

Packwood Owners Shocked by County Maps Lowering Property Values

By Dave Bunting, Publisher

About 230 Packwood landowners attended a meeting last Saturday, July 18, at the Packwood Community Hall, where Lewis County officials explained the creation of maps showing new channels to which the Cowlitz River is likely to migrate within ten years. The meeting was probably the largest meeting ever held in Packwood.

Also discussed were the study of a possible wastewater treatment system at Packwood, and the probable closing of the Packwood Solid Waste Transfer Station.

The maps of the predicted channel migrations have substantially lowered property values of the 800 Packwood area properties affected.

The meeting was called and moderated by Lewis County Commissioner Lee Grose, a Packwood resident, even though there is no requirement for such a meeting, to explain the extraordinary impact of the maps and the other issues.

Solid Waste Transfer Station Service May Close

Steve Skinner, County Solid Waste Manager, reported that the Packwood Solid Waste Transfer Station apparently will be closed and not replaced.

He and Commissioner Grose explained that the station is on County land granted to the County Public Development Authority (PDA) when it was formed in 1996. The PDA has finally leased the property and building to a long-term tenant whose requirements include the Transfer Station site.

Relocating the station has been considered. Facts against relocating the station were that its fees don't pay its expenses, it receives only about 26 uses per week, weekly resident use of curbside service is cheaper than weekly use of the transfer station, use of the Morton station is almost always much cheaper because fees are by weight, and relocating the station would take over a year, cost \$150,000 to \$200,000, and require difficult permitting.

Grose said the transfer-station-sized drop box on his hardware store property will continue to be available, for user fees of \$2.50 per use or \$5.00 per month, even though the fees don't pay the box's cost which must be subsidized by the store to the extent of \$450 per month.

Someone asked, "What happened to the money we voted about 1972 or 74 to both place the transfer stations and operate them?" The officials were not aware of this and will look into it.

Someone else asked, "Why do we not have curbside recycling like other areas of the



Lewis County Commissioner Lee Grose addresses Packwood's largest-ever town meeting last Saturday, July 18, about Lewis County River Channel Migration maps which substantially reduce property values.

county?" Grose explained that with fewer users and longer distances up here, the cost per user would be prohibitively more expensive.

Wastewater System Being Studied

Barbara Kincaid, Lewis County Planner, reported that a wastewater system for the central or business area of Packwood is being explored.

She said there was a study several years ago to learn the feasibility and to set logical service boundary limits. Now the state Department of Ecology (Ecology) has provided money to hire an engineer consultant to update the outdated study, prepare a wastewater plan and propose probably three alternative systems for approval by the state and then selection by Packwood. The plan is to hire the engineer in August and hold public meetings on the resulting proposals next year.

She explained that apparently few people are opposed to a wastewater treatment system per se, but everyone is very concerned about its cost. Such a system would require state or federal grants and loans for construction, and the study will include finding likely funding sources. Details of the effort and plan are available on the County web site. She said the wastewater issue is not related to the CMZ issue.

She continued that the forces driving the effort are that our septic systems are old, some are failing, some restaurants are limited in seating by septic system size, new businesses are unwilling to locate here on septic systems, the septic systems are becoming an obstacle to obtaining government funds for Packwood improvements, and the Dept. of Ecology is pushing it. Grose said we must make it possible for new businesses to come in, to employ Packwood people, to "keep Packwood going."

In response to questions, Kincaid and Grose responded that there is no known pollution by septic systems here, though the few local private wells will be checked. Grose assured that the quality of Packwood Water System water is excellent.

Grose and Kincaid assured that no one will be required to hook up. But Grose pointed out that people who need a new septic system are likely to hook up because the cost of a septic system now is \$15,000 to \$20,000. Packwood resident Dean Hanson asked what the hookup costs might be, but was interrupted before he could report hookup fees in nearby towns.

They both also emphasized that we'll do it only if it's feasible. "If the cost to us is not reasonable, we won't do it."

Cowlitz Channel Migration Zone Maps The Reason And History Behind The Maps

Kincaid told the group that the federal government mandates that the County manage flood risk through County regulations under federal regulation CFR 44.60 through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) requirements.

She said it's voluntary whether we participate, but if we don't, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) regulations prohibit all bank loans within the flood zones. She said Lewis County Building Official Fred Chapman is in charge of the CMZ process but couldn't be here today. She said a reason for us to participate is that it will reduce our flood insurance premiums, and recommended that all homes and cabins in the CMZ zones should already have flood insurance.

Matt Hyatt, County Geographic Information Systems (GIS) Technician and Mapper, said it became known that the 2006 flood proved the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood maps inaccurate. The flood didn't match the maps' predictions and so must be revised. Regarding the High Valley Park 8 & 11 (HV8&11) area, a lot of sediment came down out of the Muddy Fork and deposited, raising the streambed, so that floodwater is now higher and more likely to go over the banks. A new

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study was required on the river with the new sediment because the sediment may cause the river to migrate to a different channel.

Grose explained that the maps, called Channel Migration Maps or CMZ's, are also related to requirements in the Growth Management Act (GMA) law passed by the State of Washington in 1990 at the behest of then Democratic Governor Gary Locke. Grose said the GMA requirements are onerous to the point that they're all but impossible for the County to fulfill, but that they were passed by legislators and a governor elected by state voters, so we just have to do the best we can with a bad situation. "You have to look to the people you've elected who have done these things."

He said Ecology asked the County to fund upgrading the flood maps, that the County refused to give the money, but that then Ecology did the CMZ study itself.

The maps show several zones into which the County and its engineering consultant anticipate the river will migrate within ten years to fifty years. The County originally published preliminary maps several years ago, but now they've republished them with revised and expanded migration zones.

About 150 pages of proposed regulations severely limiting or prohibiting construction within the zones accompany the maps. The maps can be found in the County's web site at: <http://lewiscountywa.gov/communitydevelopment/channel-migration-zone-cmz>. Maps for the areas close to Packwood and Randle can also be found on the Shopper's web site at <http://www.highwayshopper.com>

A Packwood woman asked, "Isn't the County liable for granting us permits in past years to build in what now is in the severe zone?"

Kincaid responded, "The County is not liable if they followed the regulations existing at the time they granted the permit." Hyatt added, "People have the right to build; the County had no authority to deny it."

How The Maps Were Prepared

Hyatt explained the process by which the maps were prepared. Using aerial photographs including LIDAR aerial topography mapping the ground elevation to an accuracy of two feet, they calculated the average movement or migration rate of the channel, so many feet toward each side per year, finding that in some places the channel could move very quickly. They extended this average channel movement rate to 50 years, making the preliminary outline of the least serious "Low Risk" migration zone, this being the yellow line on County maps, and the green zone on the map published by the Shopper. This outline was then narrowed where high ground, solid rock banks, and other reasons limited river movement. They also calculated an average "short term" rate of channel movement

per year, extended this rate to ten years, forming the preliminary boundary of the "Severe Risk" or ten year migration zone, this being the red line on County map and the maroon zone on the Shopper map, but then corrected this zone also for high ground, solid rock banks and other reasons.

He said all the rivers coming off Mt. Rainier have shown increased bank losses, meaning channel migration, through the last several years. He said no side tributary creeks were considered in the CMZ work.

He showed the maps, moving gradually downstream from the Muddy Fork and Clear Fork above High Valley 8&11 to the Randle area, discussing specific problem areas as he passed them.

Reducing Property Values

The maps affect a large portion of the entire Packwood area, estimated to be 800 properties, including hundreds of homes and cabins.

The maps seriously reduce property values just by their being published, showing prospective purchasers that the river is anticipated to probably migrate to the new channels within ten years.

The maps have reportedly already caused prospective buyers to refuse to buy properties in or near the zones, and owners are somewhat belatedly coming to understand that their property values are now seriously lowered because of the maps. One man waved a map and said, "No one is going to buy my property now that it's in this red zone!"

Many others admitted they are scared by the very serious lowering of their property values, saying they could never sell their property. Some said the maps made their property worth nothing, of zero value. One suggested that all property in the severe zone should be valued by the assessor at zero and removed from the tax rolls. Another pointed out that many owners have loans on these properties with the value having fallen far below the amount owed; Grose agreed that this is true.

Another said, "We can't sell for anything near what we thought our property values were. Can we get a second opinion from some other engineering firm?" Grose answered, "We don't have the money for that. It would cost hundreds of thousands to redo the CMZ maps, and it might cost millions to challenge the FEMA maps."

Grose and Kincaid emphasized many times that the County has adopted no regulations about the CMZ, and may decide not to adopt any. However, they were not asked if they could unpublish the maps.

Grose said all other rivers in the state including those in this County are being looked at like this, that the Cowlitz is one of the first, that we are therefore the first to face the crushing property value injury caused by the process.

He and the others emphasized many times that the CMZ zones are about erosion, different

from the FEMA flood maps which are about flooding by high water, and that we've adopted nothing about the CMZ yet.

Controlling the River

John Anderson, a resident and leader in the HV 8&11 area, said that the HV 8 & 11 riverbed load or deposit came from Forest Service land and from the road the Corps built across the Muddy Fork years ago to build the riprap along HV 8 & 11 and Serenity Acres. He said, "There is another view: that much could be done to prevent this channel migration [by controlling the river]." He suggested spending the money not on studies and plans but on actual channel riprap and property protection.

Packwood Fire Chief Lonnie Goble, a longtime resident very familiar with the river, said that it is apparent that if the river were moved back over under the cliffs on the highway side, it would stay there and [much of] this CMZ problem wouldn't exist.

Several others asked if the Corps of Engineers could help by controlling the river. Kincaid and Grose answered that they don't know how to involve the Corps. The only agency they deal with on this is FEMA. Grose said, "There's no money for river work. The Corps is so far behind in working on our huge Centralia-Chehalis flood issue, that we're down to number 486 on their priority list. And federal funding to the Corps for their projects is also hundreds of millions behind. The people of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) who do this kind of work told me flatly that they will do nothing in rivers because they won't fight the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and our Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW)."

Another said, "We should mine these troublesome gravel bars and stream bed to make valuable gravel to sell for roads and construction. We need to maintain our rivers."

Another reported that some agencies work in the river without trouble from fisheries regulations, that Tacoma Power dredges the Cowlitz down near their dams and hatcheries every year.

Grose and Kincaid emphasized many times that the County may decide to not pass CMZ regulation, but if we don't it will cost the County dearly in loss of federal and state funding, and property owners will get no bank loans.

But he agreed there are possibilities to change the river. "We must find a solution which satisfies several goals: 1) to maintain peoples' property values; 2) to keep the County in business with state & federal funding; and 3) to keep the river from damaging property."

He said, "We can put some levees and dikes in the CMZ ordinance, but where's the money to come from?"

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Anderson asked, "Will the state allow an owner to protect his property?"

Len LeSarge, another Packwood resident replied, waving the 150 page proposed regulations, responded "No! These 150 pages of County regulations prohibit anyone from constructing anything that will impede the flow of water. The penalty for doing so is \$1,000 every day the obstruction exists!"

Grose said, "I as commissioner will not let that [penalty] go through."

Another said diking costs \$200 per lineal foot. Grose said, "Figure four times that much."

A man asked, "Why would I contribute to a revetment if my property value is zero?"

Hyatt replied, "Where future river changes lessen the flood chances, those CMZ lines may be moved away from your property."

Grose explained, "If you build that revetment, the zone might move so your property is not affected."

Phil Rupp, County Chief Planner, added, "The local citizen group of those who've signed the sign-up sheet could move to create a flood protection district to do that sort of improvement."

Another man asked, "Will the government give money to an owner to build protection, or to compensate for reduction in property value?"

Grose answered, "The short answer is no. The County is still waiting for reimbursement for protecting property from damage in the 2006 flood."

Inaccuracy in Maps

Dozens throughout the meeting questioned and challenged the science, the accuracy of the maps, some noting that their property was in the severe zone but where flooding was obviously impossible like 35 ft. higher than the river.

A Randle man said that he owns the property at the big hook in the river aimed at the highway right in Randle. "That river has moved 950 ft. toward the highway in 15 years and is now only 150 ft. from the highway. Yet you leave the CMZ line right on the river's edge, not including the highway. Do you really think that river won't continue to move toward the highway?" Grose answered that he had noted that area and questions it.

Bob Rummel, a Packwood resident, said that the property value of his property has already been reduced by the publishing of the CMZ maps, but that the maps are obviously in error with regard to his property which is far from and well above the river. "I doubt the engineers came out on the ground, only looked at photos taken from 3,000 feet."

Grose said, "This wrongful and baseless reduction of property value is a very serious error and something we must prevent. We want to redraw the CMZ lines so this won't happen. The engineers were out on the ground but they

couldn't visit every property. I estimate that [the CMZ] affects about 800 Packwood properties."

Another man asked, "We had the FEMA flood map and now we have the CMZ map which in a sense revises the FEMA; how long will this revision last until we have another change to deal with?"

Hyatt replied, "We'll revise them whenever we're aware that the river has changed." Grose added, "We'll revise probably at least every six years but we're already behind on meeting the revision requirement. We want your input and we will redraw these lines."

Another man noted that the CMZ covers a huge area, many square miles and hundreds of homes, and suggested that it's very unlikely that we would ever lose but a small fraction of that.

Loss of Tax Revenue

Lonnie Goble, Packwood Fire Chief said, "I'm very concerned about the drop in property tax revenue to the Fire District budget. We only just barely make it now. Loss of tax revenue will reduce the protection we provide."

Grose replied, "Your money will go down."

Another Packwood woman said, "I question the science behind the CMZ maps. The river changes all the time. Based on such poor science, the state can't afford to lose all these thousands of homes, cabins and other properties statewide."

Grose replied, "These regulators don't care a rip about economic considerations. They don't care at all about loss of value of thousands of homes."

Local Group To Be Formed

LeSarge said, "Here I'm holding 150 pages of [proposed] County regulations available on the County web site. I agree we have total loss of our property value. Who will be on a local community advisory group to gather and bring our objections and concerns about the CMZ to the County?"

Grose answered, "Here's a sign-up sheet for people who want to be on that group. Hopefully they should be people with some expertise in hydrology or the other fields involved here."

Numerous times people suggested that the money being spent on the wastewater treatment be spent instead on the CMZ issue. One suggested that if the CMZ goes through and reduces Packwood, there would be so little of Packwood left that there will be no reason to do the wastewater system. One said, "These big property value losses will domino, other things will fall and reduce all of Packwood to nothing."

Grose responded, "The state Dept. of Ecology money for wastewater is entirely separate from the CMZ issue, and it's for engineering only. We can't move that money from one pocket to the other. One reason for the wastewater system is to make more land available around Packwood for development."

Questioning Why We're Doing the CMZ Maps

Scott Silver of Timberline Association asked, "Is the main reason we're doing this CMZ to reduce our flood insurance premiums? Doing this CMZ only reduces our flood insurance premiums by 15%. Can't we not do the CMZ, pay the additional 15% premium, and keep our property values? If not, our properties should be removed entirely from the tax rolls."

Another man said, "King County elected to do nothing, to accept the consequences instead. So why must we?"

Silver again asked if the justification for us doing this CMZ thing is the small reduction in flood insurance premiums.

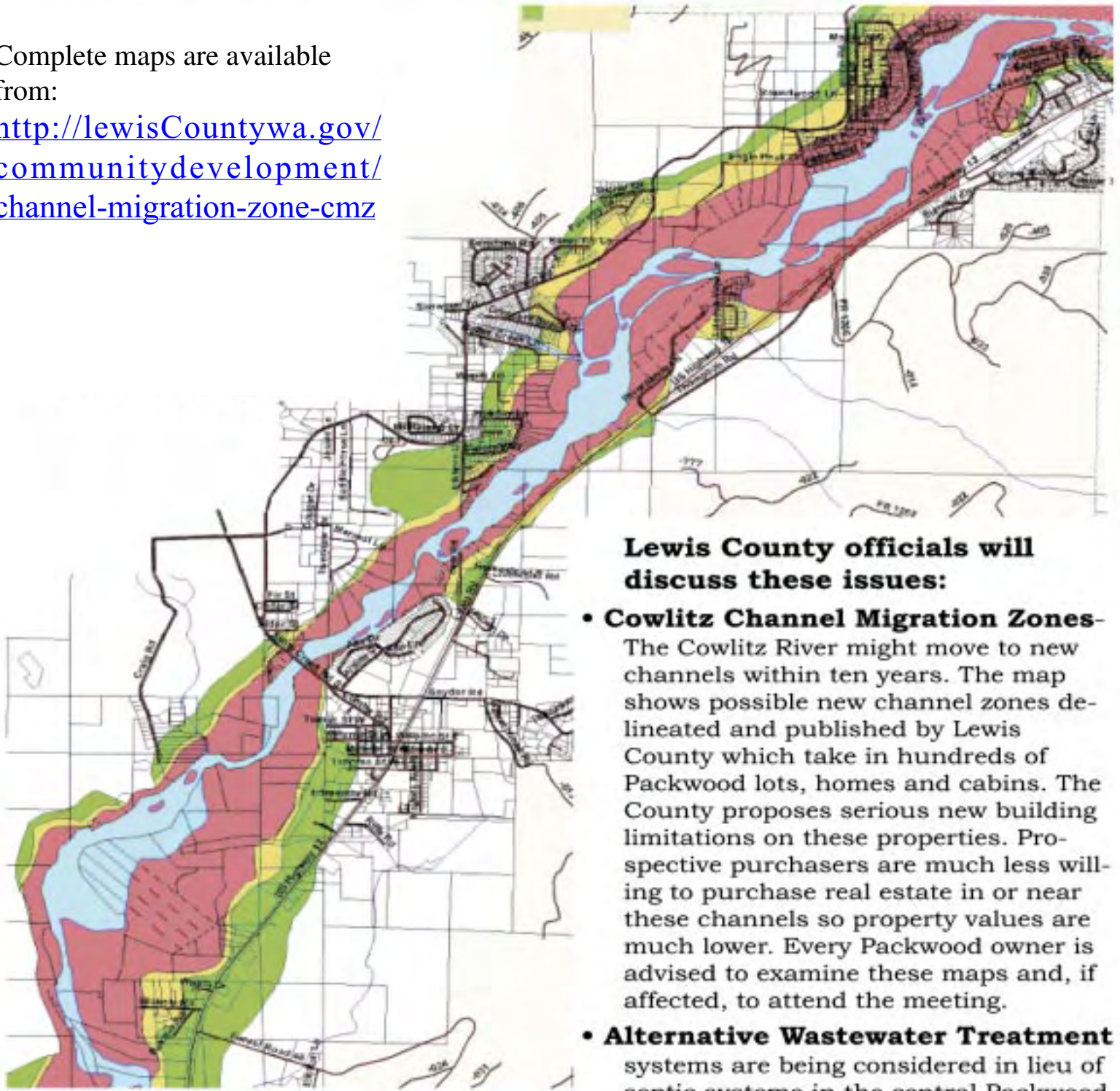
Rupp replied that the County was required to do something, to choose between redoing the FEMA flood maps and making these CMZ maps. The County chose the CMZ route.

Grose and Kincaid emphasized repeatedly through the discussion that the CMZ lines will be redrawn, that the County has taken no action on them yet, and that it may decide to take no action on them.

Grose thanked everyone for their attendance.

The meeting was adjourned about 4:30 p.m. Though it was three and a half hours long and the chairs were hard, it was entirely in order, apparently because most of the people seemed crushed facing their loss of property value. Commissioner Grose did a good job of moderating and controlling the meeting but almost no control was required. Though the information was very painful, having it explained to us in such detail was very valuable.

Complete maps are available from:
<http://lewisCountywa.gov/communitydevelopment/channel-migration-zone-cmz>



Lewis County officials will discuss these issues:

- **Cowlitz Channel Migration Zones**
The Cowlitz River might move to new channels within ten years. The map shows possible new channel zones delineated and published by Lewis County which take in hundreds of Packwood lots, homes and cabins. The County proposes serious new building limitations on these properties. Prospective purchasers are much less willing to purchase real estate in or near these channels so property values are much lower. Every Packwood owner is advised to examine these maps and, if affected, to attend the meeting.
- **Alternative Wastewater Treatment** systems are being considered in lieu of septic systems in the central Packwood area.
- **Packwood's Solid Waste Transfer Station** cannot remain where it is now.

