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Nevada County officials will continue lobbying efforts for Bridgeport Covered Bridge funding

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Submitted by Robert Lowe |

The Bridgeport Covered Bridge, has been closed since 2011.

Legislators allocated no money for the Bridgeport Covered Bridge in this fiscal year's budget, which will lead local officials to start lobbying for funds to rehabilitate the historic span in the next few weeks.

Nevada County Supervisor Hank Weston urged lawmakers to include \$2.6 million for the bridge in the fiscal year 2016-2017 budget, arguing its restoration would draw more people and revenue to Nevada County. The request didn't reach the governor's desk, and Weston now has a new plan to secure state funding.

Weston and others will begin speaking over the upcoming weeks with officials with State Parks, the state's finance department and the governor's office. His goal is to convince those state officials to include the funding when they

write the draft budget for fiscal year 2017-2018.

If successful, work could begin in September 2017.

The state has committed to rehabilitating the bridge, closed since 2011, though officials currently intend to begin work in September 2018. Weston said they can start earlier.

"It's not new ground. It's not a new project," Weston said, noting that necessary environmental work already has been completed on the bridge.

The lobbying would end if bridge supporters get their funding in this stage of the budget process.

Bridge supporters would have other options if the state agencies opted against including the funding. Weston and others would then proceed to the Legislature in the new year, discussing the issue with Capitol staff and hoping to get the money included through their budgetary process.

That latter method is how Nevada County got some \$700,000 in state funds for a solar project at Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park. Weston traveled to Sacramento to speak with budget committees, and Assemblyman Richard Gordon helped push the issue to the governor's desk.

The solar project will replace a diesel-run generator, making the project green, and was supported by both Republicans and Democrats, Weston said.

"It was like a perfect storm," he added. "Everything just fit into place."

Caleb Dardick, executive director of the South Yuba River Citizens League, noted that five years ago both the South Yuba River State Park and Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park were slated for closure.

Now both parks are off the closure list, Malakoff Diggins will receive solar and the Bridgeport Covered Bridge has the state's commitment.

"After five years of sustained advocacy of our state parks, both parks are off the closure lists," Dardick said.

"It's a grand slam," he added.

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