

Washington town wary of slow-moving landslide

By ELAINE THOMPSON and NICHOLAS K. GERANIOS
Associated Press

UNION GAP, Wash. — A slow-moving landslide in a fertile farming region in Washington state has forced evacuations as officials prepare for what they say is inevitable — the collapse of a ridge that sits above a few dozen homes and a key highway.

People in Washington are especially wary of landslides following one in 2014 north of Seattle that swept through a tiny community and across a state road, killing dozens.

Experts say the slide could happen as soon as late January or early February above Union Gap, a small agricultural town in the rolling brown foothills of the Cascade Range. A chunk of one ridge about the size of 24 football fields is expected to break off, spilling an estimated 4 million cubic yards of rocks and dirt.

Opinions on the impact vary widely, ranging from little damage to widespread flooding, especially in Union Gap. Some worry floodwaters will stretch into Yakima, which has 94,000 residents and sits just a few miles away.

Also nearby are the Yakima River and Interstate 82, which connects Oregon to busy Interstate 90.

I-82 is the main route through central Washington's Yakima Valley, which produces many of America's hops, cherries, apples and mint. The state has deemed it safe to remain open but has placed 44 shipping containers — filled with concrete barriers and weighing 9 to 14 tons each — at the bottom of the ridge to keep random rocks from tumbling into traffic.

The hillside has been sliding since at least October, when



Shawn Gust/Yakima Herald-Republic via AP, File

In this Jan. 3 file photo, a crack in Rattlesnake Ridge is seen extending from a gravel pit up and across the ridge near Union Gap, Wash.

authorities began monitoring huge cracks in Rattlesnake Ridge's western slope. At that time, the landslide was moving at less than an inch per day. More recently, it has been measured sliding at 2.5 inches per day.

Looming over all this are memories of a massive March 22, 2014, landslide in the community of Oso. That slide killed 43 people and covered 1 square mile with mud and debris. And more recently this month's deadly landslide in Southern California.

Authorities have already evacuated about 60 residents who live in trailers and a few buildings near Union Gap, population 6,000. They are staying in paid hotel rooms for

five weeks, although their future accommodations are up in the air.

Alejandro Mejia has lived below the ridge for about 14 years, and last week helped family members move some of their belongings.

"I feel kind of terrible ... that the hill is going to fall," Mejia said, calling it a "life or death situation."

Mejia said he has climbed up the ridge to look at the fracture in the ground.

"It's pretty wide, the crack up there," Mejia said. "It's way, way deep."

Flooding is a worst-case scenario, said Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, who toured the site earlier this month.

"It is not predicted for this to

happen," Inslee said, noting emergency preparations are nonetheless in place for Union Gap.

Asked about the possibility of the slide reaching and damming the Yakima River, Inslee said geologists have indicated that is unlikely.

Still, "we have to make sure we monitor this on an hourly basis because if something changes, we want to be able to respond on a minute-by-minute response plan," the governor said.

"That is the very, very worst case scenario," Lisa Freund, spokeswoman for the Yakima Valley Office of Emergency Management, said of the river being dammed by a slide. Freund said officials do not know what triggered the cracking.

Oregon partygoer says no argument preceded triple shooting

SPRINGFIELD (AP) — A man whose brother was among three people shot at an Oregon birthday party says the alleged gunman was probably struggling with a combination of "drugs, alcohol and bad feelings."

Dakota Pander, 21, said no argument preceded the gunfire at Saturday's party in Springfield. People were laughing and playing video games when party host Jordan Ledbetter nonchalantly went into his bedroom and returned with a gun.

"We were having fun," Pander

told *The Register-Guard*. "It just started off completely normal. We had a perfectly normal day. And then Jordan I guess decided that he was going into his room to get his gun."

Pander's brother, 24-year-old Garrett Petersen, died in the attack and two others were wounded.

Toxicology results are pending, but Springfield Police Lt. Scott McKee said Tuesday it's believed that Ledbetter was under the influence of LSD. Pander told the newspaper that Ledbetter had been drinking and using drugs, though

he didn't specify the drug.

Ledbetter has been charged with murder, assault and unlawful use of a weapon. Court records did not list an attorney to speak on his behalf before Tuesday's arraignment in Eugene.

Pander said everyone at the party was friends with Ledbetter.

Pander said he was sitting on the couch playing video games when he heard someone say, "Woah, he's got a real gun!"

Then, the first shot rang out. "I froze," he said. "I thought, 'What the hell is going on?'"

He heard two more shots before grabbing the assailant from behind. He said another partygoer — one with a gunshot wound to a bicep — took the weapon away.

Pander held Ledbetter down until police arrived: "I can't remember what he was saying, but a bunch of things, nonsense."

Police said it took four officers to detain Ledbetter.

Pander's brother died during surgery several hours later.

McKee said the victims who survived have been released from the hospital.

BRIEFLY

Business group asks Congress for protection for marijuana

SEATTLE (AP) — A group representing marijuana business owners in the West is urging Congress to include language in a government spending bill that would protect pot operations.

The Western Regional Cannabis Business Alliance said Tuesday it is asking for legislative protection after Attorney General Jeff Sessions' signaled a tougher approach to federal pot enforcement. Earlier this month Sessions said he was ending an Obama-era policy that kept federal authorities from cracking down on the pot trade in states where the drug is legal.

The marijuana business group wants lawmakers to include language in an appropriations bill that would prohibit the Justice Department from spending money to thwart marijuana businesses in states where it is legal. The Western Regional Cannabis Business Alliance represents marijuana businesses in Washington, Oregon, Alaska, Hawaii, Montana and Arizona.

Family of man shot holding pen sues King County sheriff

SEATTLE (AP) — The family of an unarmed 20-year-old man who was shot to death by a deputy has filed a federal lawsuit against the King County sheriff's office.

Deputy Cesar Molina shot Tommy Le last June while responding to reports that Le was threatening people with a knife, prompting one homeowner to fire a shot to try to scare him off. The sheriff's office later said Le was holding a black ballpoint pen, not a knife, when he was shot.

The King County Medical Examiner's Office determined Le had been shot twice in the back and once in the back of the arm. The family's attorney, Jeffery Campiche, says the 120-pound Le posed no threat.

The lawsuit said Le was facing a mental health crisis and needed help. Le had a trace amount of LSD in his system, but the lawyer says it wasn't enough to cause impairment.

The King County Sheriff's Office declined to comment.

Corrections

The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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AccuWeather Forecast

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TODAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Mostly cloudy	A little rain in the morning	Mostly cloudy	Mostly cloudy	A passing morning shower

PENDLETON TEMPERATURE FORECAST

54°	45°	49°	35°	50°	36°	48°	38°	53°	39°
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HERMISTON TEMPERATURE FORECAST

49°	43°	52°	34°	51°	36°	50°	39°	56°	40°
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ALMANAC

PENDLETON

through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	51°	35°
Normals	41°	27°
Records	63° (1976)	-5° (1950)

PRECIPITATION

24 hours ending 3 p.m. 0.26"
Month to date 0.79"
Normal month to date 0.85"
Year to date 0.79"
Last year to date 1.06"
Normal year to date 0.85"

HERMISTON

through 3 p.m. yesterday

TEMPERATURE	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	50°	38°
Normals	42°	28°
Records	63° (1961)	-9° (1957)

SUN AND MOON

	First	Full	Last	New
	Jan 24	Jan 31	Feb 7	Feb 15

REGIONAL FORECAST

Coastal Oregon: Breezy today. Rain; any time across the north, during the afternoon elsewhere.

Eastern and Central Oregon: Mostly cloudy today.

Western Washington: Rain today; arriving in the afternoon across the south. Periods of rain tonight.

Eastern Washington: Cloudy today. A bit of snow in the north; rain and drizzle toward the Cascades and in central sections.

Cascades: Considerable cloudiness today; rain, but dry in the south.

Northern California: Mostly cloudy today; a little rain at the coast during the afternoon.

REGIONAL CITIES

	Today			Thu.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Astoria	55	45	r	50	42	sh
Baker City	44	35	c	46	28	sf
Bend	56	39	c	44	29	r
Brookings	58	48	r	50	41	r
Burns	47	31	c	45	25	sf
Enterprise	47	41	c	44	28	sf
Eugene	60	42	r	49	37	sh
Heppner	54	44	c	48	33	r
Hermiston	49	43	c	52	34	r
John Day	52	45	c	48	31	r
Klamath Falls	54	41	c	44	25	sh
La Grande	47	43	c	46	30	r
Meacham	46	40	c	43	30	r
Medford	59	43	c	47	33	r
Newport	57	46	r	50	42	sh
North Bend	61	47	r	51	41	r
Ontario	46	35	c	49	34	sh
Pasco	45	39	c	51	35	r
Pendleton	54	45	c	49	35	r
Portland	59	45	r	50	40	sh
Redmond	59	37	c	46	27	sn
Salem	61	44	r	51	40	sh
Spokane	41	38	c	41	31	r
Ukiah	50	39	c	42	28	sf
Vancouver	57	46	r	50	41	sh
Walla Walla	53	44	c	50	35	r
Yakima	46	39	r	50	32	c

WORLD CITIES

	Today			Thu.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Beijing	44	17	pc	42	19	pc
Hong Kong	72	61	s	71	64	pc
Jerusalem	50	46	pc	55	40	s
London	46	40	pc	48	35	pc
Mexico City	66	37	pc	67	41	pc
Moscow	20	16	c	24	13	sn
Paris	46	41	pc	53	37	r
Rome	60	38	sh	58	50	s
Seoul	46	28	pc	41	23	pc
Sydney	76	61	s	81	64	pc
Tokyo	59	45	r	57	42	s

WINDS

(in mph)	Today	Thursday
Boardman	NNE 4-8	SW 6-12
Pendleton	SE 4-8	SW 4-8

UV INDEX TODAY

0 1 1 1 0 0

8 a.m. 10 a.m. Noon 2 p.m. 4 p.m. 6 p.m.

0-2, Low 3-5, Moderate 6-7, High; 8-10, Very High; 11+, Extreme

The higher the AccuWeather.com UV Index™ number, the greater the need for eye and skin protection.

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NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation. Temperature bands are highs for the day.

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 78° in Thermal, Calif. Low -30° in Havre, Mont.

NATIONAL CITIES

	Today			Thur.		
	Hi	Lo	W	Hi	Lo	W
Albuquerque	45	24	pc	51	26	pc
Atlanta	30	20	s	43	25	s
Atlantic City	36	21	sn	38	28	s
Baltimore	30	16	sf	41	24	s
Billings	39	31	pc	47	29	c
Birmingham	31	16	s	42	21	s
Boise	51	41	c	55	36	sh
Boston	36	20	sn	32	23	pc
Charleston, SC	48	24	c	48	29	s
Chicago	22	17	s	36	21	s
Cleveland	23	16	c	31	22	s
Dallas	36	21	s	48	31	s
Denver	48	26	s	59	35	pc
Detroit	27	17	pc	31	22	s
El Paso	46	26	pc	55	30	s
Fairbanks	27	4	pc	11	4	c
Fargo	30	21	s	34	24	pc
Honolulu	82	72	pc	82	72	pc
Houston	38	23	pc	44	35	pc
Indianapolis	20	12	pc	30	19	s
Jacksonville	51	25	pc	50	27	s
Kansas City	26	16	s	40	26	s
Las Vegas	66	47	pc	66	49	pc
Little Rock	29	18	s	42	24	s
Los Angeles	77	55	pc	74	54	pc
Louisville	25	12	pc	34	21	s
Memphis	25	12	s	37	23	s
Miami	76	48	pc	66	54	pc
Millwaukee	23	18	s	33	23	s
Minneapolis	26	21	s	37	25	s
Nashville	25	13	pc	38	21	s
New Orleans	37	26	s	44	30	pc
New York City	36	20	sn	34	26	s
Oklahoma City	33	18	s	47	28	s
Omaha	30	13	s	43	26	s
Philadelphia	34	20	sf	37	26	s
Phoenix	72	48	pc	73	49	pc
Portland, ME	32	14	sn	30	16	pc
Providence	37	19	sn	33	21	s
Raleigh	34	16	sn	42	20	s
Rapid City	47	25	s	53	33	c
Reno	61	41	pc	58	34	r
Sacramento	65	48	c	58	44	r
St. Louis	21	18	s	42	26	s
Salt Lake City	49	32	pc	56</		