

# PSU task force looks for airport answers

PORTLAND — Whether Portland International Airport ends up with a new runway or ends up being moved to farmland in the middle of the Willamette Valley may depend on the recommendation from a new task force.

The 15-member task force at Portland State University's Institute for Portland Metropolitan Studies will be led by Beaverton Mayor Rob Drake. The group may take eight months to analyze a list of resident concerns raised during the past three years, before a master plan effort bogged down.

Mike Thorne, Port of Portland executive director, said the task force will explore all issues, from airport noise to adding a third main runway to moving the airport.

"These are valid questions," he said. "Should we build a new regional airport in Wilsonville or on prime farmland somewhere in the Willamette Valley? Or should we just tell travelers, 'Sorry, but there are no more airline seats?'"

Ethan Seltzer, director of the PSU institute, said a common suggestion is to move the airport, either down the Willamette Valley or to somewhere between Vancouver, Wash., and Seattle that could be served by high-speed rail. But a move would be expensive and probably would pose land-use problems, Seltzer said, adding, "There is no easy alternative."

One key element of the master plan — the projected number of passengers in 2020 — has

changed several times since the effort was launched. The initial forecast was that 12 million would grow to 24 million, but today's passenger total is pushing 14 million a year, and the 2020 guess is now 28 million to 30 million.

Key projects in the master plan would be triggered by growth, and a sudden increase in travelers could accelerate building. When the planners first started, the idea was that a third runway would be needed by 2020, but now that date has been moved to as soon as 2015. In fact, the Port started developing parts of the last 20-year plan after only six years.

The task force also will study whether to support high-speed rail to Seattle and let Sea-Tac be-

come Portland's airport.

One Port of Portland commissioner, bookseller Michael Powell, warned that issues such as whether to add a third main runway at Portland International Airport could become a symbol of an emerging no-growth climate across the metropolitan area.

Meanwhile, airline deregulation leading to increased competition and lower ticket prices "may result in an accelerated use of the airport," he said. He cited Southwest Airlines' coast-to-coast price of \$98.

Powell, who participated in an advisory committee on the master plan, said a third runway could be an issue much sooner than expected, perhaps as soon as 2012.

— The Associated Press

# Flash flood destroys California town

FOREST FALLS, Calif. — Search dogs prowled mud and debris for more bodies on Monday after flash-flood waters 25 feet high swept homes, boulders and cars through a Southern California mountain hamlet.

"It looked just like a movie out of Hollywood," said Tristan McDow, who helped rescue an elderly woman buried to her neck in mud and debris for three hours.

Bulldozers were snaking a path through the vacation community of 3,500, but despite warnings of more heavy rain on Monday, some residents still couldn't drive out of the area, which was awash in debris that included giant pine trees, wreckage of automobiles and propane tanks.

The body of one woman was pulled from the ooze and four others were feared lost to the Sunday afternoon torrent that damaged or destroyed 15 homes, San Bernardino County fire spokesman Jack Fox said. Five people were hurt.

"It was all so quick," said Randy Thompson, 52, of Calimesa, who was barbecuing ribs with friends when sunshine suddenly turned to rain, then hail. "All of a sudden the house started trembling and the boulders starting coming."

Peggy Merryman watched in horror as floodwaters picked up houses and cars in a 60 mph rush past her Spring Drive vacation home.

"We saw them completely go. We knew there were people in them," Mrs. Merryman said, her voice cracking as she recalled the terror.

When the waters receded, Mrs.

Merryman and Thompson said there was an eerie whistling sound coming from across the street where a home once stood.

Buried in debris under a couch was an elderly neighbor man they know only as Bill. Clutching two Chihuahuas, he was whistling in hopes someone would find him and his family.

"My daughter! My daughter!" he pleaded as his neighbors taped him to a door and carried him away from the carnage.

The body of his dead daughter was beneath him and his wife was airlifted to a hospital in serious condition.

The downpour, which dropped more than 1 1/2 inches in just 30 minutes, was the latest devastation from a powerful flow of tropical moisture that has sent thunderheads towering over the Southwest for nearly a week. Last Thursday, Las Vegas was inundated with more than 3 inches of rain, flooding homes, casinos and highways.

Thunderheads soaring to 30,000 feet led the National Weather Service to post flash flood watches throughout Southern California on Monday. Urban and small stream flood advisories were also posted Monday afternoon in southern Nevada.

A break in the hot, moist weather was expected by Thursday.

Forest Falls, 70 miles northeast of Los Angeles off Highway 38 between Big Bear Lake and Redlands, is nestled at the bottom of a steep canyon along usually dry Mill Creek. Many of the town's homes are vacation and weekend retreats.

— The Associated Press

# In attempt to save kids, father drowns on coast

WARRENTON — A family trip to the beach turned tragic Saturday when a father drowned trying to rescue his daughters and a friend, who were being drawn out to sea by a frigid riptide.

A U.S. Coast Guard helicopter plucked the three girls safely from the Pacific Ocean about 200 yards offshore at Fort Stevens State Park. The helicopter retrieved 42-year-old George Babinec of Phoenix, Ariz., minutes later but he was pronounced dead at Columbia Memorial Hospital in Astoria.

His daughters Maggy, 13, and Kate Babinec, 14, and their friend Tabitha E. Roberts, 14, of Kelso, Wash., were released from the hospital after being treated for hypothermia.

The family had been camping at Fort Stevens and was among the throngs of people drawn to the beach by Saturday's sunny, warm weather. Police had to herd about 300 onlookers out of

the way during the rescue.

The ocean looked deceptively calm Saturday, with four to five rows of 2- to 3-foot breakers just off the beach, Clatsop County sheriff's Marine Deputy Willie Nyberg said. But the tide was going out and there was a strong undertow not visible from shore.

Even on hot summer days, the ocean is cold and swimmers can experience hypothermia. The air temperature on Saturday was in the 70s, but the water hovered in the 50s.

"The Pacific Ocean in this area of the world is pretty nasty," Penkin said. "Hypothermia is a year-round event here. The water is so cold and people just don't realize it."

The girls were playing in the surf west of the Peter Iredale shipwreck about 4:30 p.m. when one appeared to slip into a hole or fall down.

— The Associated Press

## News Briefs

### Smith lends support to rush-hour trains

BEAVERTON — Oregon Sen. Gordon Smith lent his support to a push to operate rush-hour passenger trains on the freight train tracks between Beaverton and Wilsonville.

"I'll help," the Republican told a gathering of state transportation officials last week. "I've always been committed to this. It's a great project."

Supporters of the 18-mile rail proposal asked Smith's help in getting commuter rail language into this year's transportation appropriations bill. That would get the project on federal planning boards and

ensure technical help from the federal transportation bureaucracy.

They also asked him for assistance with the Federal Railroad Administration in drawing up standards for a new generation of rail cars used on commuter lines and in developing a new federal policy that allows passenger cars on freight tracks.

An engineering firm estimated start-up costs for the commuter line could reach \$76 million, depending on the final configuration. Annual operating costs are projected to range between \$3.9 million and \$4.4 million.

— The Associated Press

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