

□ Preserving Tijuana's Alamar □ Creek

ment with federal government comes after four-year campaign

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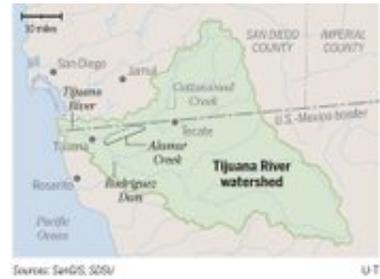
A scene last week at Tijuana's Alamar Creek, a riparian corridor in the midst of urban development that has been the target of preservation efforts. — *Alejandro Tamayo*

TIJUANA — Surrounded by houses, roads and factories, Alamar Creek offers a rare respite from the gritty urban landscape of Tijuana's eastern side. But under a federal flood control project launched in 2011, the entire creek was to be turned into a concrete channel.

Now, after a four-year campaign to preserve this small riparian corridor, local residents and environmental activists are celebrating partial success. Mexico's National Water Commission, or Conagua, has agreed to work with them on an alternative channeling plan for a two-mile stretch of the creek.

Romo, who represents the commission in Baja California, said Thursday as he prepared to sign an agreement with the coalition of groups opposing the lining. “The project will change completely.”

Running more than six miles through the city, Alamar Creek is part of a system of creeks and streams within the 1,750-square-mile Tijuana River watershed. The river starts in the United States, runs through Mexico then crosses back into the United States before emptying into the Pacific Ocean.



When Conagua launched its channeling project in May 2011, officials said it would open new areas of the city for development and prevent squatters from settling in flood-prone areas. To date, three-fourths of the stream has been lined with concrete.

Just south of the U.S. border, the area around Alamar Creek for decades was rural and agricultural. Change came in the 1980s with the development of Mesa de Otay as an industrial center just uphill.

Today, the area is hemmed in by development with Alamar Creek a burst of green in its midst. On Friday, birds chirped and the wind blew through stands of willow, cottonwood and an occasional pine. But discarded tires and occasional piles of trash washed downstream during a recent rain marred the bucolic natural scenery.

“This is not a park; nobody planted these trees,” said Anibal Méndez, a community organizer with the Chilpancingo Collective for Environmental Justice, stepping across a small stream with yellow flowers, yards away from a tightly packed housing development. “This exists in spite of us.”

The Chilpancingo Collective, which is the Mexican affiliate of the San Diego-based Environmental Health Coalition, spearheaded efforts to preserve the Alamar. Méndez said the involvement of the local

communities has been key to the campaign's success, as many became effective advocates for preserving the area.

“For us this is so important,” said Jorge Calderón, a resident of nearby Granjas Familiares, and leader of a group called Citizens Network for the Improvement of Communities. “If we want to preserve the health of Tijuana residents, we need more green spaces.”



Community leader Jorge Calderon at Alamar Creek. —
Alejandro Tamayo

Activists said their pleas initially got little response from federal authorities, who have jurisdiction over riverbeds in Mexico. The project moved forward despite the protests, though by the end of 2012, officials with National Water Commission communicated to the Mexican environmental group, Pronatura, that the agency no longer intended to pour concrete over the final stretch.

In the meantime, members the Chilpancingo Collective and other groups maintained their pressure. A turning point came a year ago, as a coalition of 14 groups led a hike through the area, Méndez said.