

‘BRIDGE TO EVERYWHERE’ COULD BE HUB FOR HIKING NETWORK

By CHRIS COUNTS

AN OLD bridge that crosses Carmel River near the wastewater treatment plant could get a new life as a critical hub for a network of hiking trails if a plan by the Carmel Area Wastewater District gets enough support. Built in the 1930s, the bridge has a sewer pipe running across it, but the pipe is no longer in use.

“This is an idea that’s been kicked around for a long time,” sewer district general manager Barbara Buikema told The Pine Cone. “We have all these beautiful trails, and there’s no way to get from one to another.”

According to Buikema, the bridge needs to be refurbished or rebuilt. She estimated the project could cost about \$10 million. The sewer district would be the lead agency.

“We need to have a structural engineer take a look at it to see if the bones are still there,” Buikema said. “We’d also have to make it ADA compliant.”

CAWD officials are hoping the bridge’s historical integrity can be preserved.

“We think the aesthetics of the bridge are important,” the general manager said. “It has a nice vibe we’d like to keep.”

Mission to beach

The new or refurbished bridge — which Carmel Area Wastewater District officials are calling the “Bridge to Everywhere” — would be part of a trail network that incorporates an old road to the sewage treatment plant, providing walking access between Carmel Mission, Palo Corona Regional Park and Monastery Beach. Eventually, the

trail could be rerouted underneath Highway 1 as part of the Big Sur Land Trust’s ambitious Carmel River Free flood project.

Also, a small park would be established near the bridge. “Property downstream of the bridge is owned by CAWD and the City of Carmel-by-the-Sea, and could be con-



PHOTO/COURTESY CAWD

This image shows what can be done to turn an old bridge and its surrounding land into a park with trail access. The site is located along the Carmel River next to the CAWD sewage treatment plant.

verted into a park,” according to the sewer district website.

Before the bridge work moves forward, the sewer district needs to get a variety of agencies and groups to sign off on it, including the City of Carmel, the Diocese of Monterey, California State Parks, the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District and the Big Sur Land Trust. The wastewater district also met with the California Coastal Conservancy this week to discuss funding.

Buikema said the project has many supporters already, including former Congressman Sam Farr.

“The public is very much in favor of it,” she added. “It’s a really great project that’s going to benefit anybody who likes to hike.”