

COMMENTARY

After the flooding, grief, then resolve

In July, I wrote in this space about a warning from Leo Kuntz, who makes his living building tidal gates and working on wetland flood control projects.

"The sediment wedges at the mouths of the Tillamook, Trask, Wilson, Kilchis, Miami and Nehalem rivers are growing at an alarming rate," Kuntz warned in a letter to the *Headlight-Herald*. "I have seen huge changes in just the last year alone ..."

The next 50- or 100-year flood event in this area could generate more property and infrastructure damage and loss of life than the devastating floods of 1996, he said.

Fast forward to Nov. 14, a week after the devastating floods of 2006. The meeting of the Tillamook Bay Habitat and Estuary Improvement District was, in some ways, more of a wake than a business meeting. The dairy farmers and North Main Avenue business owners in the room had lost again and were working their way through the various stages of grief.

The only stage not in evidence that night was the first, denial. That ship had already sailed. Most of these flood-weary veterans had been through bad deluges before, including the big one in 1996, the flooding in 1998 and many of the so-called "nuisance floods" of recent years.

By this night, they were well into the second stage, anger. There were plenty of targets for it.

They were angry that they hadn't been warned earlier and because the warnings they got were inaccurate.

"We used to get reliable calls with accurate information from (County Emergency Management Director) Tom Manning and his staff," said Doug Rosenberg, former owner of Rosenberg Builders Supply. "We don't get them anymore."

The decision last year by the county commissioners to put Manning's department under the supervision of the Tillamook County Sheriff's Office still wasn't sitting well with many in the room, even though Manning himself defended the move and said his department was on its way to being rebuilt complete with a new "reverse 9-1-1" phone system that will automate warnings to those who need them in emergency situations.

"It's not implemented yet," Manning said, "but I think it will solve the problem."

They were angry that years of efforts to get local rivers dredged had cost them money and frustration and gotten them nowhere.

Retired dairy farmer Bub Boquist said, "The rivers are so full of stuff now that they have no carrying capacity." Boquist, along with several others, has been trying for seven long years to get a permit to dredge a section of the Kilchis River to relieve lowland flooding and

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show that it can be done without harming fish habitat. But, their efforts have been rebuffed several times by one regulatory agency or another.

Briefly, they flirted with bargaining.

"If we could just get some of us into a room with the governor and a news reporter ... " Boquist said at one point, his voice rising in the expectation that somehow that might break the bureaucratic logjam.

Then came depression. "They're never going to let us work in the rivers," said one dairyman.

Said a business owner, "The path the regulatory agencies are taking is just going to run us out."

Another farmer chipped in, "I think the floods are just going to keep getting higher."

And that prompted another comment that "pineapple express" storms are going to keep hitting Oregon because of global warming.

"At the rate we're going now," said Boquist, "we're going to start losing farmland."

They didn't quite make it all the way to acceptance. They're tougher than that. Near the end of the evening, they were once again talking about what could and should be done.

Kuntz declared that just restoring the river channels wouldn't be enough.

"It's a piece of it," he said, but he warned against focusing on any single type of project. "You've got to spread it out over several."

There was talk of building a floodway on private farmland, a channel that would be dry except in peak flooding situations. There was talk of clearing brush and other debris from the channels.

Rosenberg raised the question of whether the estuary and improvement district should be essentially disbanded in favor of a larger, countywide district that might have more political clout. There was a show of hands. Many agreed.

Sheriff Todd Anderson talked about items that need to be included in the next Emergency Management Office budget.

Their resiliency was reasserting itself. They had grieved and vented, just as if they had been at a wake. And they seemed to come away with the thought that life has to go on.

Stay tuned.

READERS' OPEN FORUM

Look to the forest for a solution

With the devastating effects the November flood had on the businesses of Tillamook County, it's clear citizens want to take a harder look at how to solve this serious, ongoing issue. Blaming state and federal agencies is not a solution.

Some are saying the lack of dredging is the problem, but no amount of dredging would have mitigated the damage of this 500-year event. Dredging is, at best, a short-term solution. With the amount of silt and material associated with this type of disaster, any dredging success would have been negated by the re-filling of these areas in short order. Money not well spent.

I think it's time to look at the areas where the bulk of this rainfall affects our watersheds — upland, in the Tillamook State Forest. The Oregon Department of Forestry is doing a better job of forestry management than ever before and today we have a forest management plan that is on a trial basis for another five years. While we monitor the plan's successes or failures, Tillamook County citizens need to keep these questions in mind:

Is the Tillamook rainforest functioning properly? With one tree having the capability of absorbing over 1,000 gallons of water annually, is the removal of more trees an actual financial benefit to Tillamook County or a flooding liability?

Isn't an intact, functioning watershed a better long-term solution to the flooding problem we are facing and expect to face in the future?

With road-building and use in the upland areas contributing the most sediment to the watershed, any effort to increase harvest is also a threat to increase sediment loads and exacerbate the flooding problem.

What we need are decision makers with a long-term vision for the benefit of all Tillamook County businesses and citizens. With the elections over, let's hope we get that from our elected officials.

Bob Rees
Bay City

We're grateful for help during floods

We thank Leo Kuntz for warning us of the flood at 4 a.m., Monday, Nov. 6.

We also would like to thank the following people for transporting our dairy cattle before and after the flood: Robert and Richard Obrist, Bob Coppini, John Fisher, Dave and Joe Rocha, Doug Barker and Ken Hale. Without people like these in our community, we would not be able to survive any

more floods like this. Thank you to Bob-Cat Dairy and Fairview Acres for housing and milking our cows.

We would also like to thank Loten Hookey for his letter to the governor. We agree we don't need state money if all that comes out of it is more agencies saying no to permits that could solve a lot of problems like we had in 1996.

It's time agencies listen to us "old-timers" who know what is going on. Governor, we do need dredging done in Tillamook County.

Butch and Cheryl Schriber
Tillamook

Storms bring out heroes

Thank-yous are definitely in order. We have had two storms that brought out the heroes in our county again.

The People's Utility District kept the power on all through the first storm. In the later storm, it got the power back on very quickly.

The police and police reserves, stretched as thinly as they are, were out all over the county helping people in trouble. The fire departments and ambulance crews were fighting terrible road and driving conditions, but were on the scene quickly as needed. The Coast Guard was immediately available to help people on land, as well as at sea.

The search and rescue people, all volunteers, were out three times Sunday night, Nov. 12, to find lost hunters. It was dark, raining and windy. Red Cross volunteers and others were on the spot to help where help was needed.

We were hit pretty hard in Tillamook this time, but we'll bounce back. We always do. And a large part of the reason is the wonderful people who live here, work here, and volunteer here to help their neighbors. Just like our National Guard Unit used to do.

Louise Young
Tillamook

North County neighbors to the rescue

After a long day cleaning mud and debris from our house after the flood of '06, it occurred to us that, always before, our stories of the Red Cross, flood damage, cleanup, and losses always referred to the "100-year" flood of '96. How fast time flew!

But, this is not to complain about the flood. It's to compliment the neighbors who offered equipment and a helping hand to scrape, shovel, and clear mud which was

piled up in our yards, basements and garages.

Two local dairymen on McDonald Road (it should probably be renamed MUCKdonald Road) road came with equipment to clear our property. They had suffered their own losses, including some livestock, but they took the time to clear neighborhood properties without charge. They made it possible for us senior citizens to get to our home without mud up to the tops of our boots.

It made us realize how truly blessed we are to have great neighbors who will lend a hand without question. We're only sorry that such kindness won't make the headlines instead of the often depressing crime, war, and abuse stories that seem to dominate our news.

Jim and Lorna Townsend
Nehalem

Kulongoski should apologize

Regarding your article, "So, what on earth was the governor thinking?" (*Headlight-Herald*, Nov. 15), it was plain he was irritated and not worried what the (reaction) of the public would be. Of course, he cannot be elected again, so he gets his second term and we have to live with it. I got the feeling that the flood took away some of the glory of the moment for him and it ticked him off.

How about folks living far from any water, let alone on the side of a cliff with million-dollar view? How about the homes and businesses on U.S. Highway 101? No one there has a view of anything except each other. On my way north recently I saw a very sad sight. A whole yard full of ruined furniture and belongings lying in muddy heaps on the lawn of a home. No ocean or river in sight there, just utter destruction.

The dairy farmers are not living on the edge of beautiful scenery; they are struggling every day to make a living in a very difficult market. Many of their cows died and they were not perched on the edge of anything, just nice pasture land.

Maybe our governor would have us all live in nice boxes surrounded by impenetrable barriers. Not many of us live on land overlooking the pounding surf. Most of us live our lives as best we can. Life is hard; it hands us things that are hard to deal with.

Our governor did himself no favors by belittling the people who suffered the losses of a lifetime.

Mr. Governor, instead of sitting lofty in