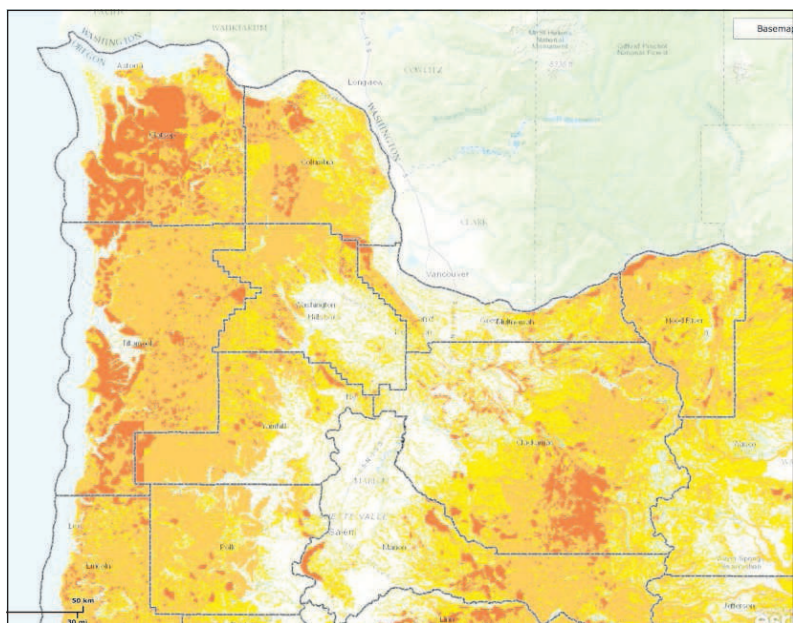


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Statewide Landslide Information Database for Oregon

Clatsop County having the state's densest concentration of sites with very high susceptibility to landslides.

Preventing landslides should be top priority

The Willapa Hills and Oregon Coast Range are comparative youngsters when it comes to mountains, having been born something like 40 million years ago, compared to 300 to 500 million years for the superficially similar Appalachian Mountains.

Like all youngsters, our local hills are subject to rapid change — including landslides, a geological equivalent of growth pains.

Human actions can trigger landslides through development, timber harvesting on steep slopes, poorly designed roads or drainage systems, and other forms of land-use malpractice. But often, landslides just happen. For example, there have been some in Cape Disappointment State Park in recent years in places no human has touched in decades, if ever.

The slide on the Upper Naselle River in Washington combines several risk factors, starting with the fact that it previously experienced severe slippage. There are questions about drainage design and a choice by Pacific County to not enforce a weight limitation, which sent many thousands of tons of logs over a fragile road with a 5-ton limit.

There have been numerous expensive landslides throughout the Lower Columbia region in recent years. A December 2007 mudslide did extensive damage in Woodson between Astoria and Clatskanie, blocking Oregon Highway 30 for a time and costing about \$1.5 million to repair. A huge slump on KM Mountain in 1990 between Naselle and Longview closed Washington State Route 4 for so long a backcountry detour was paved. In February 1998, a deep-seated earth flow in the Aldercrest neighborhood of Kelso resulted in loss of 138 homes. The list goes on and on.

The Statewide Landslide Information Database for Oregon (www.oregongeology.org/slido/index.html) shows Clatsop County having the

state's densest concentration of sites with very high susceptibility to landslides. With parallel geology but only about half as many residents, Pacific County has similar hazards but fewer chances they will impact residents.

A number of implications flow from our area's propensity to slide downhill at awkward times and places:

- Land-use planning must do better at concentrating residential growth in safer areas, while acknowledging that inevitable population growth will push housing into places prone to landslides.

- Agencies must place a top priority on personal safety in landslide-prone areas. This means enforcing weight limits on roads, funding better culverts and insisting private landowners do the same, mapping hazard zones and making sure this information reaches the public, mortgage lenders and insurers.

- Forestry practices still allow clearcut logging on slopes that are inappropriately steep, where land failures may one day put human lives or valuable natural assets like the Naselle River at risk. Local residents and agencies can be pro-forestry and yet insist that companies bear the full costs and risks associated with logging.

In an historical context, we are still in the early days of modern-style development on the far West Coast. Many generations of intense development lie ahead. Climate predictions suggest more intense rainfall events, which play a major role in triggering slides. It is crucial we lay a rational groundwork now to avoid expensive and dangerous mistakes in the centuries ahead.

GUEST COLUMN

Oregon lawmakers should take cue from Florida's sunshine laws

By JOHN SEPULVADO
Oregon Public Broadcasting

In elementary school, Franklin Weekley was diagnosed as “mentally retarded.” He was slow to learn, but quick to act out on impulse.

Teachers at his rural school were unequipped to get a handle on him. Weekley ended up spending much of his time at home. Unsupervised, he would often get in trouble.

Weekley fought with his siblings and raged at his neighbors. He was fascinated with fire and explosives, and was quick to run away in frustration. His parents — who were also developmentally disabled — hoped Weekley would grow out of it.

In 2001, that hope went up in smoke — literally — after Weekley set his family home on fire. The family lost everything, including their son, who was committed to a state-run mental facility as a result.

While in state care, Weekley vanished one day. The state agency in charge of his care would claim the developmentally disabled teenager — who had problems dressing himself — ran to Canada. But around 2004, an attorney heard about the disappearance. That attorney told a reporter, and soon after, the reporter filed public records request with the state agency in charge.

Those records showed that state contractors had found a body in an abandoned building on the property shortly after Weekley's disappearance.

The records showed the body was badly decomposed, but around the skeleton's hips was an elastic underwear band with “F.Weekley” written on the tag. A reporter's investigation found Weekley had run away into an abandoned building and fell down an elevator shaft, where he died.

Shortly after that story was published, the state agreed to pay Franklin Weekley's parents \$1.3 million.

Strong public records laws have the ability to right wrongs, hold state workers — including politicians — accountable, and shine a light into the



Photo by Cameron Browne

John Sepulvado

darkest recesses of government — like the bottom of a derelict elevator shaft on state-owned property. Public records laws help keep things honest.

That was the case in Florida, where Franklin Weekley died. Yet if that were to happen in Oregon, it's a good bet that Weekley's whereabouts would still be unknown. That's because a public records request for a case like Weekley's would almost certainly be obstructed by delays, exemption claims and high costs.

If it's good enough for Florida, it should be good enough for Oregon.

“The current state of public records is poor to pathetic,” said *Willamette Week* reporter Nigel Jaquiss. “The

public agencies have no deadlines to require to public records request, so they often do so slowly and incompletely. Some public agencies use their ability to charge whatever they want in a punitive fashion.”

Jaquiss, a Pulitzer Prize winner for Investigative Reporting, routinely files public records requests — and he said state agencies often find reasons to block requests because they “fear publication of a story that would be embarrassing.”

As Jaquiss noted, there are no deadlines for Oregon agencies to respond to requests, nor are there limits to costs. Even if the agencies do respond, there are more than 500 exemptions to the state's public records laws. And while some of the exemptions serve the public good by protecting the victims of domestic abuse, or shielding state employee medical information, other exemptions include dog licenses, information about boat accidents and complaints filed by consumers about

insurance companies, manufactured homes, and even the state's judges.

In comparison, Florida has four exemptions of public records, there are deadlines for when responses must be filed and costs must correlate with work performed and be clearly outlined. Legal challenges to this obstruction are often long and costly and it creates an Oregon where only those with resources have access to transparency.

While the state's reporters have long complained about the state's open records laws, national research shows Oregon has some of the weakest open records rules in the country. According to the Center for Public Integrity, Oregon earns an “F” grade in the State Integrity Investigation, which measures “transparency and accountability grades for all 50 states.”

The state also earns an “F” grade measuring the public's access to information, ranking 34th in the country. For context, Florida is ranked 17th (and neighboring California and Washington ranked 28th and 32nd, respectively).

The Oregon Territory Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists is calling on policymakers to reform Oregon's open record laws. Our membership believes that if it's good enough for Florida, it should be good enough for Oregon. We urge the public to support that reform.

And we encourage all journalists and voters to hold policymakers accountable until that reform is achieved.

John Sepulvado, OPB's Weekend Edition host and a member of the Oregon SPJ Sunshine Committee, wrote this on behalf of the Oregon Territory Chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists board. Reach the chapter through spjoregon@gmail.com.

Trumping around on eggshells

By FRANK BRUNI
New York Times News Service

I recently asked a good friend where her boss stood on Donald Trump.

This wasn't an idle question.

Her boss gives big money to Republican candidates. He's both power broker and weather vane. And she talks politics with him all the time.

But she has no idea about him and Trump. She hasn't inquired, because she doesn't want to know. She's fond of her boss. She respects him. But what if he's made peace with a candidate who called for a ban on all Muslims entering the United States, mocked a disabled journalist, belittled John McCain's experience as a prisoner of war, praised Vladimir Putin's thuggish leadership style, complimented the Chinese government on its brutal handling of the uprising in Tiananmen Square, made misogynistic remarks galore and boasted during a debate about the size of his penis?

She can't go there.

I understand.

I have many relatives who loyally vote Republican, regardless of their excitement about the particular nominee. There's a definite chance that some of them back Trump. So I steer clear of talk about this election, though we've spoken plenty — and placidly — about every other election.

One of these relatives routinely pushes back at any Trump-negative columns I write, and I've convinced myself that he's just baiting me and playing devil's advocate. I've never said to him, point blank, “Are you actually voting for Trump?” And I won't. It's my goal to get to and through Election Day without learning the truth.

There are various measures of the chilling singularity of Trump's candidacy, including the last two Republican presidents' announcement that they won't be attending their party's convention, all the prominent GOP donors who have publicly rejected Trump and the stubborn drumbeat among some Republicans for a third-party challenger, if only as a means to assure Hillary Clinton's victory. These are extraordinary developments. We mustn't forget that.

But another gauge of this freaky interlude is the number of us who are steadfastly avoiding conversations we'd normally have. We pride ourselves on not letting political arguments disrupt personal relationships. We have friends across the ideological spectrum. We esteem leaders from both parties. We value a healthy give-and-take.

But we can't fit Trump into that. He's a disagreement too far, an enthusiasm too bizarre. So we're treading lightly and maneuvering around him. We're Trumping on eggshells.

That's not the same as burying our heads in the sand, and it's not a squandered opportunity to dissuade someone from Trump. Most Trump supporters aren't ignorant of the litany I presented above. They've decided not to be bothered by it. They've crafted a counterargument. I've heard it.

At least he's not Clinton, they say. True. Neither is Kim Kardashian. Shall we elect her? Her husband, Kanye West, has said that he might run in 2020. Let's accelerate the timetable and speed the couple to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Trump has a furtive decency and unsung sensitive side, or so his boosters claim. They cite his relationship with his grown children. You know



Frank Bruni

who else is an obviously loving and beloved parent? Clinton. You know who had a strained relationship with his kids? Ronald Reagan. If that wasn't a mark against him, why is the opposite a gold star for Trump?

But Trump will be a competent executive! Let's assume that's so. Will he be executing a Muslim ban? In that case, wouldn't incompetence be preferable?

Enough about the Muslim ban, his accommodators respond: He doesn't believe in three-quarters of what he puts out there. It's all theater.

Great! So what does he believe in? Are we supposed to guess and hope for the best? And will his theatrical impulse dissipate when he takes the oath of office? Or will it flare now and again, sending markets into turmoil and ships into battle?

With Clinton, they say, we get the status quo. With Trump we get disruption.

Possibly. But disruption cuts many different ways. And Trump's particular disruption could leave us in shreds. To some of us, Trump is a fundamentally unserious person, and thus a dangerous one. To others, he's a vessel of grievance and protest, and that's enough. The chasm between those viewpoints isn't easily bridged. So we take detours around it. They're as elaborate as cloverleafs.

Friends have asked me about the leanings of other friends, because they shudder to find out for themselves. Relatives have grilled me on other relatives. I'm acquainted with anti-Trump Republicans who have purged the billionaire from their discourse with Trump-acquiescent Republicans, simply so they can press on.

There will be epic ugliness in the foreground of this election. But pockets of silence in the background will be just as unsettling, because they'll reflect a despair and bafflement beyond words.