years, and 180 homeowners have flood insurance policies. During the spring and summer downpours, residents in the flood zones often get far more than just an inch or two of water in their basements.

"Maybe it has done some good. I believe it has. Not as much as I'd like to see," said Chamberlain of the work.

She has emphatically stated that dredging the Saddle River would be the best way to alleviate flooding. Despite a study commissioned last July by the Army Corps of Engineers and ongoing meetings with other local mayors, county and state representatives, she said she doubts that dredging will happen in the near future.

Dredging is out of the PVSC's jurisdiction, according to PVSC spokeswoman Hollie Gilroy.

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