

Rain douses graffiti war

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CAPITOLA — The first four letters of "PROTEST" are bunched on one line. The ground below drops off, and the red and black "EST" dangles.

Motorists heading south on Highway 1 will continue to see this lopsided graffiti for weeks.

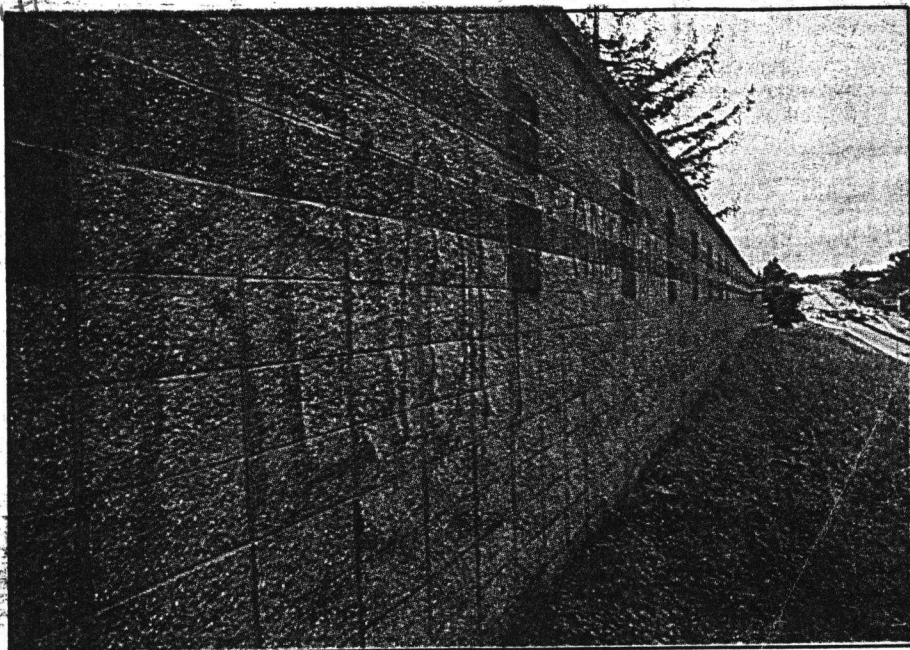
Busy fighting the recent rains, Caltrans has no plan to clean the sound wall near the construction at Bay Avenue and Highway 1 any time soon.

"It's been lower priority," said John Prokop, the Caltrans engineer in charge of the project. "We haven't gotten any calls on the graffiti, and we're concentrating on the larger issues."

He said the largest issue is finishing the project soon. "This rain has really just killed us," he said.

Caltrans expects the weather delays to stretch construction through mid-March, possibly longer.

The project began last spring. Given the rain delays, Caltrans will consider



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

The Highway 1 soundwall in Capitola will not be cleaned anytime soon, according to Caltrans.

a March finish to be on time. So far the project is under the original budget.

Last fall workers coated the gray and reddish sound walls with a clear

chemical layer to make graffiti removal easier. To wipe away the mess, workers will shoot a high-pressure wa-

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ter gun at the wall. The hot water spray should blast away both the graffiti and the protective layer.

But even though the walls have been treated, Prokop said bringing the water gun over the muddy ground should wait for a drier day.

Capitola Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Toni Castro finds the delay frustrating but inevitable. "We can't control the weather, unfortunately," she said.

The city of Capitola is working with Caltrans to find a new solution to the blight of graffiti, Castro said. "We're planning right now to put some kind of ivy, some kind of climbing plant along there to cover that wall," she said. Covering the wall with foliage will make the walls a less appealing canvas for graffiti.

And, depending on the plant chosen, it could discourage vandalism

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in other ways. "Poison oak has been mentioned," she said.

Though right now finishing the construction comes first, Prokop said Caltrans will do the best it can with the graffiti. "If there's concern, the next big break in the weather we get we'll get a contractor crew in there with the pressure sprayer to remove it."

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