

Nevada County summer hotspot to be affected by bridge closure

While not drawing droves of visitors and residents looking to beat the heat by spending long summer days along the banks of the South Yuba River, Purdon Crossing is a popular point of access to the emerald waters that traverse through the Sierra Foothills.

Officials are warning the closure of the Purdon Crossing Bridge will have impacts on recreational opportunities by limiting parking and preventing people from easily crossing the river.

The bridge will be closed for much of the summer for repairs to some of the structural elements and a fresh paint job.

The parking lot immediately upriver of the bridge will remain open, but motorists who access the area from Lake Vera-Purdon Road will not be able to park across the bridge.

“The Nevada County Sheriff’s Office and California Highway Patrol are on high alert regarding illegal parking,” said Department of Public Works Director Steve Castleberry.

In previous years, there have been several instances of motorists blocking the roadway by parking illegally, Castleberry said. Last year, there was at least one instance where emergency personnel had difficulty reaching an injured hiker due to parking congestion in the Bureau of Land Management parking lot.

“Emergency vehicles trying to access injured people need to be able to get as close to the river as they can,” Castleberry said.

A representative from the Sheriff’s Office said a BLM officer will be monitoring the parking lot throughout the summer.

Purdon Crossing is one of four crossings over the South Yuba River in Nevada County, with the other three — Highway 49 Crossing, Edwards Crossing and Bridgeport Crossing — also managed by California State Parks as part of the South Yuba River State Park system.

The parks department instituted paid parking last year in an effort to enhance revenues and keep the park from being closed.

Paid parking has put added pressure on other access points in terms of parking, visitation and garbage cleanup.

Caleb Dardick, executive director of the South Yuba River Citizens League, said there are concerns that Purdon’s closure will add even more pressure to the Edwards and Highway 49 crossings.

Last year, SYRCL initiated a River Ambassador Program, which focused on outreach coordination, attempting to educate some of the estimated 450,000 visitors to the park annually.

SYRCL used 15 volunteers, who talked to about 3,000 visitors and collected 1,800 pounds of garbage and dog waste.

“The most important part is to reach out to visitors,” Dardick said in April. “If they pack it in, they have to pack it out.”

Purdon Crossing Bridge is a rare surviving example of a pin-connected Pratt half-through truss. The bridge, which was built in 1889, has a number of functional and aesthetic problems, according to the latest bridge inspection performed by the California Department of Transportation in 2011.

The timber railing and rail posts are loose with sagging connecting points while the entire apparatus exhibits heavy distress, the inspection stated. Many important bolstering elements of the truss are bent, loose or warped.

In April, Nevada County contracted with Farr Construction, a Gridley, Calif.-based construction company, for about \$620,000, which includes a 10 percent contingency fund.

The expense relates to operational difficulties, the foremost of which is the necessary sandblasting that must occur.

Because certain parts of the bridge were covered in lead paint, the project manager must encase the entire bridge in plastic, thereby preventing any flakes from falling into the river, Castleberry said.

“It will basically look like a large plastic sandwich,” Castleberry said in March. “That’s what’s driving the cost.”

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