

Clearing Nelson Road rockslide will take months

Stephen Baxter, Bay Area News Group, 4-13-11

SCOTTS VALLEY -- Tons of rock that collapsed from a hillside onto Nelson Road are not expected to be moved for months because the slide is still wet and geologists need to study it, county officials said Tuesday.

Geologists plan to finish a report on the slide by early June, and then county Public Works officials said it would take more than 2,000 truckloads to haul debris from the road. It still has not been decided where to put the rocks, said John Presleigh, director of county Public Works.

"This is something different. We've never dealt with a rockslide like this before," Presleigh told a group of residents at a meeting Tuesday at Scotts Valley Fire Station No. 1. "This is a high priority project for us."

The March 21 rockslide blocked cars from 33 homes on Nelson Road, Sky Meadow Lane and Ruins Creek Road, but county officials built a gravel road around the slide that opened April 2.

About 30 residents attended Tuesday's meeting. Many thanked the county and other agencies for their work. Some were anxious for geological work to be done, but Public Works leaders said water in the slide is preventing some work.

"The bottom line is it's still so saturated and so wet, we can't touch it," said Steve Wiesner, assistant Public Works director.

Homes above and below the slide mean there is no quick fix -- unlike on recent slides near Big Sur where rocks essentially were dumped into the ocean, officials said.

"We're bound by this tight little valley there," Wiesner said.

Geologists have not yet found a slip line, and it is being tested to see if it is still moving.

Officials from the California Emergency Management Agency visited the Nelson Road slide last week, and FEMA leaders are expected to survey it Thursday, along with other areas in the county hit by the heavy storms of March 24 and 26.

The state and federal government have not yet decided if the damage from the storms warrants emergency relief money.

Presleigh said the storms caused more than \$8 million in damage across the county, with the price tag to clear Nelson Road yet unknown. The county will fund the geological assessment, but money from the CalEMA and FEMA would accelerate the cleanup phase, Presleigh said.

"I would get a hold of your state and federal legislators and get all the help you can get," Presleigh told residents at the meeting.

Neighbors talked about potential improvements to the gravel road, including more signs and possibly mirrors because cars have to back up to pass each other. Neighbors made an informal agreement on a Facebook page to limit trips on the gravel road to prevent wear.

Martha Kaufeldt, who lives on upper Nelson Road, said she was happy the temporary road was built quickly, but she and others asked when the real road would be restored.

Kaufeldt said she canceled an 80th birthday party for her mother that was planned for June at her home because she did not want her guests driving on the gravel road. She lives on 12 acres and said she used to have workshops and retreats there.

Kaufeldt acknowledged that her situation could be worse, but it was still an inconvenience.

"That's why we have our home there. It's a gathering place," she said.

Residents, county officials and Scotts Valley firefighters tentatively set their next meeting for 4 p.m., May 10 at the fire station at 7 Erba Lane in Scotts Valley.