

# STATE & REGION

## State weighed slide risk before logging above highway

BY KATIE FRANKOWICZ

The Astorian

Rain is considered the primary trigger for a landslide that shut down U.S. Highway 30 east of Astoria this month and sent a pile of debris onto the road and trapped a passing truck.

But some people in the community, including neighboring property owners, point to logging activities they believe left the area vulnerable when winter hit.

A harvest in 2018 cleared trees from the top of the slope down to the road. The area had just been replanted with Sitka spruce, Douglas fir and western hemlock in 2020 — most of them small plugs or 12-inch tall seedlings.

The parcel is one of a dozen units that make up a large piece of property off the highway owned and managed by the Oregon Department of Forestry. In 2017, it was a part of the Boiler Fleet timber sale.

In a report the state made



Hailey Hoffman/The Astorian

A landslide closed U.S. Highway 30 east of Astoria this month. The state weighed the risk of landslides before logging at Area 11 in 2018.

ahead of the harvest, the parcel — Area 11 — was identified as a “high hazard landslide location” for shallow but rapidly moving slides with a risk to the public. The state required foresters to consult with the state’s geotechnical specialist before logging began.

The specialist determined that the slope above the high-

way should be a “leave area,” with trees left standing to keep the soil stable, but there was another risk to consider, said Ty Williams, the Astoria-based district operations coordinator for the Department of Forestry.

“Do you leave a tree that may stabilize soil or do you cut it if it might fall on the highway?” Williams said.

When these questions arise, the state defers to the owner at risk, the person whose property might bear the brunt of either scenario. In this case, that owner was also the state — the Oregon Department of Transportation. The property was Highway 30.

Normally, when there is logging along a highway, foresters

leave a scenic buffer strip along the side of the road. This time, though, the two state departments agreed that due to the orientation of the slope there could be a danger of buffer trees falling across highway lanes during coastal windstorms. Some of the trees were large enough to potentially fall across both lanes of traffic, the state reported. This possibility outweighed the risk of a slide.

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 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.

### Hard to pin down

For decades, researchers have looked at the correlation between clear-cut 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.”

### TODAY

Today is Friday, Jan. 22, the 22nd day of 2021. There are 343 days left in the year.

#### Today’s Highlights in History:

On Jan. 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its *Roe v. Wade* decision, declared a nationwide constitutional right to abortion. Former President Lyndon B. Johnson died at his Texas ranch at age 64.

In 1901, Britain’s Queen Victoria died at age 81 after a reign of 63 years; she was succeeded by her eldest son, Edward VII.

In 1907, the Richard Strauss opera “Salome” made its American debut at the Metropolitan Opera in New York; its racy content sparked outrage and forced cancellation of additional performances.

In 1944, during World War II, Allied forces began landing at Anzio, Italy.

In 1970, the first regularly scheduled commercial flight of the Boeing 747 began in New York and ended in London some 6 1/2 hours later.

In 1973, George Foreman upset reigning heavyweight champion Joe Frazier with a second round TKO in their match in Kingston, Jamaica.

In 1987, Pennsylvania treasurer R. Budd Dwyer, convicted of defrauding the state, proclaimed his innocence at a news conference before pulling out a gun, placing the barrel in his mouth and shooting himself to death in front of horrified onlookers.

In 1995, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy died at the Kennedy compound at Hyannis Port, Mass., at age 104.

In 1997, the Senate confirmed Madeline Albright as the nation’s first female secretary of state.

In 1998, Theodore Kaczynski pleaded guilty in Sacramento, California, to being the Unabomber responsible for three deaths and 29 injuries in return for a sentence of life in prison without parole.

In 2006, Kobe Bryant scored 81 points, the second-highest in NBA history, in the Los Angeles Lakers’ victory over the Toronto Raptors.

In 2007, a double car bombing of a predominantly Shiite commercial area in Baghdad killed 88 people. Iran announced it had barred 38 nuclear inspectors on a United Nations list from entering the country in apparent retaliation for U.N. sanctions imposed the previous month.

In 2009, President Barack Obama signed an executive order to close the Guantanamo Bay prison camp within a year.

Ten years ago: Drawing inspiration from a revolt in Tunisia, thousands of Yemenis demanded the ouster of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in a noisy demonstration that appeared to be the first large-scale public challenge to the strongman.

Five years ago: North Korea said it had detained Otto Warmbier, a university student from Ohio, for what the authoritarian nation called a “hostile act.” California Gov. Jerry

Brown rejected parole for a third time for Bruce Davis, a follower of cult leader Charles Manson.

One year ago: Chinese health authorities urged people in the city of Wuhan to avoid crowds and public gatherings after warning that a new viral illness that had infected hundreds of people and caused at least nine deaths could spread further. Health officials in Washington state said they were actively monitoring 16 people who’d come in close contact with a traveler to China, the first U.S. resident known to be infected with the virus. In opening arguments at President Donald Trump’s impeachment trial, House Democrats appealed to skeptical Republican senators to oust Trump from office to “protect our democracy.”

Today’s Birthdays: Actor Piper

Laurie is 89. Celebrity chef Graham Kerr (TV: “The Galloping Gourmet”) is 87. Author Joseph Wambaugh is 84. Singer Steve Perry is 72. Country singer-musician Teddy Gentry (Alabama) is 69. Movie director Jim Jarmusch is 68. Actor John Wesley Shipp is 66. Hockey Hall of Famer Mike Bossy is 64. Actor Linda Blair is 62. Actor Diane Lane is 56. Actor and rap DJ Jazzy Jeff is 56. Celebrity chef Guy Fieri is 53. Actor Olivia d’Abo is 52. Actor Katie Finneran is 50. Actor Gabriel Macht is 49. Actor Balthazar Getty is 46. Actor Christopher Kennedy Masterson is 41. Pop singer Willa Ford is 40. Actor Beverley Mitchell is 40. Rock singer-musician Ben Moody is 40. Actor Kevin Sheridan is 39. Actor-singer Phoebe Strole is 38. Rapper Logic is 31. Tennis player Alizé Cornet is 31. Actor Sami Gayle is 25.

— Associated Press

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