

Feds contend city still has much work to do on levees

BY CINDY YINGST
The Columbia Press

Two homes on South Main Avenue are among the problems standing in the way of Warrenton's levee recertification.

Both homes have additions that were constructed into the sides of the barriers designed to protect the city from a catastrophic flood. Without the federal government's recertification, residents will find flood insurance expensive or impossible to get.

"Eighty percent of the city is below high tide,"



Mark Kujala answers questions about the city's levees.

said Mark Kujala, a county commissioner and Warrenton's former mayor. He was hired as a levee consultant last year for \$25,000 and has been working to help the city resolve the encroachment issues.

In January, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers spent four days walking the city's 10 miles of levees. They found 300 potential issues that needed to be resolved.

The city has been working to fix them and is down to 42 remaining items deemed unacceptable, Kujala said. Most of what's deemed unacceptable are vegetation such as trees, bamboo and knotweed that can destabilize levee banks.

Other issues involve depressions or ruts from vehicles driving on the levees and burrows made by nutria, otters and beavers.

The corps also is requiring...

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Cindy Yingst/The Columbia Press

Bob Bingham holds the plaque given to him by Mayor Henry Balensifer Tuesday night. At right is Bingham's wife, Debbie.

City's go-to guy for water issues retires after 31 years

The Columbia Press

He'll be remembered as the guy who took a city project and ran with it.

Bob Bingham was honored Tuesday night for 31 years of service to the city of Warrenton.

His city career started as a part-time trash truck driver, a caretaker of the Warrenton boat basin and ended decades later as superintendent of the high-tech waste-

water treatment plant.

"He took over the multi-million dollar water treatment plant with virtually no training and learned the technical details of this state-of-the-art plant," Public Works Director Collin Stelzig said. "He was self-taught and became the go-to expert on water rights, fish passage and has left us with a plant ... we should

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Old rules for burning in city go up in smoke

Slash and commercial fires would be banned

BY CINDY YINGST
The Columbia Press

Warrenton will have new rules soon governing the size and types of backyard fires.

The action came following a weekend last March, when a contractor working to clear property owned by the Kujala family off Alternate Highway 101 began burning piles of alder.

The large hot fires created an inversion layer on the overcast day and the unseasoned wood gave off plumes of heavy smoke that wafted through the south part of town.

Because it was the weekend, no one answered nonemergency phone calls at Warrenton Fire Department.

Angry residents took their complaints to other city leaders, telling them the smoke aggravated respiratory problems or forced them to stay indoors.

"I just don't want the air debris to bother the constituent again," Commissioner Rick Newton



Demers

said Tuesday night, as city leaders crafted new burn rules during a work session at City Hall.

Mayor Henry Balensifer worried that too much structure in a new ordinance would

prevent people from keeping their yards tidy, especially after windstorms.

Fire Chief Tim Demers found incongruencies between the city's current rules and what's restricted by the Department of Environmental Quality

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States work on new approach to catastrophic wildfires

After several years of increasingly catastrophic wildfires, the federal Department of the Interior is implementing new preventive measures it hopes will limit the size and scope of the destruction.

President Trump recently signed two orders establishing a more coordinated look at wildfire risks across the states as well as equipment used to fight wildfires.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is analyzing an 11,000-mile

stretch of fuel breaks running through portions of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, California, Nevada, and Utah. It's hoped focusing on the 223-million acre area could help in developing a better plan to remove risks.

"As stewards of one-fifth of the country's public lands, primarily in the West, we know that our ability to be prepared for wildfires and reduce their severity is paramount to protecting communities and saving lives," U.S. Secretary of the Interior David Bern-

hardt said.

"In collaboration with local, state, and other federal partners, we are using everything in our arsenal to prepare for wildfires this year, treating more than 1 million acres."

As part of the Department of Interior, the BLM, Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Park Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service contribute to a total workforce of 5,000 firefighting personnel, 151 smoke jumpers and 22

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