

County OKs Covered Bridge Study

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The historic Felton Covered Bridge will be poked and prodded during the next several weeks to discover how much damage this winter's storms did to the 90-year-old structure.

County supervisors this morning unanimously agreed to pay the local firm of Jeff Oberdorfer & Associates up to \$20,000 to prepare plans for the restoration of the bridge.

The plan is to restore the bridge "as is" and to make no major alterations to the structure.

Oberdorfer & Associates also determine whether the bridge is safe for continued use by pedestrians and what it will take to repair structural members and connections.

This was one of three options proposed by the firm and the one recommended to the board by County Parks Director Larry Norris.

One of the other options was to prepare plans for the rebuilding of the bridge using existing structural members and steel connections. This option also involved studying the potential of raising the bridge above the 100-year flood inundation level.

In a letter to Norris, Oberdorfer noted that the option might not be popular with local residents who have a strong feeling for the historic aspects of the bridge.

The other option was to prepare a complete structural analysis of the existing bidge and then choose between raising the bridge and reinforcing it with steel or reconstructing the bridge "as is."

The money for the "as is" option chosen by the board will be taken from county contingency funds and will be replaced when the county receives \$20,000 in State Park Bond monies in July.

The county, Oberdorfer said, hopes to receive federal funds to finance the entire reconstruction project. The \$20,000 is for the plans, while actual reconstruction has been estimated by Norris to cost approximately \$80,000.

Oberdorfer told The Sentinel the bridge weathered this winter's torrential rainstorms and flooding quite well.

The only obvious storm-related occurred when a large redwood tree being carried down the San Lorenzo River smashed into the bridge, creat-

ing a 10-foot-wide hole in the floor, he said.

The bridge has been deteriorating over the years due to wind, erosion and the cracking of the concrete abutements, Oberdorfer said.

Winds over time have loosened the truss system on the roof, Oberdorfer noted. Although there is no danger of the roof collapsing, it should be stabilized, he said.

Cracks have appeared in the concrete abutements under the bridge and drainage from an adjacent site is causing erosion around the abutements, he added.

"It's hard to say what was damaged by the storm and what wasn't. Any bridge slowly becomes architecturally deficient over time. The winds and severity of the storms probably increased the damage, so we could say that all the damage is storm-related," Oberdorfer said.

The plans for the restoration of the bridge should be completed in about six weeks.

Once completed and approved by the board, the plans will be put out to construction companies to bid on the actual reconstruction project.