



OREGON DEPARTMENT OF GEOLOGY AND MINERAL INDUSTRIES

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New maps look at landslide hazards in Eagle Creek fire area

PORTLAND, Ore. – New maps offer an improved look at landslide hazards in Oregon’s Columbia River Gorge – an area that’s even more susceptible to landslides following recent wildfires.

The Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries (DOGAMI) today released new landslide inventory maps for eastern Multnomah County, including the Eagle Creek Fire burn area.

Land that has slid in the past is more likely to slide again, says Bill Burns, DOGAMI engineering geologist. The new mapping revealed 286 existing landslides – all places that are highly susceptible to future slides.

Knowing where past landslides have occurred is especially critical in the Eagle Creek fire area, Burns says, because recently burned areas are also more likely to slide. With vegetation removed, rain can reach soil more quickly, and loss of root strength also means less stable soil.

“With Oregon’s rainiest months still ahead, it’s extremely important for people to be more aware than ever of landslide hazards in this area,” he says.

The Columbia River Gorge is one of Oregon’s most landslide prone areas. The winter storms of 1996-1997 triggered more than 9,000 slides statewide. In the Dodson-Warrendale area of the Gorge, multiple massive debris flows destroyed homes and closed Interstate 84, the Union Pacific Railroad, and Columbia River traffic.

“We can’t predict when and where the next landslide events will occur,” Burns says. “But by improving information about existing landslide locations, we better understand what areas might be hazardous during storm events, or where taking action to reduce risk is a good idea.”

DOGAMI’s interactive SLIDO shows the newly mapped landslides: www.oregongeology.org/slido. A guide to landslide hazards around the home also offers general guidance homeowners should consider regarding their home and property, including landslide warning signs and who to contact if they suspect active landslides on their property. The guide is available for free download at bit.ly/landslidehazards

Staying safe when landslides are possible

Throughout the rainy season, the National Weather Service highlights the potential for debris flows and landslides during flood watch advisories.

“When landslides are possible in your area, you need to stay alert to weather conditions, and to what’s happening around you,” says Ali Ryan Hansen, DOGAMI communications director. If your home, work, or route is in a watch area:

- Stay alert. Track the flood watch by radio, TV, weather radio or online. If told to evacuate, do so immediately.
- Listen. Unusual sounds 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.
- Watch the water. If water in a stream or creek 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.
- Travel with extreme caution. Assume highways are not safe. Be alert when driving, especially at night. Embankments along roadsides may fail, sending rock and debris onto the road.
- Stay cautious after the storm. Cleaning up after landslides can also be hazardous. A small mudslide can actually be part of a larger landslide. Cleanup should not be done until after the storm.

About the publication

Open-File Report O-17-03, Landslide Inventory of Eastern Multnomah County by William J. Burns and Kassandra O. Lindsey includes four map plates (scale 1:12,000), Esri geodatabase, and metadata. The publication is available for download at: <http://www.oregongeology.org/pubs/ofr/p-O-17-03.htm>

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