

## Wonder Stump Road meeting only spurs distrust

December 16, 2019



Nestled off the bustle of U.S. Highway 101's traffic north of Crescent City is a 2.5-mile tunnel of redwood trees making up Wonder Stump Road.

The road, a source of pride for many in Del Norte County, has been a topic of concern for several years as residents fear that the county plans to widen the tranquil tunnel.

Some 40 leery community members came to the first scheduled Wonder Stump community meeting Dec. 16 in the Crescent City Fire and Rescue building on Washington Boulevard, ready to defend their redwood refuge.

"Collectively, the majority of the people here are here for the same reason as me... Leave the road alone," said Mac Eller, who has lived on Wonder Stump Road for 15 years.

In late July, Del Norte County officials mailed announcements to Wonder Stump residents regarding a meeting planned for the Wonder Stump Road Community and Stakeholder Engagement Project, designed to gather community input on possible road improvements.

But most of the Wonder Stump residents see no problem with the road.

For years, they said, they've feared the county had plans for changing the road's integrity. But when they asked for clear answers, they said, they were met with vague answers, or "foggy mirrors," according Eller.

"It would have been nice if they had said, 'Hey, we've got this thing, we're gonna look at options, and we'll call a meeting before any decisions are made.' Then everybody would have known it was okay.

“But everybody’s all jumping to conclusions, because they have no information,” said Diana Stanley, a Wonder Stump resident of 20 years.

Their skepticism was only enhanced when graphics were presented during the meeting that displayed possible road changes. The research behind those graphics was funded by the local transportation commission - although a county representative had assured the crowd that no funding had been allocated for any action on the road.

“Many of us are very passionate about it, and I truly believe the county is just going through the motions, you know. Some people tell me nothing’s ever going to happen (to the road), but this [research] is the furthest they’ve ever gone,” Eller said.

Drone photos of the road marked with the possible hazards – trees, pipes, roots – were placed facing the room’s entrance. Behind them stood displays of seven different options for the road, including bringing it up to the standard county code, making it a one-way northbound road, and adjusting the drainage, among other options.

County Roads Superintendent Jeff Daniels led the discussion, assuring residents that none of the options were set in stone, stating it was important to hear from the community as well as the stakeholders. He said that if attendees wanted their voices to be heard, they needed to write their comments down on sheets of paper and place sticky notes on the options they preferred.

Option number one (keeping the road untouched) had the highest number of sticky notes come the end of the night.

Still, a few of those present offered other options, including Allen Hurd, whose family has owned a house on the north end of Wonder Stump since the 1940s. Every winter, said Hurd, his family’s property floods, which he and Daniels attribute to drainage problems on the road.

“Honestly, I want [the trees] down, I want them cut... Honest with you, I would like to see two lanes with a shoulder just for the drainage aspect,” said Hurd.

“And I’ve seen the ambulance and fire respond to medical calls in here and when they all rush in, you can’t get in one way or the other,” he said. “Plus, if a forest fire ever started up in there, you’re done.”

Now that the community has given their input, they await future steps, if any, regarding the much-debated road.