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“In theory, we could try to fight it, but right now we’re just trying to fight the land.”

Morgan Kottre, on one insurer’s decision not to cover the devastation caused by heavy rains

A neighborhood of seven homes overlooking the Tillamook River has banded together after extreme weather has caused their hillside to shift, sending bits of road, mud and trees onto their homes and barns.

MORGAN KOTTRE



Tillamook neighbors threatened by sinkholes, slides

By Laura Gunderson
The Oregonian/OregonLive

Seven families in a cluster of hillside homes above the Tillamook River spent the past week watching the two roads they live on slip, buckle and tangle into a slide of rocks, mud and trees.

It began Monday as a few little cracks on Burton Hill Road, just outside Tillamook. By Wednesday the cracks had collapsed into a quarter-mile series of sinkholes and creeping mud that put three homes at risk, pushed a barn off its foundation and left homeowners fearful of what will move next.

As the rains continue, they say only one thing is clear: No one is coming to the rescue.

Morgan Kottre, 27, said she and her neighbors — some of them relatives — have been told by county, state and federal officials that they don’t qualify for assistance because Burton Hill Road and the lower Hillside Drive are private roads on private land. Same story from at least one insurance company. Kottre said a representative told one family the devastation qualifies as an “act of God,” which the insurer doesn’t cover.

“In theory, we could try to fight it,” she said, “but right now we’re just trying to fight the land.”

Storms during the past week have brought flooding and landslides across northwestern Oregon. The extreme weather has caused at least two deaths in Oregon, and federal officials set early damage estimates at about \$15 million.

Tillamook County was among the 13 counties where Oregon Gov. Kate Brown declared a state of emergency. In fact, not far from Kottre’s home, the town of Oceanside was cut off Saturday as the only road out of town was closed due to a failed culvert.

Kottre, her neighbors and 50 friends spent Saturday night stacking more than 200 sandbags on tarps in hopes of keeping water from further soaking the ground. They teamed up to build a gravel road through one backyard so folks on the upper road could get out.

“It just seemed crazy when the land dropped a few
See Tillamook, A6

Tillamook has been inundated during this storm cycle.

SEAN KILLEN/SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN



What’s next

There’s no end to the soggy weather in sight for the Portland area. Rain is forecast daily for the next 10 days. We’ll get a small break Monday, with showers likely during the day but decreasing by evening as the snow level rises to above 2,500 feet. The National Weather Service continued to issue a flood warning for the Tualatin and Pudding rivers.

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- Updates from around the state.
- Residents were hunkering down in Oceanside, cut off after a culvert opened a sinkhole in the only road out of town.

Tillamook

Continued from A1

inches,” Kottre said of the hillside community. “But it became terrifying when it was 3 feet.”

Down below, on Hillside Drive, Tera Kottre and her family moved out of their house and are living in their horse trailer. If feels safer, she said, than being in the house that’s in front of the barn that’s slowly being moved by mud.

Tera Kottre first heard of the problem Monday as she ate breakfast with her husband, John.

“My mother-in-law called and said, ‘Do you know your neighbors’ driveway is starting to move?’” she said.

They went out, looked up and saw the driveway sinking away from the home and visibly pushing chunks of earth in their direction.

“We saw it and knew immediately it was going to hit our barn, and we just started moving,” said Tera Kottre. “We considered her

three horses and moved everything out of the house. She and her husband have been back to the home, she says, but she won’t sleep there. The geologists and engineers who’ve visited said that’s wise.

Neighbors said the settlement began as a dairy farm in the 1940s and later on was one long driveway to a home. That homeowner began parcelling off the land, and now seven homes are scattered across the hill, surrounded by pastures and forest.

Morgan Kottre said she and her husband didn’t realize it was a private drive — or the implications — when they bought their home about two years ago. She has started a GoFundMe.com account to help cover the costs but says the project likely will exceed the \$100,000 fundraising goal.

It’s hard to know what the cost will be until the extent of the destruction is clear. But experts have told residents a thorough survey won’t be possible until the earth stops moving. And that might not

happen until the rains clear. Worst-case scenario, the neighbors say, would mean chunks of earth and road will topple the barn, send mud through two homes and over their driveways, and leave another home too near a sinkhole to be safe.

Morgan Kottre said she’s found strength in how her neighborhood has come together. But she’s been frustrated by what some people have written online when they hear of weather-related disasters on the Oregon coast.

She read a comment to the effect “those Californians shouldn’t have built their homes on sand.” But her neighborhood is nowhere near sand, she says, and the people who live on what they call “Family Hill” have spent most of their lives in the town.

“They think we’re in some big house on the sand with beachfront views,” she said. “We’re not. We’re blue-collar workers who live on a hill because that’s what there is in Tillamook.”

“Lots of hills.”

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FOCUS ON | Oceanside

Nestled at the base of Maxwell Mountain, little-known Oceanside always feels like a hidden gem cut off from civilization. That became true Saturday when a culvert failed and compromised Oregon 131, the only road out of the tiny town about nine miles west of Tillamook.

Officials said it would remain closed at least through Monday. State crews were pumping water from a culvert under the highway, but more work is needed, said Lou Torres, an Oregon Department of Transportation spokesman.

“We’re working as fast as we can,” Torres said. “The area is pretty unstable and we want to make sure all repairs are completed before we open it up to travel.”

Tim Carpenter, chief of the Netarts-Oceanside Fire District, said about half of Oceanside’s population of 400 are full-time residents. “There were a lot of people coming down to check on their house,” he said.

Carpenter said emergency vehicles will be able to use a private lumber company’s logging road. Cape Meares Loop, the only other road out of Oceanside, has been closed since a landslide in 2013.

Judson Randall, an Oceanside resident, said most folks in town were prepared for the possibility of both roads being closed at the same time. They better be. The town, a bit like a cul-de-sac at the end of Oregon 131, has a coffee shop, two restaurants and a real estate office — but no grocery store. Netarts, about two miles away and on the other side of the broken culvert, has two grocery stores.

“I guess we’re having canned black beans for dinner,” Randall said Saturday.

— Laura Gunderson and George Rede