

County plans for possibility of spring flood

By Carl Sampson
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — Grant County commissioners huddled with staffers and their engineer Nov. 25. Their goal: To do everything they can to prevent or reduce flooding along Canyon Creek next spring.



Scott Myers

“The creek has a history of flooding in the spring,” said Ted Williams, the interim emergency management coordinator.



Doug Ferguson

A winter of heavy snow followed by a warm and rainy spring could provide the formula for flooding. In 2011, 1964 and as far back as 1897, flooding along the creek has caused severe damage to property.

But the 110,000-acre Canyon Creek Complex wildfire, which burned much of the forestland upstream in the watershed, has added more vulnerability and uncertainty. Foresters are predicting more runoff this spring even if the weather conditions are normal.

With that in mind, the county is developing a two-stage plan.

The first stage involves preventing or minimizing the area's exposure to floods next spring.

The second stage would involve developing a plan that would permanently solve the flooding threat.

But next spring is weighing most heavily on the commission. Engineer Doug Ferguson is mapping Canyon Creek, identifying areas within the 100-year flood plain that can be blocked off using sandbags or portable concrete structures called Eco-Blocks and Jersey barriers. They are pre-cast, portable and can be re-used.

“The idea is to pre-stage them where they'll be needed,” Williams said.

The areas around Grant Union Junior-Senior High School, at the mouth of the creek near the John Day River and several other low spots have flooded in the past. Using a new survey, Kenny Delano Jr., Ferguson's partner, is determining where exactly to place sandbags and concrete structures.

“I've been concentrating on



Canyon Creek is pictured near Fourth Avenue in John Day. Grant County officials worry the dead trees along the bank could snag debris and worsen flood conditions. They are planning to remove them in an effort to avert flooding in the spring.

the location of the treatments,” Delano said in an interview.

“This is more of a tactical discussion than an engineering discussion,” Ferguson said.

Next, the county will contact property owners about where the berms and concrete structures will be placed, Delano said.

The county plans to have up to 40,000 sandbags and 40 2-foot-by-2-foot-by-6-foot Eco-Blocks on hand. The county already has 20 Eco-Blocks and 29 Jersey barriers.

Of particular concern is the number of dead trees along the creek that could potentially snag other trees floating downstream and create a dam.

“There are a lot from the mouth of the river to the school,” Ferguson said.

County Judge Scott Myers and Commissioner Boyd Britton said an immediate priority will be getting rid of those potential snags.

“If we don't do it we're hurting,” Ferguson said.

Myers said the county needs to go to the Department of Fish and Wildlife to secure permits for the work.

“I think the conversation

needs to go that we're going to do it,” Britton said. “The time for asking for permission is passed.”

The commission also discussed two bridges, at Nugget and Inland avenues, which are particular concerns.

The Nugget bridge is all-wooden and in poor shape, Williams said.

The commission discussed buying a 60-foot portable one-lane bridge to have on hand should a bridge fail during a flood.

In addition, Williams said he will develop evacuation routes.

“We'll plot out the areas that would need to be evacuated first,” he said. He will also identify buildings that can be used as shelters and develop the logistics for getting people to safety should a flood take place.

Williams, a security and search and rescue instructor who lives in John Day, is working under a 12-week contract with the county.



Eagle photos/Carl Sampson

Ted Williams, the interim emergency management coordinator for Grant County, inspects a map of Canyon Creek that Ferguson Surveying and Engineering is preparing which shows areas likely to overflow if the creek has a 100-year flood and locations where barriers will be placed to prevent the flooding.

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