

# Landslide: 'Nature happens'

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The primary tree species that would have been left behind in the buffer corridor were big leaf maple and red alder, "neither of which are strongly desired along highways due to their tendency for phototropism and failure on the highway during wind, snow (and) ice events," stated a November 2017 letter from the Department of Transportation's forester to the Department of Forestry.

## Not surprised

Homeowners on neighboring and nearby properties said they were not surprised that the area slid. Some had watched harvest operations underway on the hill from their houses. As trees went down, they wondered if there could be problems later.

"It's unfortunate they logged it the way they did," said Doug Gisselberg, who lives across the highway from the slide. But, he and his wife, Liz, concluded: "Nature happens."

They hope the slide is isolated to the one area: the waterfall of dirt they can see beyond their property. To them, the danger feels farther east.

Kendrick George and his wife purchased property to the east of Area 11 and built their house there three years ago. At the time, the state land next door was all tall trees. The Georges thought how nice it was to be backed against forestland. But they did have concerns when the timber sale went through and harvest began.

George recalled thinking, "OK, that's going to create some issues on this hill."

"And sure enough it did," he said.

Still, slides happen, he added, especially in coastal areas in the Pacific Northwest. He and his wife had seen smaller slide activity next door at the start of the rainy season this year.

"Once stuff starts growing back it will be fine," he said.

After the big slide, George spoke to state engineers who came from Salem to evaluate the situation and asked, "Is this going to keep moving towards my property?"

One of the engineers replied, "Geologically speaking, someday the whole hill will come down."

But geologic time is measured in extensive scales: decades, centuries, eons, George thought. His takeaway from the conversation: Parts of that hill will continue to come down forever.

"I don't think it's going to impact my property any time soon," he said. "It's got a lot of room in the other direction."

## Hard to pin down

For decades, researchers have looked at the correlation between clearcut logging and shallow landslides. But it can be hard to pin down one main cause for any landslide, particularly in historically unstable landscapes, said Lou Torres, a spokesman for the Department of Transportation.

"We know the human factor can complicate things, but it's really difficult to make a determination unless you study a particular site," he said. "We typically don't do a very in-depth study (afterward)."

The department's responsibility is the road, he added. "There's so many uses of land around our roads and we only have so much say in what people do on these properties," he said.

Area 11 included a small stream, and several springs run through the property. The parcel is in a general area already known to be prone to landslides, Torres said. Also, he added, "we had 3 to 4 inches of rain in about 24 hours ... Whenever you have that you have a tendency to see slides."

Much of Astoria exists in a historical slide zone and landslides can be common on the coast. At the same time the Department of Transportation dealt with landslide debris on Highway 30, state crews were addressing another slide on

state Highway 202.

Last week, following more rain and blustery winter days, a landslide pushed a house on Alameda Avenue off its foundation and across the sidewalk. The homeowner believes a leaking city sewer pipe may have contributed to that slide.

Though Area 11 had been replanted, the young trees were not enough to hold earth in place when the rains hit. Now, there are plans to hydroseed the hillside to help with erosion control and the Department of Forestry will have to replant the unit.

The earliest Area 11 could be logged again would be 35 or 40 years from now.

"What the harvest mechanisms will be at that time could be a lot different," Williams said. "Right now we're bringing it back to a forested condition."

The decision to log the slope was the result of a collaborative discussion between the two state departments and their various geotechnical, wildlife and forestry specialists, Williams said. At the time, before the harvest, there was no evidence of recent erosion.

"We did our due diligence," Williams said. "Prior to harvest it was in our plan for two years."

The slide was considered "medium-sized" in terms of the volume of material that came down the slope and the amount of work it took to clear.

Torres estimates it could cost the Department of Transportation several hundred thousand dollars in the end. The state budgets money for these types of emergencies and may also be able to access funds through the Federal Highway Administration.

"This is pretty normal stuff for us," Torres said. "The problem is we've had so many abnormally dry winters over the last 10 years ... people have sort of forgotten what that's like living out here sometimes and, really, landslides are a part of it: the flooding, the landslides, the debris flows."



The Astoria Nordic Heritage Park will occupy a strip of land between the Astoria Riverwalk and Marine Drive, with flags to represent Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

Astoria Scandinavian Heritage Association

## Nordic park: 'A real asset for everybody'

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interpretive panels explaining the heritage of Scandinavians in the region.

Judi Lampi, the chairwoman of the park committee, said more than 70% of donations have come from individuals. The park has also received several grants, including \$27,000 from the Oregon Cultural Trust to install interpretive panels and \$2,000 to hire a fundraising consultant.

"A lot of grants got diverted for COVID relief, and so hopefully when life

hopefully gets back to normal, then we can start looking for some other grants. But individual donors are really what have come through for us."

Janet Bowler, the vice chairwoman of the park committee, said the association has reached out to locals with Scandinavian heritage, along with their family and friends. The association has also reached out to the embassies of Scandinavia, along with Scandinavian companies such as Norwegian Cruise Line, with ships operating in the

Columbia River, albeit with no response, Bowler said.

"We're trying every place we can, because we've asked most of the locals three to five times already," she said. "So we realize to finish the project, we'll need to seek new donors."

"Now that we're so close to the end, we hope that the general community will help too," Bowler said. "Because the park is for all Astorians, not just the Nordic community. It's going to be a real asset for everybody."

## Francis: 'The community means a lot to me'

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gas project at Bradwood Landing.

Emotions ran high over LNG as people offered divergent views on what the commissioners should consider. Once, Francis had to gavel a hearing to a close and physically eject a man who refused to step down after his allotted time to offer public testimony ran out.

During his years on the Planning Commission, on numerous local committees, on the Skipanon Water Control District board and his roles with the Shoreline Estates Homeowners Association and the Shoreline Sanitary District, Francis has stuck to a basic set of principles when it comes

to settling disputes or making decisions.

"You stay neutral and you don't get political," he said. "I always made decisions based on the rule of law."

He did not come in with an agenda other than the desire to serve his community, he said.

While he was not always personally happy with a decision, if the county rules allowed for a type of development while he was on the Planning Commission, for example, he said it was his duty to uphold those rights and rules and not be swayed by his own whims or the emotions in the room.

Francis said his parents provided him with a strong moral base, while the rig-

ors of life on the Australian continent instilled independence and self-reliance.

As he faced the final days of his job and volunteer commitments this month, Francis found himself "quite emotional."

"The community means a lot to me," he said.

But retirement does not mean a seat on a couch in front of a television set. A former contractor and an avid archer, Francis plans to keep busy and already has a roster of projects drawn up: a playground to build his three grandchildren in Texas, a new window to install at his son's house.

"Life is so enjoyable," he said. "I love people and I love interacting with them and that's all I need."

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