

# Wild Northwest weather eases drought worries

## North Coast is mostly in 'cleanup mode'

Associated Press  
and The Daily Astorian

Fierce Northwest storms that sent rivers bursting from their banks, closed roadways and produced a rare tornado have had one positive effect — easing summer drought concerns that prompted cities to activate water shortage plans.

The storms that killed at least two people in Oregon this week were easing a bit, but forecasters said mudslide danger on the saturated hills would remain high through the weekend.

A rain-soaked hillside collapsed Wednesday north of Portland, on the main highway connecting Washington and Oregon, stranding thousands of motorists on Interstate 5. Road closures in both states frustrated drivers who were trying to navigate alternate routes taking them hours out of their way.

Two lanes were back open by Thursday night and officials said they hoped to have all three reopened by late Sunday.

### North Coast

The North Coast was under



Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

**A car drives by high water along Highway 202 near the Youngs River Thursday evening. High water shut down parts of the highway for several hours. Neighbors are bracing for more high water tomorrow.**

a flood warning until 4 today, then under a flood advisory from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. Saturday, according to the National Weather Service. As of 8 a.m. today, there had been 3.42 inches of rain in Astoria since Tuesday.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Thursday declared a state of emergency in Clatsop, Tillamook and 11 other counties because of a severe winter storm,

including high winds, flooding and landslides.

"The emergency declaration ensures state resources, emergency response personnel, and equipment can be activated to respond to communities in need if their local resources are exhausted," Brown said. Washington Gov. Jay Inslee declared a statewide emergency Wednesday.

Because of the heavy rains

and flooding, Jewell School and Neah-Kah-Nie School District remained closed today.

Access to Jewell is restricted because of intermittent flooding on Oregon Highway 202 southeast of Astoria at high tide, along with landslides that have closed Hwy. 202 between Jewell and Birkenfeld and Oregon Highway 103 north of the junction with U.S. Highway 26.

Clatsop County Public Works Director Michael Summers said travelers will see high water on other county roads during high tides over the weekend.

The high water will impact parts of Perkins Road and Dolphin Road in Warrenton and Lounsbury Lane south of Warrenton. McCormick Gardens Road in Gearhart and Tweedle Road off Highway 103 will also be affected.

"We are working to keep the signs up to date on the high water," Summers said. "Then, we will move into more of a cleanup mode, moving all of the debris off the road."

The Oregon Department of Transportation has also established a snow zone on OR 202 between Copperage and Sweede roads, asking motorists to carry chains or traction tires regardless of conditions. Another snow zone has been established on Oregon Highway 47 south of Clatskanie.

As of this morning, U.S. 26 east of the junction with Oregon Highway 53 was still restricted to two lanes because of reported erosion. There were also brief delays on U.S. Highway 30 near Rainier because of erosion.

U.S. Highway 101 at Wheeler will remain closed through the weekend. The

roadway sunk too much to allow vehicle traffic, the transportation department said. The road has been closed since Tuesday, when extremely heavy rainfall caused numerous slides and flooding throughout the area.

While the road will eventually need to be rebuilt as part of a larger emergency project, the transportation department is hoping to construct a temporary repair that would allow at least one lane of traffic to open by early next week.

Since many county roads were also damaged by the recent storms, there is no easy detour for travelers to go from Wheeler to Tillamook. The alternative route is to take OR 53 from Wheeler to U.S. 26, east on U.S. 26 to OR 6 and then west on OR 6.

In Raymond, Wash., flooding from the Willapa River blocked parts of U.S Highway 101 Thursday afternoon, cutting off the major north-south route through in Raymond, according to Pacific County Emergency Management.

More storms are coming, but nothing as strong as earlier this week. Steady rain of the usual winter variety is expected in Oregon and Washington over the next few days. The major storms have shifted south into California.

# Stranded: 'It was terrifying. I had to crawl out the window ...'

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"When we hit it, the car immediately died, we started floating to the left," Steadman said.

The Taurus was dragged by water into the parking lot of the Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping & Garden Center and the vehicle began taking in water.

"I called 911 and we said, 'The water is filling up the car so fast. My aunt is 71, she just had knee surgery,'" Steadman said. "They wanted to know where we were. They wanted us to call a tow truck. We were in danger for our lives. I felt hysterical by then."

Seaside Police Chief Dave Ham said this morning the women called at about 8 p.m. and said they were going through high water. The callers said they wanted a tow from AAA.

From the dispatcher's perspective, Ham said, they ask callers to call AAA directly.

The dispatcher said he could send a different tow truck, but it wouldn't be AAA. He told the women to call back if they needed other resources.

"The dispatcher basically said, 'Yeah, call AAA directly,'" Ham said. "Then they (the family) said 'OK.'"

Even as water was filling the car, Keno tried to call a tow truck, which did not respond.

Freezing water was up to their waists. "It was terrifying, I had to crawl out the window and get out the roof," Steadman said.

The car was still moving and tipping, she said.

"I literally had to try and open the door, then the water rushed in. We're talking freezing water," Steadman said. "It was already filled up to our seats."

Finally able to get out of the passenger side, Steadman got in 2 feet of rushing water to try to free her aunt.

While freeing Keno, Steadman banged her knee against debris floating in the flood waters. They pressed themselves against the closed building to try to stay dry.

Meanwhile, Steadman said, police, sheriff and Oregon Department of Transportation vehicles were passing nearby through the water. No one heard their screams, she said, and no one made any contact.

"I knew we had to get to high ground," Steadman said. "The water was splashing us on us, the waves were up to the building on the ramp. My aunt

couldn't climb up the walls, I couldn't pick her up.

They continued to try to signal to officials, who continued to drive by.

"Two huge ODOT trucks went by, then an ambulance," Steadman said. "Nobody is engaging. It was two hours. Our fingers weren't moving. We were lit up because of the light from the store."

Keno was hysterical at this point and trying to walk back to her car through the water, Steadman said. "We were hypothermic. They sat there and watched us."

Finally, Steadman said, an

official — she is not certain what department — came over and offered them a ride to Seaside. She said she was frustrated that, despite their condition, the official dropped them off not at the hospital, but at Safeway.

"He said to us, 'I don't have time for this, you're going to have to get a ride.'"

"We had to call a cab to get back to Astoria," Steadman said.

The next day, Steadman and Keno were treated for hypothermia and post-traumatic stress. Steadman said she is having back spasms, along with the knee injury.

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