

Landslide on private property endangers Dobbyn Creek bridge' county diverting water over bridge to protect structures

Donna Tam, Eureka Times-Standard, 4-6-11

Humboldt County Public Works on Tuesday continued to monitor a massive landslide in Southern Humboldt that caused a creek to flood, immediately threatening a home and a bridge.

The landslide -- located between Blocksburg and Alderpoint -- made its way into Dobbyn Creek, causing it to dam with logs Monday night and push water downstream to Little Dobbyn Creek Bridge.

Public works employees have placed dozens of sandbags in front of a home next to the bridge in hopes of keeping the water out of the structure and diverting it onto the bridge.

Public Works Director Tom Mattson said the water backed up behind the slide is estimated to be at a depth of 30 feet.

Local residents are concerned that the water will continue to rise.

"It's kind of like a hurry and wait thing," Blocksburg resident Patty Coleman said. "No official people are telling us what we can do, and local people are doing the best we can."

Coleman said the flooding washed out the home's septic on Monday.

Mattson said the sandbags are a temporary solution to protect the private property and the bridge. The water is diverted over the bridge and back into the creek. One lane is open for traffic.

"It puts it where we want it to be instead of where it wants to be," Mattson said.

The slide -- which started on March 31-- is one of many private property landslides being monitored. It is about the same size as the landslide that shut down U.S. Highway 101 last week, officials said.

The rising water at the bridge prompted the Southern Humboldt Unified School District to send the students from Casterlin Elementary home early in case the bridge became unusable. The school will be closed today.

Superintendent Michael McAllister said many of the school's students live on the south side of the bridge and the district didn't want to risk sending the school bus through unpaved backroads, or waiting to see if the water levels go down.

"It's just a matter of being safe rather than sorry," he said.

Mattson said the water levels should remain the same for now, but it is hard to predict what may happen next.

National Weather Service Senior meteorologist Carol Smith said some showers are forecast to come through the area this afternoon and into Thursday morning, with less than a half-inch of rainfall expected. Smith said it will dry out a bit until Sunday, when another weather front is forecast to drop an inch to an inch-and-a-half of rain in the area.

Mattson said public works is trying to remove the log jam, but it is unclear when they will be able to do more to stabilize the slide.

"It's moving all the time," he said. "You can't get to it; it's just really dangerous right now."