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Grant helps effort to save historic Route 66 bridge

By Mary Shapiro | Posted: Friday, July 22, 2011 3:00 pm

Efforts to save the Meramec River/Times Beach Bridge got a shot in the arm with a \$15,000 grant from the National Park Service Route 66 Corridor Preservation Program.

Great Rivers Greenway is matching the grant with \$15,000 and the engineering firm Great Rivers Associates in Springfield will make a \$15,000 in-kind match. That money will be added to a \$15,000 planning grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation to help fund efforts to save the bridge.

Constructed between 1931 and 1932, the 1,009-foot-long truss and girder bridge once carried traffic on Route 66 until it was bypassed by Interstate 44 in the 1960s.

Since 1999, the bridge has provided the most direct way to enter Route 66 State Park, which is situated on the 409-acre site of the once dioxin-contaminated community of Times Beach.

The Missouri Department of Transportation closed the bridge in 2009, forcing visitors to drive to the Route 109 exit and then double back to take the Williams Road exit to enter the park from Williams Road. The convoluted route into the park has caused a drop in park visitors, said John Regenbogen, executive director of Scenic Missouri.

Scenic Missouri has been leading a coalition of about 20 organizations trying to save the bridge from demolition.

The Missouri Department of Transportation has given the organizations until next year to devise a business plan and find a new owner. MoDOT had originally planned to take down the bridge this fall.

The latest grants will help fund a Historic Structures Report that is being done by Great River Associates. The evaluation will provide a range of alternatives for saving the historic bridge and provide an estimate of rehabilitation costs.

As part of that effort, Scenic Missouri nominated the bridge for Missouri Preservation's Most Endangered Historic Places List in 2010 and 2011. The bridge has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 2009.