

OREGON DEPARTMENT OF GEOLOGY AND MINERAL INDUSTRIES

Vicki S. McConnell, State Geologist



NEWS RELEASE: September 4, 2013

Increased potential for landslides and debris flows on eastern Oregon rivers

A Flash Flood Watch has been issued by the National Weather Service for today through Thursday afternoon for eastern Oregon rivers. The official statement from the NWS can be found at: <http://alerts.weather.gov/cap/or.php?x=1>

The target area includes:

- Baker County
- Harney County
- Malheur County
- Oregon Lower Treasure Valley

HEAVY RAINFALL IS PARTICULARLY DANGEROUS IN AREAS OF STEEP TERRAIN AND NEAR AREAS RECENTLY BURNED BY WILDFIRE ACTIVITY...WHERE DANGEROUS MUDFLOWS AND DEBRIS FLOWS ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY. BE PREPARED TO TAKE QUICK ACTION IF HEAVY RAINFALL IS OBSERVED NEARBY. KNOW HOW TO LEAVE THE AREA QUICKLY AND MOVE TO HIGHER GROUND.

YOU SHOULD MONITOR LATER FORECASTS AND BE ALERT FOR POSSIBLE FLOOD WARNINGS. THOSE LIVING IN AREAS PRONE TO FLOODING SHOULD BE PREPARED TO TAKE ACTION SHOULD FLOODING DEVELOP.

Care should be taken when traveling over the mountains during this time. The most dangerous places include:

- Canyon bottoms, stream channels, and areas of rock and soil accumulation at the outlets of canyons;
- Bases of steep hillsides;
- Road cuts or other areas where slopes of hills have been excavated or over steepened;
- Places where slides or debris flows have occurred in the past.

Debris flows are rapidly moving landslides that can destroy everything in their paths. They can easily travel a mile or more, depending on the terrain. They will contain boulders and logs and transport those in a fast-moving soil and water slurry.

Some areas are more hazardous than others when the danger of landslides is high. If there is a flood warning, stay away from the river. Stay away from steep slopes during intense rainstorms. Knowing ahead of time where the danger areas around your home for potential landslides might be is the first step in being prepared.

DOGAMI's mission is to provide earth science information and regulation to make Oregon safe and prosperous.

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Follow these steps:

- Stay alert. Listen to the radio, TV, or a weather radio for flood watches, which include the potential for debris flows and if told to evacuate, do so immediately;
- Listen for unusual sounds that might indicate moving debris, such as trees cracking or boulders knocking together. A trickle of falling mud or debris may precede larger landslides;
- If you think there is danger of a landslide, leave immediately;
- If water in a river or stream suddenly turns muddy or the amount of water flowing suddenly decreases or increases, this is a warning that the flow has been affected upstream. You should immediately leave the area because a debris flow may soon be coming downstream;
- Assume highways are not safe. Be alert when driving, especially at night. Don't overdrive your headlights. Embankments along roadsides may fail, sending rock and debris onto the road;
- Landowners and road managers should check road drainage systems and conduct needed maintenance in case the predicted heavy precipitation does occur.

Cleaning up after landslides can also be hazardous. "When it is wet outside, be careful when cleaning up the mess. A small mudslide can actually be part of a larger landslide. Cleanup should not be done until after the storm.

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