

Storm closes Tribal offices for two days

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Although a fierce Pacific storm forced closure of Grand Ronde Tribal offices for two days on Dec. 3-4, the Grand Ronde campus was relatively unscathed by the wind and pounding rain compared to other inundated areas in northwestern Oregon and southwestern Washington.

The two days of unrelenting rain did not halt the Dec. 2 General Council meeting from being held in the Community Center, but the wind and downpour prompted Tribal Chairwoman Cheryle Kennedy to end the meeting in the early afternoon as lights flickered.

On Monday, Dec. 3, phone service in the Grand Ronde area was nonexistent, hampering Tribal phones and Internet access, which forced offices to close.

Mike Larsen, Tribal Facilities manager, said that the worst damage on the Tribal campus was water getting into the Health and Wellness Clinic. An electrical vault near the Community Center had conduit running to the clinic and the conduit was not enclosed. When the vault filled with water, the water ran through the conduit



Photo by Dean Rhodes



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Nacho Morales of D&H Flagging directed traffic at the intersection of Highway 18 and Grand Ronde Road on Dec. 4, preventing drivers from proceeding on to the Coast. A fierce Pacific storm downed trees and caused flooding in the Grand Ronde area on Dec. 2-3 and forced a two-day closure of the Tribal offices. Below, a tree in Tribal housing pulled up its roots after being blown over by the winds.

down into the clinic.

Facilities employees showed up for work on Monday, discovered where the water was coming from and pumped the water out of the vault.

The water did not damage any Tribal technology equipment located in the clinic since it had been previously placed on racks off the floor. Information Systems Manager Trevor Aaron said.

"The maintenance staff was on it right away," said Mark Johnston, Health Clinic executive director.

Tribal offices were closed Tuesday, Dec. 4, as local phone service — land lines, cell phones and Internet — was intermittent at best. Phone and Internet service to Tribal offices came back online late Tuesday afternoon.

Meanwhile, flooding from the South Yamhill River flowed over a portion of State Highway 18 just east of Spirit Mountain Casino on Monday morning. The river crested at 16.26 feet late Sunday night near Willamina, according to the National Weather Service, about

a foot short of its historical high of 17.07 feet, which occurred in December 1964.

West Valley Fire and Rescue crews closed Highway 18 about 9 a.m. Monday, but allowed travelers to drive across the rushing water about an hour later "at their own risk," said Lt. Dave Morey.

"The river rose so much quicker than in the 1996 flood," he said.

Downed trees and power lines forced the state Department of Transportation to close Highway 18 west of the casino between Grand Ronde Road and the coast.

Casino Facilities Director Ron Reibach said between 70 to 90 guests were at Spirit Mountain on Monday and couldn't get anywhere because highways heading east, west and north were closed.

Spirit Mountain Casino was named an evacuation shelter for area flooding victims by the Yamhill County Emergency Operations Center. West Valley Fire and Rescue lent the casino radios for communication since phone lines

were down.

Reibach said he noticed several area residents eating dinner at the casino Monday night because they did not have power at home.

Meanwhile, the casino building experienced some roof leaks and lost a couple of ceiling tiles, but received no serious damage, he said.

Water in the casino underpass rose for awhile and a couple of cars stalled out as a result of trying to drive through the high water, Reibach said.

Natural Resources Division Manager Michael Wilson said the Tribe's fish weir on Agency Creek survived and there was no damage to the Natural Resources building.

Wilson said the reservation's culverts, roads and ditches held and there was scattered blow-down timber, with the largest blow-down area being between a half-acre to an acre.

The storm was the result of moisture from tropical typhoons colliding with Arctic air coming down from Alaska. ■



Photo by Bob McElderry

West Valley Fire & Rescue crews controlled traffic on Highway 18 east of Spirit Mountain Casino on Dec. 3. The highway was closed for about an hour Monday morning as the South Yamhill River overflowed its banks and other local rivers and streams crested near record highs.