



Locals join in new flood effort

BY JOE HAPP
Headlight-Herald Staff

TILLAMOOK — Local, state and county officials Monday night held out little hope of obtaining federal funding in the short term to solve the area's flooding problems and warned that new calculations by the U.S. Geodetic Survey show that flood levels similar to those experienced in November could

become more common.

But, a consensus did emerge in support of an effort by state Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-16th, to seek funding for a comprehensive review and recommendations for dealing with local flood issues by one of the state's premier problem-solving organizations.

At a meeting of the Tillamook Bay Habitat and Estuary Improvement

DAIRYMEN TALLY DAMAGE: Lost animals, lower production, debris in pastures cost nearly \$2 million.
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(TBHEID), County Emergency Management Director Tom Manning said officials of the Federal Emergency Management Administration no longer

look at dredging river channels — believed by many here to be a necessary flood abatement technique — as a solution.

"The federal government stopped doing that in the '70s," Manning said. Instead, FEMA now looks at hazard mitigation in terms of buyouts and relocation of businesses and homes in flood plains, he said.

County and city officials, he said, are collecting data that will

be submitted to federal officials in hopes of getting a presidential disaster declaration, which would make available low interest federal loans and other forms of financial assistance to business owners and residents who suffered damage in last month's devastating flood.

Flood damage to farms along the Wilson and Trask rivers and businesses along North U.S. Highway 101 in the city has

been estimated at \$12.5 million.

Manning and Tillamook City Manager Mark Gervasi told homeowners and business operators at meetings last week they hope a decision on a federal disaster declaration will be made by the end of the year. They urged business and home owners to fill out data report forms and get them to Gervasi or

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County Community Development Director Bill Campbell.

Manning said Army Corps of Engineers representatives are in the area this week gathering data on high water marks in the recent flooding and to survey a 500-foot breach in a levee along the Wilson River near Wilsonview Dairy operated by Don and Bill Josi. Manning said local officials are hoping to get help and money from the Corps to repair the levee before another flood hits.

County officials and others familiar with conditions in local rivers believe that breach during the Nov. 6 and 7 flooding caused more water than ever before to flow into the Dougherty and Hoquarton sloughs and dumped record levels of water into the business area along North U.S. 101.

At Monday night's meeting, County Commissioner Mark Labhart said \$1.3 million is available now to finance voluntary buyouts of businesses in that area.

"A number of businesses are looking into it," he said.

Labhart said another \$730,000 in hazard mitigation money would become available with a federal disaster declaration.

State Emergency Management Director Ken Murphy, who also attended Monday night's meeting, said he is confident that damage estimates being gathered will lead to a presidential disaster declaration.

Labhart and Manning noted that a new USGS chart obtained this week by county officials describes the flow of water measured last month along the Wilson River as a 50-year event, rather than the 250- to 500-year flood event that many officials thought it was. Officials said a 50-year flood is one that has a 2 percent chance of occurring every year.

"This new information should be quite disturbing to us," Labhart said. "It means our nuisance floods are likely going to be more severe because our flood plain is filling in the lower rivers and they can't handle the flow like they used to."

Labhart said the new data may also affect the city's Community Rating System which, in turn, affects FEMA flood insur-

ance rates in the area. It could also affect city and county zoning ordinances, he said.

Johnson reported that she has been in preliminary talks with the office of Gov. Ted Kulongoski to get Tillamook County's flooding problems on the agenda for Oregon Solutions, a problem-solving organization based at Portland State University that has successfully dealt with major problems around the state.

Johnson described the organization's method as getting all those in the public and private sectors — including government agencies — involved with an issue "to describe the universe of what we want to do" and work toward an agreed-upon plan of action.

Johnson said she was involved in Oregon Solutions' development of a project to build a trail from the Fort Clatsop Memorial to Sunset Beach as part of the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. She said the effort involved getting nine state and federal agencies, all with divergent interests, to "work toward saying yes to the project."

"I'm prepared to continue to hunt for the money and go to the governor and ask that he consider this as an Oregon Solutions project," Johnson said.

Johnson said she estimates it would take about \$100,000 to get Oregon Solutions involved.

Johnson cautioned that she couldn't guarantee the success of her efforts or that Oregon Solutions could broker an agreement, but she and Labhart noted that they had secured promises of cooperation from the Army Corps of Engineers and the National Marine Fisheries Service.

TBHEID officials and others blame the Corps for thwarting local efforts over the past several years to dredge river channels in an effort to prevent flooding in areas west of U.S. 101.

"I want to come out of this with a precedent-setting template for how communities can work with the Corps," Johnson said.

TBHEID board president Doug Rosenberg called it the only positive thing he heard at the meeting.

In a related matter, Labhart and Sheriff Todd Anderson told the group that the county's new "reverse 9-1-1" phone system

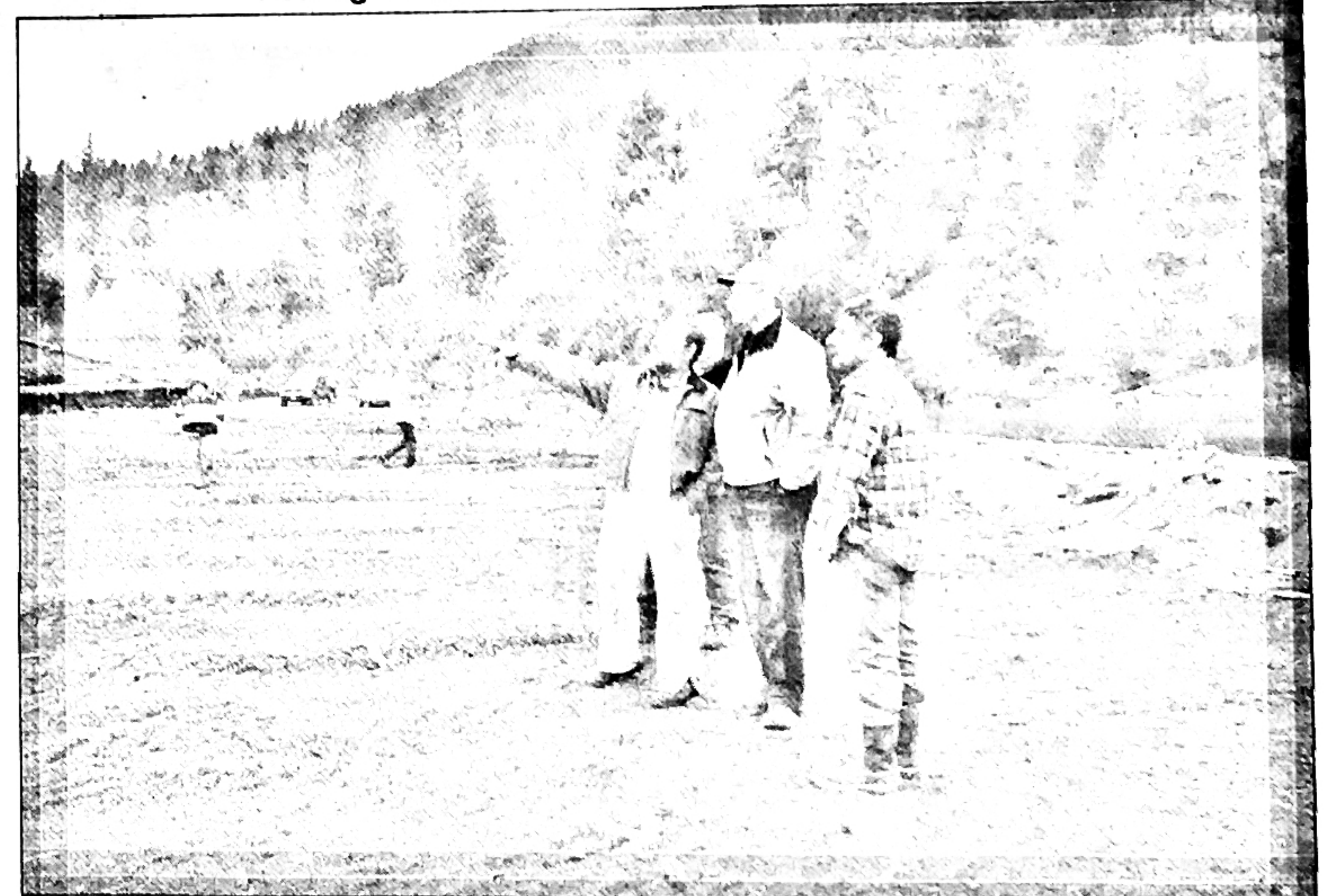
for automated warning calls is due to be installed around the second week in January.

Anderson said the system can make about 4,000 calls to deliver a recorded warning about floods or other emergencies to a targeted area in about 10 minutes.

Labhart said the new system is "mega-times better than what we have had in the past." But, he said, county officials need to program into the system all numbers — including work and cellular phone numbers — for people who need to be reached in emergency situations.

Manning said his office will take the lead in updating the list of numbers to feed into the computerized system.

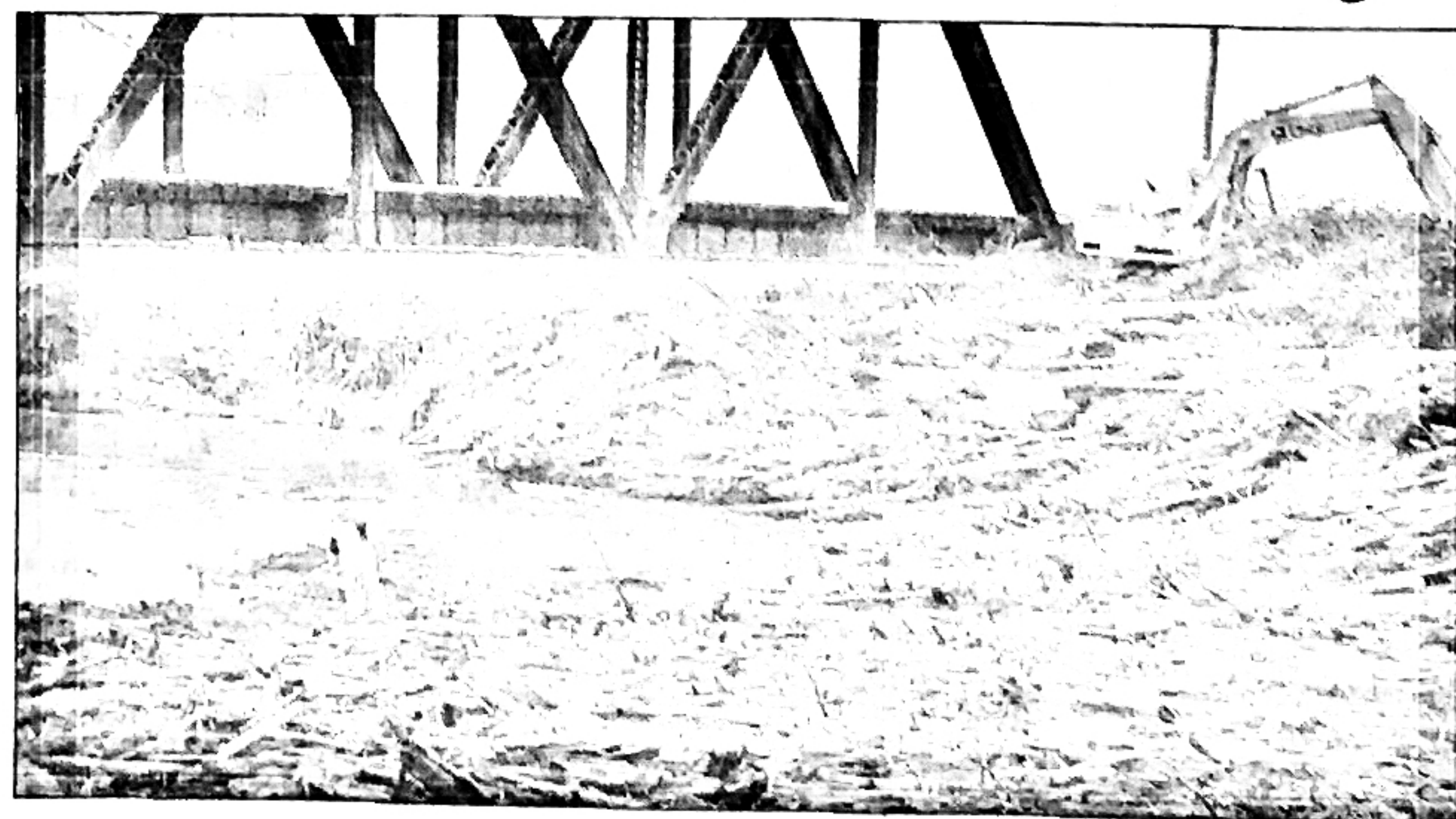
Manning added that another problem in last month's flooding was that emergency radios activated by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration were not programmed to sound in flood events. That policy has since been changed, he said.



JOE HAPP/HEADLIGHT-HERALD

Tidal and wetlands expert Leo Kuntz points out the path Wilson River water took after it breached a 500-foot section of levee in last month's flood to Les Miller of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (in baseball cap). Looking on are County Emergency Management Director Tom Manning, in background, and dairyman Don Josi.

Clearing up the Trask jam session



Work to clear the logjam built up by the November flooding on the Trask River, upstream from the railroad bridge at the Port of Tillamook Bay Industrial park, is being conducted this week by Leo Kuntz, of Nehalem Marine. The project is made possible by the Tillamook Anglers and other support groups. The contractor is using boats, block and tackle and an excavator to cut a swath through the debris.

COUNTY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT/COURTESY PHOTO