



## Some fear levee break

### Failure could mean flooding, lost revenues

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TILLAMOOK — A structure that prevents a breach along the Wilson River and protects an area of economic importance to Tillamook is in danger of collapsing and costing adjacent businesses millions, say local officials.

Worse yet, Tillamook County government can't find the funds to repair it.

The structure actually is a rock revetment (or facing) along the river's south bank. It stretches along U.S. Highway 101 on the north side of the Shilo Inn and extends 1,000 feet upstream. It was found in need of replacement during a recent annual inspection by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The County of Tillamook is responsible for rebuilding or replacing the revetment.

Since the 1950s, the structure has directed river currents to the center of the channel (it technically is called a "training facility," as in, training the water to flow to the center of the channel) and away from a nearby bridge, thereby preventing a breach.

According to Tillamook County Commissioner Mark Labhart, if the structure breaks, it will alter the river's course, take out the U.S. Highway 101 bridge and flood Tillamook's Highway 101 North business district.

"We want to get ahead of the problem before it becomes a major issue," said Labhart.

He estimates the resulting havoc could resemble that of the notorious 1996 flood, which racked up more than \$53 million in damages countywide.

"We know its going to happen, because we have been told it will by several engineers. But it will be only a guess as to when, depending

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(Shilo)

on the severity of the flood season," said Paul Levesque, the county's facilities, fleet and contracts director.

Both Labhart and Levesque said factors that can contribute to a structure break include the magnitude of a given flood season and whether floodwaters contain large amounts of debris that would bang against the structure.

In recent years, emergency repairs — sand-bagging, plugging holes and everything short of rebuilding — has been required to maintain the integrity of the structure.

The county has hired HBH Consulting Engineers to design a replacement structure, perform the required biological assessment and secure the necessary permits, at a cost totaling \$35,000.

Construction costs are estimated to be an additional \$217,000. The county is expecting to accept

bids within the next 60 days and hopes to begin construction in November.

But county officials are moving forward on the project without knowing how to finance the work. "We really don't know what's going to happen at this point," Levesque said. "We do know we need to proceed with the project. Hopefully, the funds will materialize."

Thus far, Tillamook County has received commitments of financial support from the Tillamook Bay Habitat & Estuary Improvement District (\$30,000) and Shilo Inn (\$10,000).

The Oregon Department of Transportation, which owns 210 feet of the structure beginning at the Wilson River Bridge, has yet to determine how much it will contribute. The county has requested \$57,000, which is 23 percent of the project that is situat-

ed within the state highway right of way.

At a Tillamook City Council meeting April 6, Labhart and Levesque asked the city to contribute \$77,500, half of the remaining balance on the project.

But City Manager Mark Gervasi said that with its own budget cuts being implemented, the city may not be able to come up with that amount.

If funding is found, construction on the project would need to begin by July 1, said officials, when salmon are not present in the water. The work would continue through September.

Given the project's environmental impact on the fish population, if the repairs aren't completed by September, the structure will be left as is for another flood season.

