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More funds sought for Bridgeport Covered Bridge restoration

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By Alan Riquelmy/ The Grass Valley Union

Representatives from Nevada County plan to appear Wednesday before an Assembly subcommittee, where they'll urge legislators to provide \$2.6 million in state funding to the Bridgeport Covered Bridge project.

Supervisor Hank Weston and Caleb Dardick, South Yuba River Citizens League executive director, are slated to speak to the subcommittee. The pair aren't on the agenda, though they plan to speak during the panel's public comment portion. Dardick said he'll ask the subcommittee to fully fund the bridge's rehabilitation. He'll also request \$450,000 in funding for a solar project at Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park.

"Walking through the bridge is something all of us growing up here experienced," Dardick said.

County officials already have secured \$1.3 million in funding for the bridge. However, the cost of the rehabilitation has risen to \$3.9 million, partially because it must be raised about a foot from its current position.

Weston and Dardick recently spoke with Capitol staff about getting the funding on the subcommittee's agenda, an initial step in the legislative process. Staff said the agenda is set for the next two meetings, and the Bridgeport project didn't make the list. However, anyone can speak during public comment.

"The meeting was very positive," Weston said. "We believe we could be shovel-ready by September 2017."

Timing is key to Weston. He said the required environmental studies shouldn't take as long as expected. That's why he wants state funding earmarked now, in case the rehabilitation can start next year.

Securing the funding from the Assembly subcommittee is only one step. The request must move through committees in both the Assembly and state Senate before both chambers approve it, sending it to the governor's desk for his signature.

Weston already has a contingency plan if the funding isn't included in the fiscal year 2016/2017 budget. He'd start the next round of lobbying in August and ask for the funding in the 2017/2018 budget, which he said would still allow for the project to begin in September next year.

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