

River gravel ... and sleepless nights

One man's view on rocks and flooding

By AMBER NOBE
Headlight-Herald Staff

TILLAMOOK — As Bub Boquist drives his pick-up truck along the bumpy, muddy roads through the dairy lands along the Kilchis River, he shakes his head.

He's thinking about the gravel in the river bed. It's something that's kept him awake at night for several years.

Before chum salmon were listed as endangered, it was common practice for area rivers to be dredged and the gravel used for commercial aggregate. But since 1991, the build-up of gravel bars has been in size and amounts abnormal for river mouths.

Removing gravel from river beds is not a natural process. Neither was the installation of dikes and levees that long ago created farmlands central to Tillamook County's existence — they protect surrounding property, but stymie the natural process of spreading gravel and silt outside the rivers' banks.

That combination results in an unnaturally high threat of soil erosion, habitat degradation and severe flooding.

This is the problem inherit-



AMBER NOBE/HEADLIGHT-HERALD

Bub Boquist studies a large gravel bar in the Kilchis River bed during a low tide.

ed by local landowners, one that has been exacerbated over the years. This is the problem that causes Boquist sleepless nights.

A retired farmer and lifetime county resident, Boquist knows the ways of the Kilchis, its tributaries and neighboring sloughs — the labyrinth of waterways surrounding the Tillamook Cheese Factory and the pastures north of town. In fact, these streams border a road that carries his family name.

As Boquist stands on a massive Kilchis River gravel bar during low tide, the distress in

his voice resonates as he says, "This is supposed to be the river!"

He picks up a handful of rocks, explaining how a healthy river system is supposed to crush them into fine gravel. He studies the riverbanks, declaring that the river bed should be several feet lower. He describes how water at high tide now moves away from the bay, the opposite of how it is supposed to flow.

When the negative impact of gravel build-up became clear to Boquist several years ago, he and some neighboring landowners began the arduous

process of securing permits to privately remove gravel themselves. They spent more than a decade and several thousand of their own dollars to get first county, then state permits.

But, said Boquist, agencies at the federal level strung them along for years — before denying the permits.

Meanwhile, his land, his neighbor's land and North U.S. Highway 101 continued to flood on a regular basis.

A gravel-removal agreement recently signed by a variety of public and private agencies — an Oregon Solutions

See **KILCHIS**, Page A8

Page A8 - Tillamook, Ore., Wednesday, March 4, 2009 - Headlight-Herald

Tourist dollars could fund roads

Legislature is considering bill on room taxes

By KYLE BOGGES
Headlight-Herald Staff

No one has to tell Liane Welch about the sad state of Tillamook County's roads.

The county Roads Department director has compiled a laundry list of repair projects that could be performed from one end of the county to the other.

The problem, as has long been the case, is a lack of funding, said Welch.

Cash-strapped Tillamook County residents clamor for improvements to local roads but are loathe to pay higher taxes to get them.

But now, State Senate Bill

440 may provide more dollars for Tillamook County road improvements without increasing existing taxes.

The bill would amend ORS 320.350, which states that 70 percent of any countywide transient room tax revenues must "fund tourism promotion or tourism-related facilities."

In essence, the proposed measure would remove the 70-percent requirement — a county could use revenue from its transient room tax to fund anything it sees fit.

A transient room tax is assessed on owners of vacation lodging facilities as a percentage of the price they charge their guests.

Right now, Tillamook County has no countywide transient room tax. All the cities in the county, except Bay City, do.

A survey last summer by

the public-interest group Tillamook County Citizens for Sustainable Roads found that county residents would support a countywide room tax.

Data provided for that survey suggested that if such a tax were passed, for each 1 percent of transient room tax, the county could expect to generate about \$283,000.

That would be more than enough to fund at least one project on Welch's wish list — restoring more than a quarter-mile of Olsen Road between Third Street and Highway 6.

Testimony for SB 440 was taken in Salem on Feb. 25, with Tillamook County Commissioner Mark Labhart endorsing the bill.

The Association of Oregon Counties also supports SB 440.



KILCHIS:

Continued from Page A1

flood-reduction effort — is a small step in the right direction, said Boquist. But he, along with several landowners, are skeptical it will result in the flood relief they need.

He wonders what it would be like if he had taken matters into his own hands and dredged the river back in 1996. "By now, I'd be out of jail and have paid the fines," he says, only half joking.

Boquist knows the importance of salmon for this region. He remembers when they were prolific here in the Land of Many Waters. But, he says, the

gravel bars near his home aren't used for salmon spawning, because they are subject to tidal waters. And he sees the erosion that pulls land into the stream and out into the bay — bad for water temperatures.

Greatly frustrated, Boquist insists government agencies must treat rivers individually, must not apply a one-size-fits-all mentality. They must work with local residents to mitigate problems on a case-by-case basis.

"I don't understand why they don't listen to someone like me who's lived on the

river their whole life," he said.

Boquist blames what he sees as an increase in flood-related problems on the ever-growing gravel bars. He points to the damage to local business establishments, the steep price tag for flood-mitigation work, the hardship for local dairies, and the lives of people and animals lost to high waters.

"It's really important that people see what's happened because of the ban on taking rock," he said. "It's really hurt us economically, not just as individuals, but the county as a whole."

