

Rains Keep Coming

■ Bringing with it, the good, the bad and the ugly.

By Ron Karten

Somewhere in the Pacific Northwest gets flooded pretty much every year, according to Tyree Wilde, Warning Coordination Meteorologist for the National Weather Service in Portland.

And even though this month's rains are at least three times normal, and flooding has closed up a lot of the back roads in the area, the extra precipitation is doing some good by filling reservoirs throughout the area.

The storage will serve the area well for spring and summer fishing, for irrigating crops, for recreation, for power generation and for fish migration, according to Wilde. High water improves

water quality, said Wilde, and rains also work their ways down to fill aquifers tapped by wells for both agriculture and home use.

Here at Agency Creek, however, the Natural Resources Department has built and installed a fish weir to count the number of steelhead trout that come through. For the second year, the rains have interrupted the process, and unless the water subsides quickly and any damage to the weir is quickly repaired, the opportunity for counting the fish will again have passed.

"We can't survey when the water is this high," said Kelly Dirksen, Fish and Wildlife Coordinator for the Tribe's



Photo by Toby McClary

In Deep— Tribal member and Housing Maintenance Coordinator Lonnie Leno drives through high water at Grand Meadows Housing on McPherson Road.



Rising Waters — This picture shows the rising level of the South Yamhill River on January 1 just off of Grand Ronde Road. Photo by Brent Merrill

Natural Resources Department. "The river is four feet over its regular stage."

"It's just part of the cycle," said Dirksen of the rains, but the timing again this year is not very good. The department caught the first steelhead for the survey on Sunday, January 8, which means that the steelhead are moving into this part of the river just as the river is too high to count them.

At the same time, the rain and wind, which peaked at 47 miles per hour on January 10, is the perfect combination for taking down trees on the reservation.

Untouched by the weather so far are stream structures the department built with logs to improve habitat, said Dirksen.

Before the non-stop rains, in December, the water pipes in the Tribe's Governance Building froze, thawed and then burst, according to Tribal member and Public Works Director John Mercier. The water caused only minor damage in a few areas of the building.

During the rains last week, a storm drainage line on Grand Ronde Road in front of the Post Office blocked up. The Tribe worked with Polk County and the Grand Ronde Fire Department to open that line up again, said Mercier.

Also on January 10, the casino temporarily lost electricity.

A lot of water flowed over Grand Ronde Road by the Health Clinic one evening. Groundskeepers put up signs and ProStar Security brought out a truck with flashing lights to prevent cars from going too fast and hydroplaning over the slick roadway.

"The biggie," said Mercier, "is when the South Yamhill gets up and goes over the highway. They could close the highway. On Thanksgiving, 2000," Mercier recalled, "they closed Route 18 because of flooding."

The National Weather Service has put out contradictory predictions about whether or not the Yamhill will flood, but as far as rain goes, the Service sees no end in sight. ■

Tribal Soldier Survives Blast, Comes Home To Oregon

■ Specialist Frank Grammer travels all the way to Kirkuk to learn that his real love is his family at home.

By Ron Karten

"I notice a lot more of the detail of life," said Grand Ronde Tribal member Spc. Frank Grammer, "and how much easier we have it than they have it in Iraq." Grammer is a Demolition Specialist with the National Guard.

In Kirkuk, Grammer was a 50-caliber gunner for a few months and a driver for most of his time in Iraq. The job of his unit of Cavalry Scouts was to clear improvised explosive devices, often called IEDs, from the roadsides. His group would find two to four IEDs "on a good day," sometimes more, he said.

But he never killed anybody during his time in Kirkuk, and the one IED that took out the humvee gun truck he was driving did not cause him or the others in the vehicle permanent or debilitating injuries.

"I think it was right after the explosion went off that I was wondering if I still had my legs," he said.

"I had a migraine headache for a week," he added, "and a sore neck." But he "immediately returned to duty." Another soldier in the group suffered bleeding from his ears from the concussion of the bomb. The truck commander had his forearm filled with shrapnel. The vehicle was thrown 300 feet and turned all the way around by the blast.

"It's like...hard to imagine," he said. "It feels like everything is going in slow motion. You think about what's most important to you. For me, it was my

wife and three kids. Making it home alive. Are the rest of the guys ok? Will I make it home?"

"I can close my eyes (now) if I'm on the road by myself and I can hear the blast as clear as day." The blast knocked a back wheel off of the vehicle.

"I feel we got lucky by that back wheel breaking off. We didn't roll."

"I remember maybe one or two dreams with the truck blowing up," he said. "I can't remember most of my dreams. I've got a lot more gray hairs now."

"I was definitely scared. I didn't want to die, but it was something that I needed to experience."

A little more than 18 months ago, Grammer volunteered to serve in the war in Iraq. Now, he feels the renewed pull of family. "I've been married three years," he said, "I've been gone two-and-a-half of that."

"My wife went through a very stressful and testing time," said Grammer, "and she still supported me. It's good to have a wife like that."

"I got used to it," said Marsha. "It was hard at first, but now I'm getting used to it."

Brandon, their two-year-old son,

"wouldn't let (Frank) out of his sight" when he came home, said Marsha.

And while the media likes to report stories filled with violence and destruction, and Grammer witnessed plenty of it, he also described how the men in his platoon, many from Eastern Or-



Photo courtesy of Frank Grammer

Grand Ronde Tribal Member & Demolition Specialist Frank Grammer

gon, received packages from home including candy and toys.

"When we got a lot," said Grammer, "we'd pick a day and go out. I have a friend in Portland that used to mail me candy, and I'd pass it out."

Grammer said that of the intelligence his team collected, about one-third was accurate and the rest was either inaccurate or "they were hiding things."

And he added, "There is so much corruption, it is hard to see the good being done there. It's hard to see the good with so much bad happening there. If you find one IED, two to three others go off."

"So much money is wasted and thrown away over there," he said. "Propane is burning twenty four hours a day, seven days a week, and all that is being burned off. They have no way to use it or store it. They need to burn it off to get to the oil."

"They have no driving laws," he said. "No DMV. No turn signals. It gets pretty hectic, but when they see us coming, they know to get out of the way."

He has photographs of what it looks like outside of the cities. "You're pretty much out in the middle of nowhere," he said. "There are no toilets. People go right out in the open. There's the smell of propane. There are so many nasty smells. In open land, there is garbage everywhere. There are no dump trucks."

When it's not summer, the early mornings are welcomed with the smell of burning trash or tires that residents light to keep warm.

"It's like a third world country inside a third world country."

Coming home reminds Grammer: "to be more humble and compassionate about others, to not take things for granted."

"I'm tired of being gone," he said. ■