

# Flood Meeting Held At Packwood

by the Shopper May 10, 2010

Flood issues in the Packwood- Randle area were explained and discussed at a meeting last Saturday, May 8 at Packwood's High Valley Clubhouse.

Landowners from the Packwood, High Valley, Cora Bridge and Randle areas attended. The meeting was a combined meeting of the "County Tech Group" and the "Upper Cowlitz Community Awareness Committee," both formed following the original July, 2009 meeting about the Cowlitz Channel Migration Zones (CMZ) maps.

Lewis County Commissioner Lee Grose informally led the meeting in the absence of John Anderson who has resigned for health reasons. However Grose said as a County Commissioner he is prohibited from formally leading this group.

No one was selected or volunteered to lead the group during the meeting.

## CMZ Maps

Grose spoke regarding the Cowlitz Channel Migration Zone (CMZ) Maps. The county had published these maps on its web site delineating areas of "Severe," "Moderate" or "Low" Risk of the Cowlitz River Channel migrating to overrun the properties within ten years. The County stated that these maps were "best available science."

Grose said that recently he had ordered the CMZ Maps pulled down off the County web site. However the county is required to adopt new CMZ-like maps approved by the Federal Emergency Management Agency reasonably soon.

He said that individual property owners can make application with fee for revision of the maps on their specific property. To apply they must submit solid—probably costly—scientific evidence from such as an engineer, surveyor or hydrologist where the maps have clear errors, such as where the property is much higher above the river than indicated by the maps. He said that history of the property not being flooded, or of changes in channel or log jams, is not acceptable evidence.

He contended that the maps don't reduce property value, an opinion which was strongly disputed by the group.

Elise Lindberg, a licensed real estate agent of Packwood, explained that as licensed real estate agents, even though the maps have been pulled off the web, her agency is still required to inform prospective purchasers of CMZ-affected properties about the CMZ maps. This is service under their obligation to help their sellers fulfill the

Washington State law requiring sellers to positively inform prospective purchasers in writing whether "there any shorelines, wetlands, floodplains, or critical areas on the property." She said, "We could be held liable if we didn't."

The group was informed that the decades-old FEMA Flood Maps are still effective now in determining building requirements, and that these maps remain in effect until the county adopts the new revised FEMA-approved maps.

## Present CMZ Maps Will Be Adopted With Revisions

He said unless something unforeseen happens, the present CMZ maps will be adopted, (*with any property-owner-proven revisions as mentioned above*). He said that these maps for which we paid are reliable, were made over several years by a highly skilled engineering firm, and at great expense. He said there's no realistic chance for major revision of the maps because neither the County nor anyone else can afford the high price of redoing them.

## County Must Adopt New FEMA Maps Reasonably Soon

Grose estimated the County will be required to adopt the new maps probably not before the end of this year, and maybe not before the end of 2011. He said FEMA requires that new building requirements based on the new maps be

adopted with the maps.

Grose said, however, that even now any new building's first finished floor must be at least one foot above the highest Flood of Record at that site.

## Why Lewis County Must Adopt The New Maps

Some suggested, "If we don't adopt new FEMA-approved maps, and all we'd lose is flood insurance, why not just not adopt new maps and forget the flood insurance?"

The answer is that much more than flood insurance would be lost.

The federal government holds a huge stick over all local governments forcing them to adopt current FEMA-approved flood maps, because all Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) banks—meaning all banks—are prohibited in FDIC laws from making property loans within any area—meaning all of Lewis County—for which the local government has not adopted FEMA-approved flood maps. To not adopt the new maps would mean there would be no more bank property loans within Lewis County, a clearly unacceptable situation.

## Flood "Zone Districts"

Grose explained that three Lewis County Flood "Zone Districts" (ZD's) were created by vote of Lewis County voters several decades ago:

- 1) Entire County Zone District

- 2) Chehalis Basin Zone District
- 3) Cowlitz Basin Zone District

Each Zone District includes all properties within the entire drained area, the entire river basin, for example, rather than just those close to the river. If a Zone District desired a bond issue for significant flood control, all properties in the Zone District basin would be taxed.

Grose said the maximum tax a ZD could assess would be 50¢ per thousand of assessed valuation which would raise very roughly \$1 million dollars per year. He suggested smaller assessment of perhaps 5¢/thousand would raise roughly \$100,000 per year which might be appropriate for engineering studies or Environmental Impact Studies prior to going to construction of flood control measures.

He said the County has already allocated \$5,000 to each Flood Zone District for its initial “get going” expenses.

The Commissioners for each of these Zone Districts are the County Commissioners by default. The Advisory Committees described below will advise the County Commissioners, who will make the decisions.

The County is creating five-person Advisory Committees for each ZD, as is required. Advisory Committee members must be people willing to be active,

to work on the ZD’s activities and to meet quarterly with the County Commissioners in Chehalis.

The five members of the Cowlitz ZD Advisory Committee are suggested to be:

- Three from above Lake Scanewa including at least one from each Randle and Packwood.
- One from Morton.
- One from below Riffe Lake.

The Advisory Committees will actively seek flood control and flood hazard reduction and mitigation activities in their districts. They may also advise individual owners regarding owner-built protective measures on their particular properties, and on application for revision of the map in their area.

The Zone Districts will also be the established required fundable entities to seek extensive flood control measures such as the revetments or dikes above the High Valley Parks as proposed by the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS).

Grose passed out applications for the Advisory Committee positions, asking that these be sent to the County by May 24. The Commission will select and notify Advisory Committee members by June 7.

#### **CMZ Map Accuracy**

There is much reliability and hard science behind the CMZ maps. But the maps’ statements of “Severe,” “Moderate” or “Low” Risk

of the Cowlitz River Channel migrating to overrun the properties (*very wide properties in some cases*) within ten years are not scientific, but arbitrary. The terms “severe,” “moderate” and “low” risk are not scientific terms. “How severe?” or “How low?” for example. Also the “within ten years” is only scientific if it can be proven that the true, real length of time is determined scientifically to be ten years and to not be nine years and to not be eleven years.

Questions were raised as to whether the CMZ maps, expensive though they may have been, are really scientifically accurate enough, weighty enough to be used to justify tens of millions of dollars in reduction of property value.

Especially at least the words “Severe”, etc. and ten-year length of time would seem too arbitrary to justify the huge damage to property values caused, and it seemed to those present that at least these arbitrary wordings can and should be challenged over the entire CMZ area.

#### **Cowlitz Above High Valley**

**The log jam** that was much discussed after the 2006 flood has been dispersed by more recent high water, with remaining debris now embedded in the streambed, not to move or become a future problem. Some said the remains of the log jam now protect the residential area. Another said that one property pro-

tected by an unusual type of log wall was actually harmed as the logs were ripped from it by the current.

**The National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) proposed several control measures, including some revetments or dikes** above High Valley Park 8. The NRCS estimated they’d be relatively inexpensive and proved their feasibility. Some present intend that the group should move ahead toward implementation of these. Grose agreed these would be very good, and that the U.S. Forest Service is “OK” with them, but first engineering plans must be done, then the NEPA study must be done. Both will take more than a year and be expensive, with no known source of money. Funding could be requested through Congress, perhaps others, and from local owners through a tax assessment. The Zone District must become capable of receiving the money and handling the contract.

**A next meeting was set for 10:00 a.m. Sat. June 12 at Packwood Museum.**

#### **Information Source**

Elise Lindberg of Four-U Realty in Packwood agreed to be the meeting planner, webmaster and information resource:

Elise Lindberg, office 360-494-4848, email or webmaster@uppercowlitz.info. Web Site: <http://uppercowlitz.info>