

Civilian pilots, cyclists rehearse aid delivery after Cascadia

By TOM BANSE

Northwest News Network

A huge dress rehearsal for regional earthquake disaster relief was supposed to happen this week until the ongoing pandemic forced it to be shrunk and moved online. The original Cascadia Rising 2022 exercise would have involved more than 22,000 participants — chiefly U.S. soldiers, sailors and airmen as well as state, local and tribal emergency planners. Some smaller drills were set to go ahead last weekend and next featuring civilian volunteers who will demonstrate unusual ways aid may get to Pacific Northwest earthquake survivors.

On Saturday, around 40 to 50 cargo bike riders were set to compete in a disaster relief drill in Portland. This weekend, more than 100 private pilots from Oregon, Washington state and British Columbia, Canada, will take to the skies to shuttle food from airfield to airfield in another mock quake relief effort.

The drill scenarios entail a magnitude 9.0 full rip of the offshore Cascadia earthquake fault from Vancouver Island to northern California — aka “the Big One.” That brings widespread devastation west of the Cascade Range in Oregon and Washington state. The highways to the east, north and south are severed.

In this worst-case scenario, help will come from above, said Sky Terry, the Northwest regional director of the Emergency Volunteer Air Corps. Terry likened his organization’s one-day exercise to a “Berlin Airlift effort.”

“The other analogy would be the China-Burma hop in World War II,” Terry said. “You lose the land route. All you’ve got is air to supply everything and keep it going.”

Terry said private pilots are prepared to go into the breach, presumably alongside the National Guard when the Big One happens for real. The offshore fault last ruptured in Janu-



Clallam County DART and Sara Harrington

Private pilots and cyclists were set to take to the air and the streets this month to practice delivering relief supplies after a catastrophic earthquake.

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Mike Cobb | event co-founder

ary 1700, spawning a tsunami that reached all the way across the Pacific to Japan. Cascadia megaquakes typically happen every 250 to 800 years. That puts the present-day well within the return window.

The aerial relief drill, dubbed Thunder Run, will begin with private pilots launching from Walla Walla, Washington, and Langley, British Columbia, where boxes of food are being stockpiled for distribution into western Washington and Oregon.

“The way to look at Walla Walla is that it is the out-of-impact area hub for the general aviation response,” said Terry, who formerly served as a communications operator in the U.S. Army. “That’s the aircraft carrier that is just outside the battle zone throwing support into the fray, but planes can come back and resources come back and it

still has all the normal communication to the outside world.”

But wait, won’t the destination airports such as Renton, Bellingham, Hoquiam, Shelton and Port Angeles in Washington and Aurora, Albany and Creswell in Oregon be wrecked and unusable after the Big One? Terry replied that the backbone of the private airlift will be nimble little Cessnas, Bonanzas, Mooneys and Piper planes.

“We don’t necessarily have to use an airport,” Terry said. “We can use a stretch of Highway 101 or I-5 or any long two-lane stretch of road. So, we’re not totally dependent on having all the airports survive.”

Event organizers have collected roughly 60,000 pounds of boxed food for this one-day drill. The volunteer pilots, amateur radio operators and ground crews at the

destinations including from the Civil Air Patrol will hand over the cargos to food banks to simulate bringing aid to an earthquake disaster zone.

Terry said another goal is to demonstrate to state and federal authorities the capabilities of general aviation and inspire confidence. He got the attention of the Washington State Emergency Management Division, where Robert Ezelle is the director.

“When our state suffers the anticipated Cascadia earthquake and tsunami, it will take every resource we have to get our communities the help they need,” Ezelle said via email. “Volunteers will be a necessity, and we constantly look at how they’ll be incorporated into our response.”

Separate from the aerial relief drill, bicyclists in Portland were set to practice how to distribute disaster relief

on two wheels. Not just any two wheels — on sturdy cargo bikes, some capable of schlepping up to 200 pounds. Event co-founder Mike Cobb said cargo bikes are ideal to get airlifted supplies across the last mile to recipients in neighborhoods.

“There might be 3,000 or 5,000 cargo bikers in Portland. You can bet that a good portion of those people are going to want to help,” Cobb said. “So, we’re going to optimize a system to deploy these willing and capable cargo bikers.”

This was set to be the sixth edition in Portland of what is known as the Disaster Relief Trials. Previously, there were corollary bike events in Seattle, Bend and Eugene. Cobb says the drill takes the form of a friendly competition. Bicyclists must visit seven checkpoints during the drill, pick up cargo along the way and scale obstacles meant to

mimic earthquake wreckage, including a 1-meter-high barrier.

“Preparedness doesn’t need to be dour, laborious and boring,” Cobb said. “If it is all those things, you’re going to get less citizen participation.”

Cobb explained that he and his co-organizers coordinated with the Portland Bureau of Emergency Management so that the cargo bike competition represents a realistic extension of neighborhood disaster relief plans. The bureau helped promote the event.

If you don’t happen to own a small airplane or a cargo bike, there are other ways to be inspired to prepare for the Big One. The start and finish line of the 2022 Disaster Relief Trials in northeast Portland’s Cully Park was simultaneously set to be the scene of a resilience fair. Manzanita will host its own emergency preparedness fair on Thursday. In coastal Lincoln County, the communities of Depoe Bay, Newport and Lincoln City were also set to conduct disaster rehearsals heavily reliant on volunteers.

Replacing benefits of Snake River dams would cost billions, report says

By NICHOLAS K.

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Associated Press

The benefits provided by four giant hydroelectric dams on the lower Snake River in Washington state can be replaced if the dams are breached to save endangered salmon runs, according to a new report released Thursday.

But it would be expensive.

Finding other ways to provide electricity, irrigation and enabling commerce would cost between \$10.3 billion and \$27.2 billion, said the report commissioned by Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat, and U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, a Washington Democrat.

The draft report does not make any recommendations on whether the four dams should be breached. A decision on that divisive issue is expected later. Instead, the report allows the public, tribes, river users and other stakeholders to provide input over the next month that will inform that decision.

“We continue to approach

the question of breaching with open minds and without a predetermined decision,” Inslee and Murray said in a press release.

“Every community in the Pacific Northwest knows the value and importance of our iconic salmon runs — and every community recognizes the importance of salmon to our economy and cultural heritage,” they said. “We each remain firmly committed to saving our salmon.”

Breaching the dams would significantly improve the ability of salmon and steelhead to swim from their inland spawning grounds to the Pacific Ocean, where they spend most of their lives, and then back to their original spawning grounds to procreate and die, the report said.

Major benefits of the dams include making the Snake River navigable up to Lewiston, Idaho, allowing barges to carry wheat and other crops to ocean ports. Eliminating the dams would require truck and rail transportation improvements to move crops, the report said.

The dams also generate electricity, provide irrigation water for farmers and recreation opportunities for people, the report said.

The dams have many supporters, including two GOP members of Congress representing eastern Washington state. The dams are also supported by barge companies, farmers and other business interests. Breaching them would require an act of Congress.

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse and U.S. Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, both Republi-

cans of eastern Washington, introduced a bill on Thursday to protect the dams, which are located in their districts. “Breaching the four lower Snake River dams would be harmful to our communities, our environment, and our economy,” Newhouse said.

“What’s alarming is trying to breach them at a time when families in eastern Washington are paying record-high energy costs just to keep the lights on this summer,” McMorris Rodgers said.

But the chairman of the Yakama Nation said the

dams must be breached.

“Our people are salmon people,” said tribal council chairman Delano Saluskin. “When the salmon thrive, we thrive; but when they suffer, our people suffer too.”

Exploring the Columbia River basin in 1805, Lewis and Clark wrote of waterways so full with salmon that you could all but walk across on their backs.

In the late 1800s, up to 16 million salmon and steelhead returned to the Columbia River basin every year to spawn. Over the next cen-

tury and a half, overfishing whittled that number down. By the early 1950s, just under 130,000 Chinook were returning to the Snake River.

Construction of the first dam on the lower river, Ice Harbor, began in 1955. Lower Monumental followed in 1969, Little Goose in 1970, and Lower Granite in 1975. The dams stretch from Pasco, Washington, to near Pullman, Washington, and stand between migrating salmon and 5,500 miles of spawning habitat in central Idaho.

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