

# Officials focus on flood-control sites

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Reno's most historic bridge and the former site of Northern Nevada's most infamous brothel were the focus of actions Friday by officials trying to cope with regular flooding of the Truckee River.

A coalition of local officials pushing for completion of the long-awaited Truckee River flood project took action on the future of both landmarks.

The Flood Project Coordinating Committee agreed to spend \$2 million for design and environmental permitting for the tear-down and replacement of the Virginia Street Bridge — a project ultimately expected to cost about \$20 million.

The committee, composed of officials from Reno, Sparks, Washoe County and the University of Ne-

vada, Reno, also approved a \$7.2 million river restoration project at the former site of the Mustang Ranch brothel east of Sparks.

Both projects have the potential to qualify for some funding from the federal economic stimulus package, officials said. They have been given status as accelerated efforts up front of the overall flood project, expected to cost between \$1.2 billion and \$1.6 billion.

The Virginia Street Bridge, built in 1905 and made famous as the location where divorcees tossed their wedding rings into the Truckee River, acts as a bottleneck during floods, causing floodwaters to spread through the downtown area.

Over the objection of historic preservationists, the flood committee and Reno City Council decided in 2007 that the bridge should be torn down and replaced as

a flood hazard rather than be restored.

How the new bridge will look and what level of flood protection it will provide will be discussed Feb. 25 by the Reno City Council. The council also will review a feasibility report on replacing the bridges that span the Truckee at Sierra, Lake and Center streets.

"It's going to be important for the city of Reno and this entire project," Reno Councilman Dan Gustin, a member of the flood committee, said of changes coming to the Virginia Street Bridge. It will be the first of the downtown bridges to be replaced.

At Mustang Ranch, a major river restoration project is planned. The area is the site of Nevada's first legalized brothel, founded by Joe Conforte in 1971 and operated until 1999, when the federal government shut the operation down.

The property subsequently was obtained by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

The actual structure was moved down river to the site of another brothel, the Wild Horse Resort and Spa, after being sold in 2003.

On the land where the brothel was located, officials plan to restore the river ecosystem to a natural condition.

Improvements will include cutting new meanders into the river channel. When finished, the restored site will help floodwaters spread naturally over the landscape, improving habitat for fish and wildlife and boosting water quality.

Similar restoration projects are planned at 11 locations along the lower Truckee. Work commenced last fall at two, the 102 Ranch and the site of an old trailer park in Wadsworth.