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## Saving the Bridgeport covered bridge, one letter at a time



The Union file photo/John Hart A grass roots campaign committee known as, “Save Our Bridge” is urging the community to contact State Legislators on the Budget Committees to let them know why it is important to save the bridge before Budget Committee Hearings take place on March 30 and April 23.



Submitted photo/South Yuba River Park Association A woman stands by the north side of the Bridgeport covered bridge in this photograph from the 1930s.

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For more information, see the “Save Our Bridge” page at: [www.southyubariverstatepark.org](http://www.southyubariverstatepark.org).

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When Nevada County’s historical Bridgeport covered bridge was closed off to pedestrians in 2011 due to structural deficiencies, community groups banded together to raise money to restore the bridge under the grassroots flagship, “Save Our Bridge” committee.

But in January, when California Gov. Jerry Brown allocated \$1.2 million in his budget proposal for comprehensive and necessary repairs to the bridge, the 16-group committee quickly shifted gears, finding more power in the pen than the dollar.

“Instead of raising money, we decided to focus on protecting that budget line by getting people to write letters and make phone calls to state legislators and budget committees,” said Dave Anderson, South Yuba River Parks Association president. “We’re trying to get these legislators aware that the bridge is important to the people, and that the line item that sets aside funds for the bridge has got to be defended.”

Anderson, a founding member of the “Save Our Bridge” committee, added, “If that line item passes, we no longer have to go around begging for money.”

The “Save Our Bridge” letter writing campaign, organized by committee groups such as the Bear Yuba Land Trust, the South Yuba River Citizens League, and SYRPA, began this week and has two specific goals. To save the bridge, and to save it sooner rather than later.

“I think all of us, who especially as children, have walked across that bridge, and looked out of those windows and sort of imagined ourselves as our ancestors who first came to California. It feels like it’s a window into the past, and it’s an opportunity to walk through history.”

SYRCL Executive Director Caleb Dardick

“The governor has proposed \$318,000 in the 2014-2015 budget for the bridge, and \$943,000 in the 2016-2017 budget year,” Anderson said.

“We want these funds to stay where they are, but we want the money budgeted for 2016-2017 to be moved to the 2015-2016 budget, which currently has zero dollars for the bridge that year.”

Anderson said the grassroots campaign is also identifying local county officials to influence legislators in protecting the budget proposal through senate and assembly budget committee meetings on March 30 and April 23, as well as through state legislature approval in June.

“That’s what we’re really after, to raise community awareness and again notify our legislators, that there’s a strong interest here, and this bridge provides an economic impact to the community,” said Anderson.

According to a CSU Sacramento study, California State Park visitors spend an average of \$4.32 billion per year in park-related expenses, with an average park visit generating \$57.63. The South Yuba River State Park attracts close to 900,000 visitors every year alone.

Many of those visitors come to see the 152-year-old Bridgeport covered bridge, said SYRCL Executive Director Caleb Dardick.

“Clearly this bridge is an iconic symbol and what makes the Yuba River such a wonderful place to visit,” Dardick said.

“But I think all of us, who especially as children, have walked across that bridge, and looked out of those windows and sort of imagined ourselves as our ancestors who first came to California. It feels like it’s a window into the past, and it’s an opportunity to walk through history.”

The historical impact of the bridge, Dardick said, is the reason why nearby cities like Truckee, Nevada City, and Grass Valley have all banded together with unanimous county resolutions supporting the budget proposal to renovate the bridge.

“We can’t risk allowing this bridge to collapse into the river because it is an irreplaceable local and state landmark,” Dardick said.

“That’s the special thing about this bridge. it brings everybody together, and that’s rare in these times.”

Built in 1862 by Virginia Turnpike company owner, David Wood, the more than 200-foot long bridge is referred to as the longest, single-span, wooden covered bridge in the world, and has survived the mid-19th century Gold Rush bringing about the vast migration of pioneers from the East to the American West.

The bridge was designated as a National Historic Site on July 14, 1971.

“It’s the history that makes it special,” Anderson said. “Whenever you talk to people who have been to Gettysburg for instance, the first thing they say is the feeling they had. It isn’t what they saw, it’s what they felt. You walk out into the middle of that bridge, and it’s the same thing. It’s not what you’re looking at, it’s what you feel.”

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