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THURSDAY

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Virgin River flood plans considered

By Mary Manning
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Mesquite officials and federal agencies mapped an approach to protect the flood-damaged Virgin River Wednesday afternoon before the spring snowmelt begins within weeks.

The same representatives plus an environmental activist had toured the river Tuesday to look at the city's response to flooding on the Virgin River.

Mesquite sent bulldozers and used explosives to channel the river after flooding last month damaged or threatened homes, public roads and bridges. City officials claim that emergency conditions authorized their work, but environmentalists and federal officials have concerns.

Bryan Montgomery, Mesquite city manager, said the city is consulting with the Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and environmentalists to work on short- and long-term plans to manage the river. A written plan for immediate remedies is expected to be reviewed by federal officials within two weeks.

"This unwieldy river rips out not only homes, but habitat," Montgomery said.

Within four to six weeks more runoff is expected from snows melting in the West.

The federal agencies and the Center

for Biological Diversity will review the city's proposals before any new actions are taken in the river. The long-term plan, expected in six to nine months will protect wildlife habitat.

Mesquite officials are writing a memo today for review by federal officials and the Center for Biological Diversity, an environmental group that has sent a notice warning of a lawsuit if the flood response continues in a way that could harm wildlife habitat. Endemic species include both fish and birds.

A center representative did not attend Wednesday's meeting, but will be part of the review team for the city's proposal in the next two weeks, Montgomery said.

The short-term plan must ensure that any further work in the river does not cause further damage, Bureau of Land Management spokeswoman Kirsten Cannon said.

