Winter flood and landslide forecast says, "It may not be over yet"

Oregonians should continue to be vigilant and prepared for more flooding, landslides and mudslides urge officials with the Governor's Recovery Cabinet, Oregon Emergency Management and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

"The state's recovery efforts rely on avoiding and preventing future damage whenever possible," said Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski. "We will continue to coordinate closely with federal agencies and local governments, but we also need individual citizens' help. We urge people to be watchful for landslides, and to stay out of harm's way." The Governor's Recovery Cabinet urges people to watch for potential landslides as rain continues and snow pack builds.

"It may not be over yet," said Federal Coordinating Officer Glen R. Sachtleben. "Oregonians need to stay prepared. Two of the most important ways to prepare are to buy flood insurance and to have a family disaster plan."

Timing for the purchase of flood insurance is critical. There is a mandatory 30-day waiting period after purchase of a flood insurance policy before it will go into effect.

Director of Oregon Climate Service at Oregon State University, George H. Taylor said, "In mid-December the snow water equivalent in the Willamette Valley drainage was less than 50 percent of average. At the end of January, snow water was listed at 167 percent of average," he said.

"Of particular note is that low- to mid-elevations (less than 4,000 feet) have particularly deep snow, generally exceeding 200 percent of average," said Taylor. "These are the areas that will melt first if a large, wet storm reaches us."

Taylor indicated that no unusually wet storm seems imminent but added, "we will continue to monitor the long-range weather predictions because the deep snow pack is expected to remain for the foreseeable future."

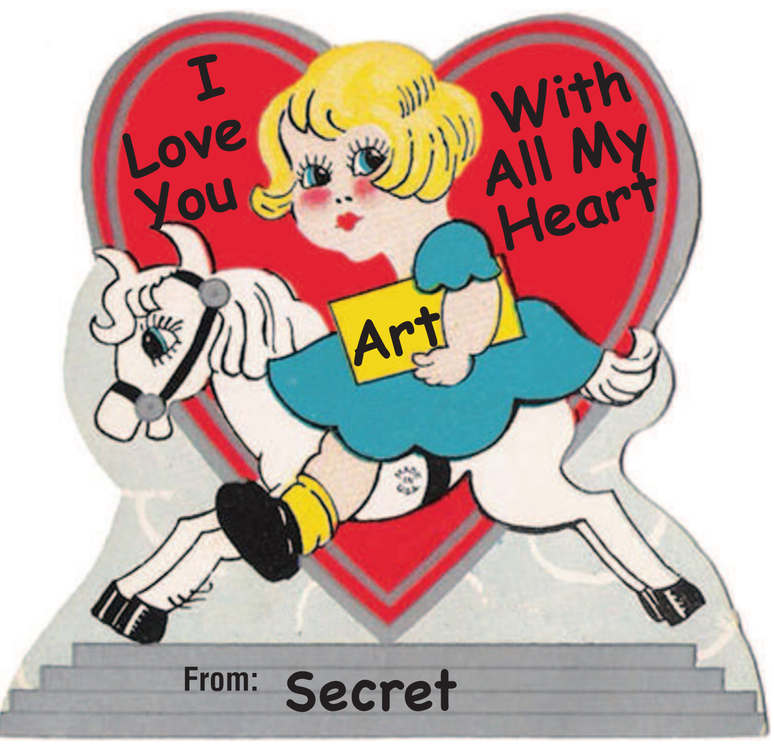
The flood of February 1996 is an example of a "rain on snow event," according to Taylor. He said the combination of heavy rain, warm temperatures and a deep snow pack caused large amounts of runoff and widespread flooding. He noted the importance of residents heeding agencies' warnings. In December 1964 flooding caused a tremendous loss of life while in February 1996 there was less loss of life due in part to residents taking flood warnings seriously, being prepared, and being aware of what to do in an emergency situation.

Oregonians can find river forecasts and flood stages at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Weather Service website www.nwrfc.noaa.gov/.

The U. S. Dept. of Agriculture's (USDA's) National Resources Conservation Service tracks changes in the snow pack through a network called "snowtel," or snowfall telemetry. The USDA's National Resource Conservation Services (NRCS) website www.or.nrcs.usda.gov/snow/data/current.html provides daily "snowtel" reports for Oregon.

"It is important to go a step further and know what to do before, during and after for specific types of disasters," State Coordinating Officer Abby Kershaw said. "Oregonians need to plan ahead for all types of disasters and to learn to prepare for and respond to them. Taking action today protects our families and reduces the impact of emergencies when they occur."

Go to www.fema.gov/areyouready and www.floodsmart.gov for more information on flood insurance and preparing for disasters.



Senator Johnson sponsors housing bill

In the next six years, more than 7,000 families in Oregon are at-risk of losing their homes due to expiring federal Housing & Urban Development (HUD) and Rural Development (RD) contracts. Consequentially, many low-income families, seniors and people with disabilities could potentially lose their housing.

As the clock is ticking to preserve this critical stock of affordable housing, Senator Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose) is working with housing advocates to find a solution. Senator Johnson is sponsoring Senate Bill 1073 which will allocate $2 million to create the 'Housing Acquisition Fund' that will leverage funding from private foundations and banks. This will help avert the crisis and save thousands of affordable homes throughout Oregon.

Within communities throughout Columbia and Clatsop Counties, 229 affordable housing units are set to expire. "Children and families deserve an opportunity to succeed in school and life, which is tied to having a stable home" said Rocky Johnson with Community Action Team. "Senate Bill 1073 will give hope to families at risk and an opportunity to ensure they still have an affordable place to call home."

The Housing Acquisition Fund will address an emergency need with one-time funding that will leverage an estimated $150 million in other public and private funds to help with the preservation of expiring affordable housing units.

The Housing Acquisition Fund will also save $12 million in annual federal rent assistance. Senate Bill 1073 gives local non-profit developers and housing authorities the opportunity to purchase expiring properties, keeping federal funds in Oregon and housing affordable.