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September 29 PCFYI: Decades later, Pima County looks back at lessons learned from '83 flood

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**40 years of innovation has kept Pima County
from seeing repeat of '83 flood damage**



Pima County was not ready for the flood of 1983. Forty years ago this week, rivers overran their banks, sewer lines were destroyed, most major bridges were closed and hundreds of people took to their rooftops to escape the rising waters. The flood resulted in nine fatalities, making it the deadliest flood event in the County's history. For the fledgling [Regional Flood Control District](#), the goal was to make sure such a catastrophic event never happened again. It hasn't. In little more than two decades, Pima County's innovative flood control measures had effectively ensured that a disaster on the level of 1983 would not be repeated.

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County workers look back on flood that changed everything

From watching homes fall into the Rillito River to preparing an appeal to the governor and Legislature requesting emergency aid, Pima County workers recall the hectic hours, days



and weeks that followed the historic 1983 flood. “We have come a long way in floodplain management and flood control,” said one of those workers. “But the work never ends.”

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Flood Control constantly working on waterway improvements

Since the creation of the Pima County Regional Flood Control District in 1978, more than 250 major jobs have been completed, including the Kino Environmental Restoration Project (pictured at right), the Big Wash restoration and the El Rio Preserve Bank Protection Project. As a regional authority, the district’s jurisdiction touches every municipality in Pima County and all unincorporated areas.



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County earns better flood rating, which may lower insurance costs



On April 1, 2024, Pima County will be upgraded to a Class 2 community in terms of flood risks by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. As a result, property owners in unincorporated Pima County will see up to a 40% discount on their flood insurance premiums. The upgraded classification is the result of continuous work by the Pima County

Regional Flood Control District in floodplain management and disaster resistance.

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At its core, The Loop is a flood-protection program

The origins of The Chuck Huckelberry Loop spring from Pima County's response to one of the most devastating disasters in the community's history — the 1983 flood. The deluge came just five years after the creation of the Regional Flood Control District, a time when many developers or homeowners took the term "riverfront property" literally and built right out to the bank. The County took a look at the flood's connection to The Loop in this [special supplement](#) published in the March 11, 2018, issue of the Arizona Daily Star.



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Protecting property, people is serious business



In 1973, after a decade of major hurricane and flood expenses, the Flood Disaster Protection Act was passed by Congress. That same year, the Arizona Legislature passed the Floodplain Management Act, which allowed for the creation of the Pima County Regional Flood Control District in 1978. In the 40-plus years since its creation, the district has overseen the protection of more than \$9

billion in property and more than 1 million people in Pima County.

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