

Bridges

✓ Troubled bridge over the San Lorenzo River

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SANTA CRUZ — If there's one thing longtime contractor Howard Myers doesn't have to worry about these days, it's being out of work.

Myers, of Myers Construction Co. — a home-grown Santa Cruz operation — is the superintendent for the \$600,000 repair of the broken Soquel Avenue bridge.

The troubled bridge over San Lorenzo River waters has been fractured for a long time — three years and nine months — ever since a logjam popped two of its four lanes during flood storms of January, 1982.

It's been a crippled link between the city's east and west side longer than the City Council and Public Works Director Larry Erwin care to remember.

As for Myers, he isn't particularly thrilled about the job.

"Naw, I'm not glad I got the job," he said Thursday, adjusting his hard hat and watching the constant pumping of river water in what seems like a never-ending task to dry out the river bottom so work can progress.

At first, he had hoped to finish the job by Oct. 15, "which we won't make at all," said Myers.

Now, he's shooting for mid-December or early January — the city's deadline for job completion.

If Myers isn't out of the water by Oct. 15, he will have to get permission from the state Department of Fish and Game to continue work in the river. That is the date winter fish-protection regulations go into effect. The regulations aren't lifted until May.

Myers thinks he'll meet the Fish and Game deadline. He is acting as superintendent for the general contractor, Dan Caputo of San Jose.

This is just one of many jobs Myers is doing. He's got a contract for a bridge at Fall Creek in Felton, the Santa Cruz Water Department's rubber dam in Felton, the Ocean Street bridge and another one on the 10th fairway of the Pasatiempo golf course.

"We're just snowed under," he said.

Erwin said there was a meeting in mid-August, the gist of which was "to tell the contractor to get going" on the Soquel Avenue bridge project.

One problem has been the way the river has been damming at the mouth, causing water to back up to the bridge. "The river's been so high, it's hard to pump out," Myers said.

The work is concentrated around the base of two 375,000-pound concrete piers. New concrete footings will be placed under each of the heavy piers.

But, first the river water has to be removed from around the base of each pier. The water has to be lowered by at least another five feet, said Myers.

Six 40-foot-deep wells have been drilled. The water is pumped from the wells and spewed through pipes into a



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

An area resident

different part of the river.

Wood retaining walls have been built around each footing, pushing wet sand away from the work areas. As the water level is lowered, workers add another board to the bottom of the retaining wall.

A support trestle has been installed under the bridge.

Another headache was a gas leak that caused the generator to catch fire July 10, sending a huge fireball into the sky from the bridge. Columns of black smoke snaked up the river as firefighters put out the blaze.

"I was in Felton when that happened," Myers said.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Howard Myers, reluctant superintendent

There's a new generator now. It goes 24 hours a day and the neighborhood has pretty much grown accustomed to the machine's drone.

In some ways, the work has been an advantage to at least one resident, a man who sleeps under the bridge, according to the construction workers.

They have let him use some wood to make his camp a little more pleasant.

But he also has to wake up in the mornings to the sound of heavy construction as the crew continue their work to repair the bridge-sleeper's home.