

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

When will the flood return?

You've heard the talk. Many people have ideas about what caused the latest flood. People who live in houses that have stood since the early 1900's report that their homes never took in water before 1996 and they sure never expected to see it again, just 11 years later.

The Flood of 2007 has been attributed to logging practices, specifically clearcutting. It's been said that the problem was foot-print; more houses, more school buildings, more apartments, more concrete that resulted in the flood damage. Maybe the problem is global warming, that's been heard, too. It's even been said that the flood was Nature's way of telling us something's wrong (oh, wait, that was a song from the 70's, wasn't it?).

Maybe it was just an unusual storm that dumped almost 11 inches of rain on this area? But, the official weather report for Vernonia only shows 6.42 inches of rain falling December 1-3. The rainfall total for December 2007 was 14.39 inches compared to December 2006 when 8.12 inches fell upon us. The difference is 6.27, almost the amount that fell those first three days of December. That doesn't seem like enough rain to cause the multiple feet of water seen in the area.

Whatever caused the Flood of 2007, as a community we all need to pay attention to what's going on around us that might impact the community and there needs to be a mechanism to report and evaluate such occurrences, for example somebody filling in low lying areas with fill. We've all seen people building houses in areas that fill up with water most years, even in years when no buildings are damaged by water.

Another thing we've heard is that FEMA is doing flood-mapping this time, and did not do so last time. If so, that mapping needs to be used so that all new construction is considered in view of flooding potential. That didn't happen after the Flood of 1996 because most people got the impression that it was a once in a really, really long time event that wouldn't occur again.

Well, we know better now, don't we? Even if it doesn't flood again for 20 years, there needs to be a mechanism to monitor all of the possible conditions affecting the water in this area, so that even when the people who remember this event are gone from the area or from jobs at the city and/or county level, there will still be a way to keep the area's flood damage to a minimum.



Out of My Mind

by Noni Andersen

Many of us are understandably preoccupied with putting our lives back together after the December 3 flood, so you may not have noticed that the Vernonia City Council approved a new position in city hall. (No, not the second administrator, more on that later.)

The new position is called the Administrative & Financial Services Assistant/Human Resources Coordinator. If you are interested in applying for the position, forget it. City Administrator M.R. "Dick" Kline said it will be filled by Shannon Gillenwater, who started December 3 as the Customer Service Clerk.

If you recall, Kline's first personnel move was to eliminate the position of Financial Director, removing Cindy Naillon, a knowledgeable, long-time employee. The reason: The city's "dire" financial condition required a reduction in staff. Kline also assured the council that, with two good people, he could handle the work that needed to be done.

His second personnel move was to change the City Recorder position by incorporating some fiscal responsibilities and renaming it the Administrative and Financial Services Manager/ City Recorder. Joanne Glass, who had been customer service clerk before Gillenwater, was picked in September to fill the renamed position. The major difference, however, is that it provided a way to remove Kate Conley as recorder. Conley was both knowledgeable and outspoken, fatal flaws with an administrator who desires sycophantic employees.

To recap, when Kline took over, there were three administrative positions in city hall, which Kline said the city couldn't afford, plus the city administrator. Soon there will again be three administrative positions in city hall, plus not one, but TWO city administrators.

Why a second administrator?

The second administrator was initially Interim Administrator for the Emergency. Aldie Howard, the city's contract planner, was appointed to this spot because an administrator was needed during the emergency, and he was meeting that need. Kline was unavailable. It wasn't simply that Kline lives in Cornelius and couldn't get to Vernonia; no, Kline deliberately left the area on Dec. 4, and flew to the East Coast for a son's graduation from...Army boot camp.

This wasn't the first time Kline ignored his job as the city's top administrator and highest paid employee. In December of 2006, when windstorms left the city without electricity for a few days, he came in one day, decided he wasn't needed because others were doing a good job, and left.

Howard, who is a city contractor and not an employee, is now the Interim City Administrator and Kline now works part-time (on finances). Neither one receives employee benefits, so we are told that their combined compensation is no more than it was before the flood. Of course, there is that third city hall position, which Kline said the city can't afford.

Kline has tendered a letter of resignation, and

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