

Oregon swamped by massive flood

PORTLAND, Ore. — A mountainside moaned, then gave way in a rush of mud. Highways vanished beneath stinking, caramel-colored flood waters swirling with uprooted trees and raw sewage. Two people were dead, a woman was missing, and thousands of Oregonians were driven from their homes. And the rain kept falling.

As the state's worst flooding in more than three decades threatened to swamp downtown Portland, sandbags and concrete highway dividers formed a thin defense Thursday against the wide and rising Willamette River.

"Water's going everywhere," said Trase Myers, as he and others hurried to stack 40-pound sandbags against a building downtown. "I can't believe the destruction the water has caused."

In the nation's latest extreme weather in a winter of extremes, hundreds of roads—including both of Oregon's cross-state freeways, interstates 5 and 84—were closed by high water or mudslides. Amtrak trains were halted. Gov. John Kitzhaber declared 16 of Oregon's

36 counties disaster areas and asked President Clinton for federal emergency aid.

Amid the deluge, there were water shortages. As muddy flood waters contaminated water supplies, Portland and Salem officials urged people to conserve water. Smaller towns shut down their water plants completely and told residents to buy bottled water.

The flooding is the result of a series of storms that marched in from the Pacific beginning two weeks ago. The first were cold, piling up snow in the mountains that form a scenic backdrop to Portland—the Cascades to the east, the rolling Coast Range to the west.

On Monday, a warmer storm stalled over the state, and the snow started melting, adding to the record rains—more than 5 inches a day in some areas.

Sparkling mountain streams, narrow enough to jump across two weeks ago, turned monstrous. They tore through the forest, ripping small bridges apart.

As the swollen streams converged in the Willamette River val-

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TRASE MYERS
Portland resident

ley, evergreen trees were yanked out by their roots, bobbing and lunging downstream like huge battering rams.

At least 15,000 Oregonians were forced from their homes, including about 12,000 in the Salem area, where a parade of U-Hauls, horse trailers and pickup trucks streamed through the rain.

Bill and Connie Mellin grabbed a few valuables from their home in Keizer, near Salem, and headed for higher ground.

"We've stacked our furniture up on books that we don't like," Bill Mellin said. "We're going to grab

some photos, kids' toys and clothes and get out of here."

The gathering waters barreled toward Portland, Oregon's biggest city, which sits astride the Willamette near its confluence with the Columbia River.

The Willamette was expected to breach Portland's sea wall late Thursday night and crest Friday morning at 30 feet, 1.2 feet above the sea wall's lowest point.

That would equal the level of Portland's last big flood, around Christmas 1964, which killed 47 people and left 17,000 people homeless throughout the Northwest.

A 9-year-old girl drowned in a culvert Wednesday when she went to get the mail near the small Willamette Valley town of Scio.

An 84-year-old Corvallis woman died Wednesday night after her car plunged into runoff from the swollen Luckiamute River.

The rocks and mud swept one Multnomah County sheriff's office cruiser, lights flashing, into the Columbia River. The deputy driving it escaped unharmed.

FCC OKs Disney, ABC deal

WASHINGTON — Federal regulators cleared the way Thursday for The Walt Disney Co. to take over Capital Cities/ABC Inc., creating the world's largest media company. But the company will have to shed some properties.

The Federal Communications Commission voted 5-0 to remove the last hurdle to the \$19 billion deal.

Disney said it would complete the acquisition by the end of the week.

The commission won't let Disney permanently own, as it had requested, radio stations and a newspaper in Fort Worth, Texas, and in Pontiac-Detroit, Mich.

Instead, the commission would provide the company with a temporary waiver of one year from cross-ownership rules to give Disney time to sell or swap either the radio or the newspaper properties in each city. The choice would be Disney's.

Still, Disney might be able to keep the Fort Worth and Pontiac-Detroit properties. The FCC said it would re-examine its newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership rules within the year.

"We are hopeful that it will ultimately allow us to retain the properties in the two cities," said Disney chief Michael Eisner, who otherwise applauded the FCC's action.

Even though all five commissioners voted to clear the deal, two of them — James Quello and Rachelle Chong — opposed the FCC's decision not to let Disney permanently own the properties in Fort Worth and Pontiac-Detroit. Both said there is ample media competition in the two markets. Each market has more than 50 separately owned broadcast outlets, they said.

Quello said the FCC's newspaper-broadcast rules "no longer reflect the realities of the marketplace."

Federal regulations prohibit one company from owning a newspaper and a radio station in the same market. Legislation overhauling the nation's telecommunications laws, which President Clinton signed Thursday, would not change that.

For Disney to win a permanent waiver, it would have to prove that the combined ownership is in the public interest, the FCC says.

In 20 years, the FCC has granted only two waivers to its newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership rules. And the standard has been tough—in both cases, owners had to show the newspapers would otherwise go out of business, FCC attorneys said.

ACLU battles new anti-porn law in court

PHILADELPHIA — The government's ban on sending "indecent" and sexually explicit material to minors over computer networks was challenged in court the moment President Clinton signed it into law Thursday.

The Justice Department pledged not to initiate prosecutions for a week, and a federal judge declined to temporarily block the Decency Act, giving prosecutors until Wednesday to submit written legal arguments.

The American Civil Liberties Union and 19 other groups said the law violates privacy rights and strangles free speech by authorizing the government to prosecute people even for the private messages they send about AIDS, abortion, politics and science — any subject involving sex.

The law defines indecency as "any comment, request, suggestion, proposal, image or other communication that, in context, depicts or describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards, sexual or excretory activities or organs."

Thanks to a last-minute addition by Rep. Henry Hyde, R-Ill., it also extends a rarely enforced, 123-year-old law into cyberspace, making it a violation of obscenity laws to use computers to provide information about how to obtain an abortion.

Christopher Hansen, the national ACLU senior staff counsel, said the law prohibits all "socially useful, nonpornographic speech that happens to be about sex."

He noted parents already can limit their children's access to adult material by using safeguards on computer services or by buying inexpensive software that limits the Internet sites children may reach.

Clinton 'eager' for campaign, dismisses talk of recession

DES MOINES, Iowa — President Clinton said Thursday he's eager for the opening of the presidential campaign and predicted that voters will give him a "clear yes" after he makes his case.

"I'm looking forward to it," Clinton told The Associated Press in a telephone interview from the White House.

He dismissed suggestions he could face an election-year recession, as he sounded upbeat themes likely to become staples on the campaign trail.

"When you judge a president, you ought to ask 'Did he do what he said he'd do, or at least try, were the results good ... does he have a good plan for the future?'" Clinton said. "I think the answer to all these questions will be a clear 'yes.'"

Clinton spoke with the AP just two days before he travels to Iowa where Republican presidential candidates are spread across the state campaigning for Monday's precinct caucuses.

While Clinton is stealing some of thunder from the Republicans in the closing days of their caucus campaign, he declined to contrast himself with any of the GOP contenders.

"I'm not overconfident. I trust the judgment of the American people."

BILL CLINTON
President

"I will talk about that when they take a nominee," Clinton said. "To me, the most important thing is to make my case to the American people about the challenges I see facing us."

"To me that overshadows whoever the opponent might be, and whatever might be said that I would have to respond to."

Though Clinton does not face opposition from within his own party, some strategists have worried that Democrats would suffer from the continuous pounding he's taking during the Republican campaign.

Clinton left little doubt he's ready to join the fray. "I am eager to do that," he said.

As the GOP presidential campaign

has unfolded, Clinton's standing in the polls has grown, and while Clinton said he had a solid case to make to voters, he was careful to add "I'm not overconfident. I trust the judgment of the American people."

And Clinton said he had a simple message that he would take to voters, beginning with this weekend's campaign-style swing: "The economy is in a lot better shape today than it was three years ago."

Clinton won the White House largely by capitalizing on economic nervousness and the economy has been relatively solid during his term. Despite the issues that come and go during a presidential campaign, economic weakness is one of the forces that can work against an incumbent president.

There have been some signs of economic softening in recent weeks, however. Clinton is not worried about an election-year recession.

"We don't expect there to be a recession," he said. "There has been a little bit of a slowdown, as we thought there might be. I basically believe that the economy is not going into a recession."

Thousands go on-line to be included in '24 Hours In Cyberspace' project

SAN FRANCISCO — Thousands of computer users Thursday logged into "24 Hours In Cyberspace," an on-line exhibition of the people using and cruising the Internet. As of late afternoon, computers running the 24 Hours project on the World Wide Web had registered 3 million "hits" from people viewing pictures and reading stories posted on the site.

Although it is difficult to translate hits into the number of people accessing the site, the site was undeniably popular.

Many web pages get only a few dozen hits in a month; the 24 Hours file servers were jammed with people logging in all day long. "We have just been deluged with e-mails," said Tom Melcher, chief operating officer and technical coordinator. "This exceeds our expectations."

Melcher said 25,000 people from

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TOM MELCHER
Internet technical coordinator

around the world had signed the project's guest book since it went on-line at 12:01 a.m. Thousands more were expected to log in by the time the project stopped at midnight.

Photographers, videographers, radio reporters and writers from around the world contributed to the project, which was based at a "control room" near downtown San Francisco.

The project was led by Rick Smolan, who organized the popular

"Day in the Life" series of photography books.

The cyberspace project set out to capture the human face of the on-line revolution using first-person accounts and pictures from journalists, professional photographers and thousands of volunteers.

For example, one story was about a couple from Yokohama, Japan, who met while corresponding via Internet e-mail and eventually married.

Melcher said even with all the traffic on the 24 Hours file servers, there were no major technical problems. At the end of the night, the editors and programmers were going to stop updating the site and leave it as is until Sunday, when it will be taken off line.

Smolan and his crew planned to edit the images and stories into a book and CD-ROM to be published in October. The Internet location can be found at <http://www.cyber24.com>.

Daily Nebraskan

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FAX NUMBER 472-1761
The Daily Nebraskan (USPS 144-080) is published by the UNL Publications Board, Nebraska Union 34, 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448, Monday through Friday during the academic year; weekly during summer sessions.
Readers are encouraged to submit story ideas and comments to the Daily Nebraskan by phoning 472-1763 between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The public also has access to the Publications Board. For information, contact Tim Hedegaard, 436-9253, 9 a.m.-11 p.m.
Subscription price is \$50 for one year.
Postmaster: Send address changes to the Daily Nebraskan, Nebraska Union 34; 1400 R St., Lincoln, NE 68588-0448. Second-class postage paid at Lincoln, NE.
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