

Overflow

Water, water everywhere — and no place to go but up. The ingredients for the worst flooding in Oregon in 31 years were all in place by Feb. 4.

Record rainfall had pounded the region for months. A hard freeze locked it in place. Wimpy snowpacks at the end of December grew bigger and bigger, and even at midelevations between 1,000 and 3,000 feet, snowpacks tripled.

And then Sunday night, Feb. 4, it rained and froze solid, speeding runoff. The temperature rose and it rained some more, in some places falling at half-an-inch an hour. At Laurel Mountain northwest of Salem in the Coast Range, more than 2 feet of rain fell in four days.

Melting snow contributed to the runoff: for every inch of rain that fell, a half inch of snow melted, and ran into swollen creeks. The temperature kept rising. The night of Feb. 7, the temperature reached 60 degrees in Portland, just before midnight.

And still it rained.

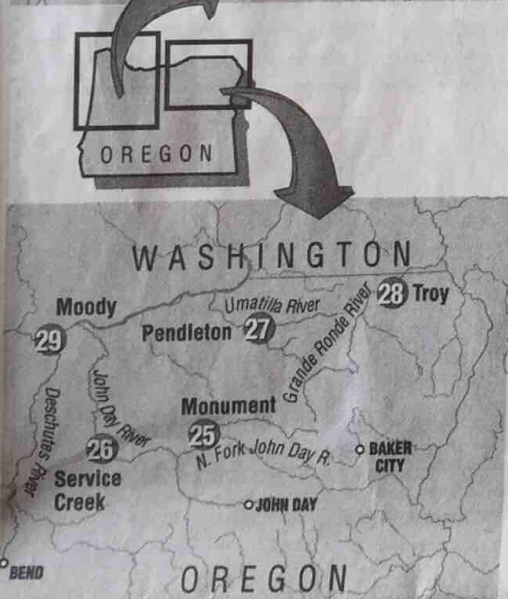
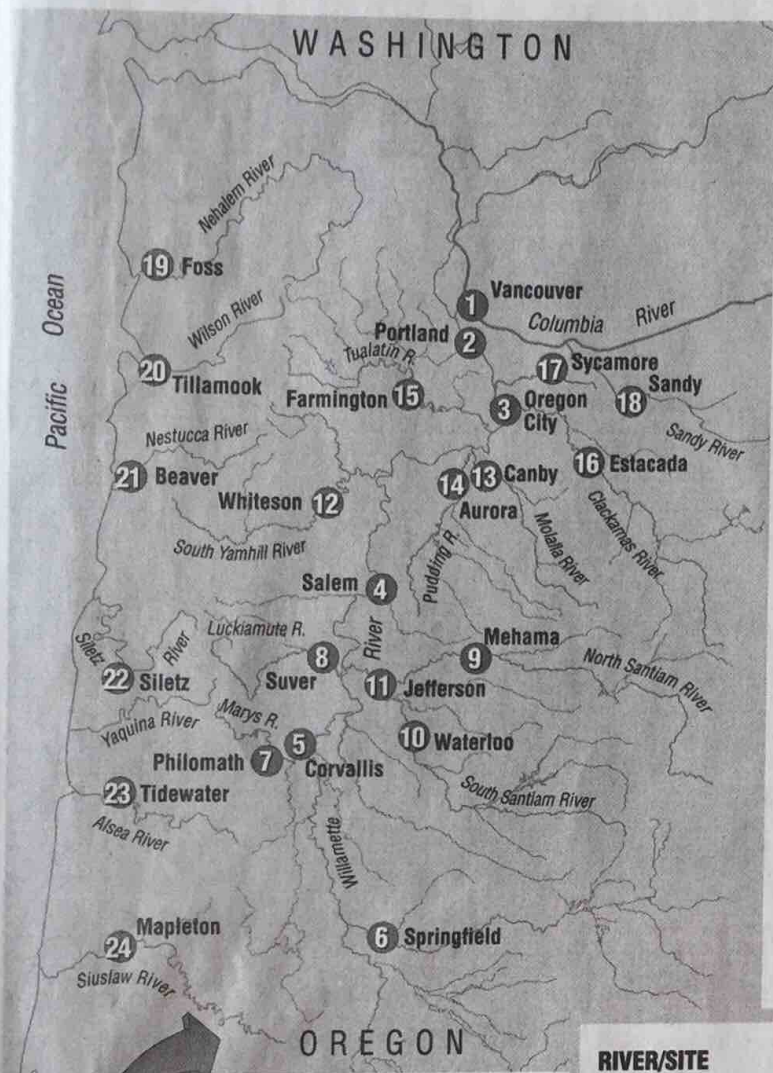
The creeks became torrents, the rivers became unstoppable. At the Northwest River Forecast Center in Portland — one of only 13 such river monitoring sites in the United States — forecasters tried to keep up with hourly rainfall updates and river gauge readings from 38 river forecast locations.

By week's end, they had issued nearly 100 flood bulletins, and 26 Oregon rivers had reached flood stage. Of those, six had reached what forecasters call "flood of record" heights.

The Wilson and Nestucca rivers probably exceeded records, too, but the river gauges were washed away, out to sea.

Steve Todd, meteorologist-in-charge of the National Weather Service in Oregon, summed up his reaction to the waters of February: "It just boggles the mind."

— Stuart Tomlinson



RIVER/SITE	FLOOD STAGE	CREST	DATE	TIME	RECORD CREST*	RECORD YEAR
1. Columbia/Vancouver	16 ft.	27.2 ft.	2/9	6 p.m.	31 ft.	1948
2. Willamette/Portland	18 ft.	28.6 ft.	2/9	7 p.m.	33 ft.	1894
3. Willamette/Upper Oregon City	14 ft.	19.5 ft.	2/9	6 p.m.	21 ft.	1890
4. Willamette/Salem	28 ft.	35.1 ft.	2/8	5:15 p.m.	47 ft.	1891
5. Willamette/Corvallis	20 ft.	23.5 ft.	2/9	11:50 p.m.	32.4 ft.	1861
6. Mohawk/Springfield	15 ft.	22.2 ft.	2/7	1:30 p.m.	24.3 ft.	1960
7. Marys/Philomath	20 ft.	20.8 ft.	2/7	8 p.m.	20.8 ft.	1996
8. Luckiamute/Suver	27 ft.	33 ft.	2/8	2:30 a.m.	34.5 ft.	1964
9. N. Santiam/Mehama	11 ft.	13.4 ft.	2/7	noon	17.5 ft.	1923
10. S. Santiam/Waterloo	12 ft.	13.1 ft.	2/7	5 p.m.	24.5 ft.	1964
11. Santiam/Jefferson	15 ft.	23.2 ft.	2/7	8 p.m.	24.22 ft.	1964
12. S. Yamhill/Whiteson	38 ft.	47.5 ft.	2/9	1 a.m.	**47.2 ft.	**1964
13. Molalla/Canby	13 ft.	14.6 ft.	2/7	5 p.m.	16.8 ft.	1964
14. Pudding/Aurora	22 ft.	30.5 ft.	2/8	7 a.m.	**30 ft.	**1923
15. Tualatin/Farmington	32 ft.	37.2 ft.	2/9	noon	**37 ft.	**1933
16. Clackamas/Estacada	10 ft.	17.4 ft.	2/7	7 p.m.	18.4 ft.	1964
17. Johnson Creek/Sycamore	11 ft.	13.8 ft.	2/7	8 p.m.	14.7 ft.	1964
18. Sandy/Sandy	—	22.6 ft.	2/7	11:30 p.m.	**22.3 ft.	**1964
19. Nehalem/Foss	14 ft.	27.4 ft.	2/8	11 p.m.	**24.9 ft.	**1990
20. Wilson/Tillamook	13 ft.	18.4 ft.	2/8	2 p.m.	gauge failed	—
21. Nestucca/Beaver	18 ft.	18.2 ft.	2/8	8 p.m.	gauge failed	—
22. Siletz/Siletz	16 ft.	24.5 ft.	2/9	8 p.m.	31.6 ft.	1921
23. Asea/Tidewater	18 ft.	23.9 ft.	2/7	2 a.m.	29.5 ft.	1890
24. Siuslaw/Mapleton	18 ft.	27.5 ft.	2/7	4 p.m.	28.5 ft.	1972
25. N. Fork John Day/Monument	14 ft.	15.1 ft.	2/9	4 p.m.	—	—
26. John Day/Service Creek	11.5 ft.	14 ft.	2/10	1 a.m.	—	—
27. Umatilla/Pendleton	7.8 ft.	11 ft.	2/9	4 p.m.	—	—
28. Grande Ronde/Troy	10 ft.	13.6 ft.	2/9	8 p.m.	**11.3 ft.	**1964
29. Deschutes/Moody	8 ft.	12 ft.	2/8	7 a.m.	—	—

* Comparisons are difficult because some record floods occurred before construction of flood control reservoirs.
 ** Old record

TUALATIN



Houses can be replaced; memories can't. Mica Castro lays out a collection of her mother's family photos, soaked when water flooded their apartment.

CORBETT



Douglas Weberg smiles at his daughter, Cora. He was injured when a tree struck his car, pinning him inside.

VERNONIA



Charlene Ratkic comforts her 7-year-old son, Charles, after they were forced from their Vernonia home into a shelter at St. Mary's Catholic Church.

AFTERMATH:
Neighbors' pulling together

FACES

MIST
Once the water goes down, the cleanup begins. That meant drying out dozens upon dozens of shoes for Ardy's Turska, an 83-year-old resident of Mist. The community was cut off for days when the Nehalem went over its banks. Turska gets a hug from Louise Green.

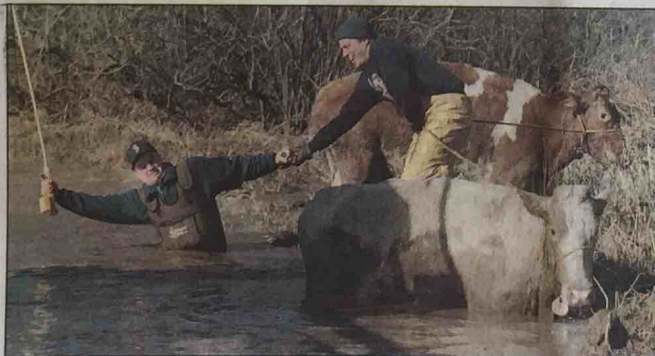


Below: Volunteer Brian Wright (right) helps television newsman Grant McOmie through high water as they bring cows in for milking in Tillamook.

It's one of the rituals of the modern presidency. Disaster strikes somewhere and the nation's leader is expected to be at the scene. What can a president do? He doesn't fill any sandbags, and he's not going to lay any new carpet. But he can make it clear he won't tolerate any red tape from the federal disaster agencies. He can maybe boost a few spirits while he does a little discreet politicking of his own. And so it was when President Clinton came to Oregon and Washington, bringing his four-helicopter entourage filled with top government officials, senators and representatives and the national press corps. Clinton also brought his empathy as he toured a stricken neighborhood in Woodland, Wash., and then spoke in Waterfront Park in Portland. For Douglas Jungnickel, a 68-year-old Woodland resident whose home was inundated by 7 feet of floodwaters from the North Fork of the Lewis River, Clinton offered an arm around the man's shoulders as he toured his home. "He invited me into his backyard swimming pool," Clinton joked to reporters. In Portland, the president toured the emergency flood wall built to protect the downtown and pronounced it "a symbol of what our country does when everybody pulls together." And everywhere he went, he shook hands, hundreds of them. By the time Air Force One was winging away from Portland and to a similar disaster-relief visit to Idaho, Clinton had promised to stick with Northwesterners until they have fully recovered.

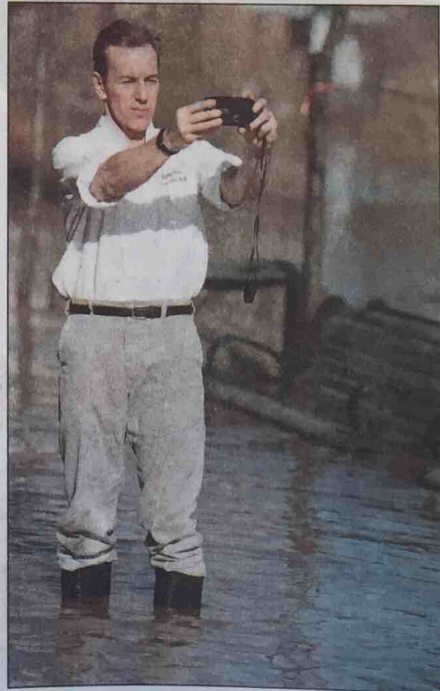
-Jeff Mapes

TILLAMOOK



BRIAN WRIGHT/The Oregonian

PORTLAND



Executive chef Billy Hahn stands on the sidewalk in front of the Harborside Restaurant to record the height of the river. The RiverPlace complex is not protected by Portland's harbor wall.

PORTLAND



President Clinton examines the emergency reinforcements to the harbor wall. With him (from left) are Gov. John Kitzhaber; Mayor Vera Katz; Jim McKune, who supervised volunteers; Bill Long, of the Bureau of Maintenance; and Steve Barrett, the city's bridge engineer.

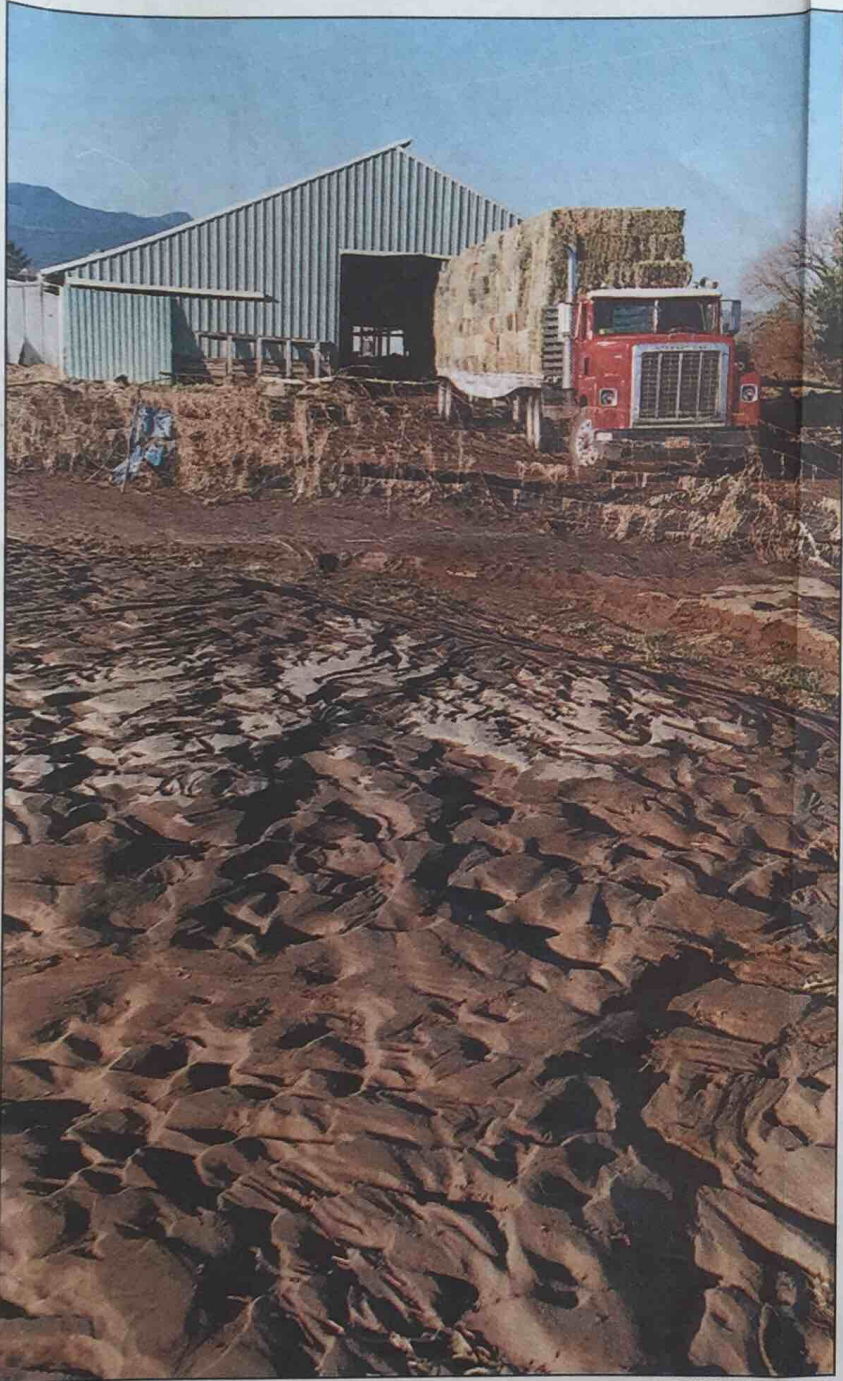
MICHAEL LLOYD/The Oregonian

ANGELA CARA PANORAZIO/The Oregonian

THE FLOOD OF '96

“We'll be years getting out of this.”

Carl Hadermann, owner of River End Dairy on the Nehalem River



Flood mucks up dairies

Tillamook County farmers fight to make buried pastures turn rich green again

By PAT FORGEY

Correspondent, The Oregonian

TILLAMOOK — The rich pastureland that supports this county's famous dairy industry should be luxuriant and green this time of year. Instead, floods have left much of it a muddy, debris-strewn wasteland.

“We'll be years getting out of this,” said Carl Hadermann, who owns the River End Dairy on the Nehalem River.

As floodwaters rose across the Tillamook County bottomlands, dairy cows and farmers paid a high price. As many as 500 cattle drowned in the flood, many suffering agonizing deaths trapped in darkened barns while the waters rose around them.

But the loss of pastures — some of which are under 4 feet of muck, stumps, rocks and fencing — may be even more costly.

Tillamook County's agricultural base really is grass, which the cows turn into milk, and local co-ops turn into cheese and money.

“The only crop we can grow over here is grass,” said Jim McMullen, assistant manager of the Tillamook County Creamery Association.

The grass in the Nehalem, Nestucca, Kilchis and other valleys provides inexpensive feed. After paying high costs for silage and hay during the winter, dairy farmers turn their cows out into fields, where they can feed relatively cheaply.

But preliminary surveys show that about 7,000 acres, or a fourth of the county's grass, is buried under silt.

INSIDE

■ **STUCK IN THE MUCK:** Park and recreation areas are still digging out from flood-deposited mud, and getting rid of it may take awhile/B4

Joy Jones, an Oregon State University extension agent, is searching for ways to deal with the silt. Some farms have only a couple of inches.

“That we can probably work with, but it's still going to reduce feed,” she said.

Where the silt is 3 to 6 inches thick, there might even be some grass growth this year. But when it gets to be a foot thick, “that land, for all intents and purposes, is out of production for this growing season,” Jones said.

The Extension Service and the Tillamook County Soil and Water Conservation District are sampling the silt to see what additions it needs to make it usable soil. The pastures also need extensive disking or harrowing and reseeding.

In addition, silt is frequently sandy and consequently won't retain water, which could force farmers to irrigate all summer.

The floodwaters also carried weed seeds that are likely to sprout this spring, requiring additional mowing or herbicides. Both are time-consuming and expensive.

Meanwhile, truckloads of donated hay have been rolling into the county, courtesy of farmers elsewhere

Please turn to
PASTURE, Page B4

BRENT WOJAHN/The Oregonian

A load of hay donated by Central Oregon farmers rolls into River End Dairy in Nehalem to sustain cattle that cannot graze on pastureland buried under flood silt and muck.

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