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## Malakoff Diggins solar electric project a go in governor's signed budget

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California State Assemblyman Brian Dahle, second from left, tours the Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park in this file photo, along with Caleb Dardick, executive director of SYRCL, Nevada County Supervisor Hank Weston and Matthew Green, Sierra District Superintendent.

Securing \$700,000 in state funds for a solar panel project at Malakoff Diggins State Historic Park is a coup for Nevada County.

The state Legislature had allocated nothing for the project when it began the budget process for fiscal year 2016-2017. Many meetings and pitfalls later, Gov. Jerry Brown approved the money when he signed the budget earlier this week.

"It went from being on nobody's radar to being signed in the budget," Nevada County Supervisor Hank Weston said.

State Parks officials have no definitive timeline for when construction would begin. State Parks must bid out the project.

The funds, available July 1, will enable the state park to eliminate its diesel generator, currently the only source of electricity for the facility. The solar project will provide an electrical source expected to allow more camping opportunities for visitors and security for some 100,000 artifacts at the site.

Locals had feared the state park was on the chopping block because of its low attendance and high operating costs. Replacing the diesel engine should reduce costs.

"It's a great victory for Nevada County and for the park," Weston said.

Weston, along with the South Yuba River Citizens League, helped move the funding request through the Legislature. Assemblyman Richard Gordon, who doesn't represent Nevada County but has a second home here, proved instrumental.

"It's a great credit to the stamina and determination of the county," said Caleb Dardick, executive director of SYRCL. "Too often, important projects never happen because people don't stick with it."

Dardick hopes more people will be drawn to the first state park powered completely by solar.

"This is a really important development for the Yuba River community," he added. "Now we have a sure way of keeping Malakoff Diggins open."

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