

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Anxiety levels soared along with the water

When heavy rains hit again last week, four inches in less than 48 hours, our water-logged soil couldn't retain it. Springs were spurting and hillsides oozing as the water table and the rivers rose again. This time, the Nehalem Valley wasn't hit nearly as hard as Clatskanie, where mud slides did major damage; nevertheless, anxiety levels rose along with the water and the community discovered that it's not yet over the trauma caused by the flooding in February.

This is really quite ordinary, as mental health workers know, but that doesn't make it any more comfortable. Many people are not yet in their homes; high school classes are operating out of modulars; everywhere we look, flood damage is obvious.

Unfortunately, stress often shows in negative ways, ways that harm the people you care for, such as child abuse, domestic violence, alcoholism and suicide.

Anyone feeling the stress should remember that professionals from the Oregon Flood Support Project are in the community to help others cope with stress and anxiety. Their advice is to start on the road to recovery by acknowledging your feelings and, if you need support, they are there to help you.

They can be reached by calling 429-4014 in Vernonia, 755-2303 in Mist, or 325-5754 for Jewell. They are willing to assist you in their offices or in your home so, if you need a little support or a lot of support, don't hesitate to call. They are here to help.

What is the shape of Vernonia's future?

Whether people have lived in a community for one year or 60 years, the future of that community is important to them and Vernonia citizens now have the opportunity to be involved in planning their town's future.

The city will host a visioning meeting Thursday night from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Fire District meeting room. The process they have adopted doesn't keep people out, either. Instead of appointing a few citizens to determine the direction for tomorrow, city government has invited everyone who's interested to join in the process.

There will be opportunity to offer suggestions and/or ideas on the city's future. This is one meeting that should be interesting; try not to miss it.

Watch for electrical fires

Another hazard of flooding is becoming apparent in Vernonia — electrical fires. These tend to break out in circuit breaker boxes, electrical outlets or other electric connections that were under water. Now that they are dry, the possibility of a fire-causing short circuit is very real. If possible, replace all electric connections that were under water; try to avoid the problem of fire.



Ike Says

By Dale Webb, member
Isaac Walton League, Nehalem Valley Chapter

Many people asked me during the big flood "How do you think the fish are doing?" My answer was "not good, but I'm not worrying about that now." The fish were on their own, just like the rest of us.

Now, with more information, the answer to that question is not pretty. The tremendous run of chinook salmon that we had last fall took a real beating. Either the eggs were still in the gravel or had just recently hatched. Either way the scenario would look a lot like a blender of huckleberries turned on puree. The big flood actually moved gravel bars hundreds of feet down stream. Eggs or fish in the gravel would have been ground to bits. Even if the fish had reached the fry stage, it would have been like placing a human baby in the middle of the Sahara desert in a sandstorm, unprotected. The bright spot with chinook is that not all the fish from a brood year return in the same year so, over time, this year's class of fish should get some help in rebuilding from broods of the year before and the year after.

Coho salmon, already in serious trouble, were not helped by this flood. Coho eggs would have been in the gravel — blender time again. Additionally, much of the coho habitat got hammered by new slides and torrents of mud.

Steelhead may be the only species that fared somewhat well. Early steelhead (December and January) fared like the coho. Steelhead that returned after the flood probably will do extremely well.

The big flood was not all bad though. While planting trees in the riparian area along the river, I started noticing how pretty the water looked. I have never seen the water look so blueish-green before. It looked somewhat like distant glacial water. The gravel bars were clean of mud and looked fresh and revitalized. There were large amounts of large woody debris that had entered the river and remained in the channel. The evidence shows that large floods are not all bad.

Most of us view floods as bad for streams and fisheries; I know I did. But there is a difference between high water that stays within its

banks and a big flood that leaves its banks and enters the flood plain. When floods stay within the streambanks, all the sediments are confined so, when it settles, it is still in-stream. Our big flood actually scoured out twenty-some years of sediment build-up and deposited it in the flood plain. It seems to have cleaned the stream while raising havoc with the (human) inhabitants of the flood plain.

Lots of stream-bank trees slid off the bank and are now providing a major resource for fish in the stream. PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE TREES IN THE RIVER UNLESS IT IS A DANGER TO YOUR PROPERTY. People who are taking these trees from the river for fire wood are hastening the listing of the coho salmon as a threatened species. If you have trees on your property that you feel are a threat, please call the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife at 503-738-7066 and they will assist you in decision making. Removing trees from a river for commercial use is a violation of the Forest Practices Act, this includes selling them for firewood. Large woody debris is vital to a healthy fishery as it provides food and shelter for the fish. If you doubt this just pick up a large chunk of wood from the river and look closely on the bottom side, you will find many macroinvertebrates (bugs); this is fish food.

My opinion of forest related slides has not changed much, although the slide that completely blocked Clear Creek just upstream from the gate is a clear example of how a slide can benefit a fishery. This slide, although it dumped tons of mud into the creek, also contributed tons of rock and woody debris. The slide also formed a pond on its upstream side which will provide tremendous coho salmon habitat. Other land slides totally obliterated coho spawning areas with mud, or stripped the stream bed down to bedrock. These streams will not produce fish for at least a decade.

The Isaac Walton League Nehalem Valley Chapter has completed its second year of tree planting along the rivers, with about 2,800 trees being planted. Despite the flood, the trees that we planted last year seem to be doing quite well and people will start seeing a

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