

'Washaway Beach' tries to change its fate

Residents, tribe fight against the rising water

By AMY NILE
Chinook Observer

NORTH COVE, Wash. — There's more than disaster porn to see here.

David Cottrell, a fourth-generation cranberry grower, is tired of storm chasers and TV news crews coming to North Cove for a look as thundering winter tides pull his neighbors' homes into the Pacific.

The small community north of Willapa Bay is determined not to go down with its nickname — "Washaway Beach."

Unrelenting saltwater scours off more than 100 feet of the shore around North Cove most years. That makes it the fastest-eroding spot on the West Coast, according to the Washington Department of Ecology.

Since last winter, cranberry growers and neighbors have been experimenting with a different way to slow the encroaching ocean. While their work was put to its first test during the January storm and king tides that pounded the shore, state lawmakers hammered out a deal on the construction budget. It includes \$650,000 for North Cove erosion control.

The sea has already swallowed more than 50 homes, a school, a Coast Guard station, a lighthouse, a clam cannery, a grange hall, a post office and the town of North Cove itself.

A gritty fight

For decades, experts and officials have been telling people who live around the inlet south of Westport there was nothing they could do to preserve it or at least nothing they could afford, Cottrell said. But with homes teetering on the shoreline, the ocean eating the western edge of the street grid, and saltwater threatening to cross State Route 105 and kill cranberry crops, people are pulling together to protect North Cove — at least for awhile.

"We're rolling up our sleeves and doing it with whatever we've got," Cottrell, 59, said. "Now's the time to do something. We know if we do nothing, we're going to fail."

The chairman of the local drainage district and longtime Grayland Cranberry Growers Association board member learned about a way to build a barrier to protect the shore that's had some success in Oregon and California. He wondered if it would work for North Cove, so the diking district started testing it.

Now, Cottrell, fellow farmers and neighbors are hauling bulldozer loads of cobble-size basalt to the beach and piling it with driftwood and other natural materials along the shoreline. Unlike a seawall made of large boulders and concrete, a barrier with smaller stones moves and shakes as it absorbs the destructive force of the waves, more closely mimicking nature. It's also cheaper and easier to build, Cottrell said.

After decades of hearing North Cove was doomed, the community is rallying behind building the dune.

"We're all 'can-do' kind of people," Cottrell said.



Photos by Natalie St. John/Chinook Observer



TOP, Homeowners have tried all kinds of tactics to slow the erosion in the northern Pacific County community of North Cove, known to many as 'Washaway Beach.' Despite their best efforts, homes continue to fall into the sea at an astonishing rate. LEFT, A beached boat and a bridge to nowhere overlook the remains of the elaborate driftwood and salvaged rope barrier that one late-coming resident began building in 2014. He hoped his makeshift berm would buy him 10 years. Less than three years later, much of the protected area is gone. RIGHT, Wearing his custom 'Wash Away No More' jacket, resident David Cottrell checked on properties at the water's edge during an unusually high tide in January.

The section of the barrier they've already put in place held up to the crashing king tides, turbulent sea and roaring winds last month.

"It was a really good shakeup for our work," Cottrell said. "But we're taking it one storm at a time. Right now, I'd love to get through the winter without losing anything."

After the mid-January storm relented, Cottrell found about 30 feet of shore had eroded away at the worst spots. That's compared to roughly 150 feet during the last storm of similar strength a couple of winters ago.

Although the barrier is keeping the water at bay, it's not a long-term solution.

"I describe it like putting one can of paint on a house — it looks better but it's not done yet," Cottrell said.

Damming on the Columbia River and dredging in Willapa Bay contributed to erosion of the sand spit that supported the now underwater town of North Cove, in an area once known as Cape Shoalwater.

The barrier dune that used to protect it has washed away. As the ocean erodes the shore, storm surges and flooding reach farther inland. Rising sea levels also threaten the area.

Guillaume Mauger, a research scientist with the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group, said by the most optimistic projections, the ocean is expected to rise at least 6 inches by 2100. Although climate models vary widely, many indicate it could go up more than 6 feet.

"Even really small changes are going to be important," Mauger said.

A 6-inch rise in sea level could bring 100-year floods every few years, he said. And 6 inches during the next 50 years, is "pretty much guaranteed."

Mauger said Washington state is more likely to see a rise of about 2 feet by the century's end. That's three times the 4 to 8 inches it rose during the previous 100 years. And people aren't thinking about that, he said.

Scientists are just starting to scratch the surface of what's to come in terms of potential effects of climate change, Mauger said. He expects the costs of dealing with them will outweigh budgets by far.

Scientists don't need to agree on how much sea level is going to rise, Mauger said. They know it's going up. He suggests people and local, state and federal governments

\$50,000 for homeowners to extend the project.

Cottrell had hoped to get more conservation money for the work this year. But he was told the county didn't have it because the Legislature delayed approval of the construction budget.

Meantime, the Pacific County Marine Resource Committee stepped in with \$10,000 to shore up some of the worst spots this winter.

The North Willapa Harbor Grange is raising money to buy more basalt from a quarry in Raymond and extend the barrier. Volunteers are selling stickers, T-shirts and reusable grocery bags that say "Wash Away" in faded gray letters with "No More" printed over the top in bold red.

The Grayland non-profit is also taking donations online at gofundme.com/wash-away-no-more.

"People are more positive now that they're more involved," Shoalwater Bay Tribe Chairwoman Charlene Nelson said.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is hiring a contractor to rebuild the berm that helps protect the tribe's reservation near Tokeland. The fed-

eral agency expects to spend \$10 million to \$25 million to repair damaged sections of the 25-foot-tall, 12,000-foot-long barrier by early 2019, according to a government description of the project.

Last spring, Nelson went to Washington, D.C., to ask Congress for \$480,000 to plan to move the tribe upland and build a road for tsunami and storm evacuation. She told lawmakers the berm the Army Corps finished four years earlier had temporarily halted erosion that threatened the reservation and SR 105, which connects the surrounding area to schools, grocery stores, health care, banks and housing. According to a transcript of her May testimony, she told a federal budget subcommittee efforts to protect the area from erosion revealed the need for the tribe to move inland.

Relocating away from the ocean shoreline isn't an idea unique to the Shoalwaters. North along the coast, the Quinalt Indian Nation is working to move the village of Taholah at the mouth of the Quinalt River to higher ground due to threats from tsunamis, storm surge and riverine flooding. And in 2012 federal legislation allocated 785 acres of former Olympic National Park land as a new site for the Quileute Tribe's town of La Push.

The state Department of Transportation started work last summer on a \$3.6 million restoration of a berm that reinforces SR 105 near North Cove. Crews are scheduled to finish adding cobble to stabilize damaged sections of the barrier this winter.

"The rocks take some of the punch out of the ocean," Department of Transportation spokesman Bart Treece said, adding a longer-term solution is needed.

In the meantime, the work is expected to improve highway safety between Aberdeen and Raymond and reduce the need for costly emergency repairs and unexpected closures. The state departments of ecology and fish and wildlife are also working to combat coastal erosion.

Hope floats

Cottrell and others are hoping to expand their project and help find better ways to manage coastal erosion. As seas rise and communities begin drowning across the globe, lessons from work in North Cove could not only help protect its homes and farms, but benefit other areas as well.

"So everything is on the line for us," Cottrell said.

Nelson said people seem more hopeful now that the community and the tribe have come together with county, state and federal agencies to fight erosion.

"It's the individual voice that makes a difference," she said. "There has to be people saying we're not leaving, we're looking for a solution."

'Now's the time to do something. We know if we do nothing, we're going to fail.'

David Cottrell

Fourth-generation cranberry grower and North Cove resident

Rising seas are likely to take over parts of Washington's coast and cause more frequent and severe flooding in others. The saltwater could damage infrastructure such as wastewater treatment sites, storm drains and roads, contaminate groundwater and kill crops. Rising temperatures and ocean acidification threaten marine life, putting the food supply and the economy at risk.

start planning for the change now.

"We need to be looking at this through the climate lens," he said.

'Wash Away' no more

The Pacific Conservation District provided a \$50,000 grant last year to build the first stretch of the barrier, Cottrell said. The local drainage district also helped get another

Especially
For Seniors

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR!
½ PRICE WEDNESDAYS
60 & OVER EAT FOR HALF PRICE ALL DAY

CHECK OUT OUR
\$6 DAILY SOUP & LUNCH SPECIALS

MON: TRIPLE GRILLED CHEESE WITH TOMATO BASIL SOUP
TUE: CHICKEN SALAD WRAP WITH MINESTRONE SOUP
WED: BOWL OF BLACK & WHITE BEAN CHILI AND CORNBREAD
THU: FRENCH DIP WITH POTATO LEEK SOUP
FRI: COD FISH TACOS WITH A CILANTRO LIME SAUCE AND RICE
OUR SOUPS ARE, OF COURSE, HOMEMADE

OPEN DAILY AT 11AM
NORMA'S
SEAFOOD & STEAK

1 BLOCK OFF BROADWAY • 1 BLOCK FROM BEACH
20 N. COLUMBIA, SEASIDE • 503-738-4331
NormasSeaside.com

EMERALD HEIGHTS APARTMENTS

503-325-8221
2 & 3 BEDROOM APARTMENTS

All Rents Include: Electricity • Garbage • Water

ASK ABOUT NEWLY REMODELED APARTMENTS

WANTED
Alder and Maple Saw Logs & Standing Timber
Northwest Hardwoods • Longview, WA
Contact: John Anderson • 360-269-2500

Volunteer Pick of the Week
Luna
Nine year old Tuxedo American Shorthair
Play, nap, and wake up softly in the company of a kindly little fur-person.
(More on <http://Petfinder.com/>)

Sponsored by **Winnipeg Borne LUMINARI ARTS**
CLATSOP COUNTY ANIMAL SHELTER
1315 SE 19th Street, Warrenton • 861-PETS
www.dogscats.org Noon to 4pm, Tues-Sat

Astoria Band Boosters
CAN & BOTTLE DRIVE
1 P.M. - 3 P.M. • SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4TH
AT ASTORIA HIGH SCHOOL
PLEASE, NO EARLY DROP-OFFS
Check the Label!
Items must have the 10 cent, OR redemption label in order to benefit the band programs
The Band Boosters are the primary source of funds to keep Astoria's school band programs functioning. Please help by dropping off your empties or making a donation.
Call (503) 791-8134
or email i_want_to_help@astoriabands.org
for more information.