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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 29, 2009

The Seattle Times



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Decaying levees magnify Green River flood risk



PHOTOS BY STEVE RINGMAN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Many Green River levees, including those near this Auburn mobile-home park, are 50 years old, leaky and at risk of failure. Seeping water creates ponds, which spread into the neighborhood as the river rises.

DANGER FROM DISREPAIR | The threat posed by troubled Howard Hanson Dam is intensified by aging levees downstream, poorly built and neglected for decades.

BY CRAIG WELCH
Seattle Times environment reporter

The rows of giant sandbags now lining the Green River may calm residents who feared water could swamp its banks. But the new barrier only masks risks still hidden below. Beneath the stacks of plastic designed to prevent flooding from a damaged dam rest aging levees in serious decay. The right mix of storms could wipe them out and flood the valley before the river even hits its crest. About a half-dozen stretches between Auburn and Tukwila are so porous or unstable that they're considered a failure risk — even if the Howard Hanson Dam is operating normally. If problems with the dam force operators to release enough water to reach the sandbags, odds that the levees won't hold increase. "In 50 years, the water's never been that high," said Tom Bean, a King County floodplain engineer. "Nobody can say what will happen." Storms last winter damaged an abutment to the dam, and the Army Corps of Engineers concluded this year it might have to release more water than usual and cause flooding to prevent a cata-

strophic collapse. After months of panic and millions of dollars in preparations, the corps said its temporary repairs this fall dropped the possibility of a significant flood from 1 in 3 to 1 in 33. But permanent repairs that would lessen the threat further may be five years away. And concern for the levees is not new. Some sections are so old and loose that high water could saturate and blow them out. Others have been undercut or carved

into cornices or have deteriorated until muddy clumps slump off and wash away. Rushing water already tunnels beneath some banks, forming muddy lakes along adjacent roadways even in mild rains. In one spot, levee instability caused an asphalt path above to crumble into a 4-foot sinkhole. Shoring up the levees is slow and expensive, even as the damaged dam elevates risks. And the corps' best shot at preventing

See > **GREEN RIVER, A4**



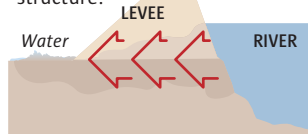
Tom Bean, a King County engineer, monitors weak spots most likely to be first to flood. A levee on this stretch in Auburn keeps water from flooding the mobile-home park.

Green River levee troubles

Levees can fail in numerous ways, but three problems are common along the Green River:

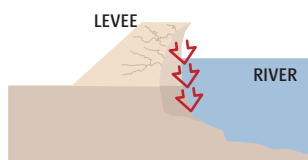
SEEPAGE

River water can leach through a levee's soft earth and fine sands and pool up on the other side, drawing kernels of sand and mud with it in a process called "piping" that can destabilize the structure.



STEEP BANK

Erosion steepens slopes, which can cause levee tops to slough off into the water and fracture and weaken the rest of the structure.



SLUMPING

Large sections of levees become saturated and loose and slump into the water in big chunks.



Sources: King County flood-control map; King County flood-warning instruction book; Tom Bean; Steve Bleifjuhs

Reporting by CRAIG WELCH, Graphic by MARK NOWLIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Pierce County sheriff's Deputy Kent Mundell Jr., 1965-2009



FAMILY PHOTO

SOMBER WAIT FOR 'MIRACLE' IS OVER

TAKEN OFF LIFE SUPPORT, DEPUTY DIES QUICKLY

He and partner were shot last week near Eatonville

BY CHRISTINE CLARRIDGE
Seattle Times staff reporter

Pierce County sheriff's Deputy Kent Mundell Jr. died Monday shortly after he was removed from life support at Harborview Medical Center in Seattle. Deputy Mundell's wife was at his side when he was pronounced dead at 5:04 p.m., according to Sgt. Ed Troyer, spokesman for the Pierce County Sheriff's Department. He said the deputy was taken off life support after his physicians told his family that he would not recover. "Obviously, everybody was waiting for a miracle," a tearful Troyer said outside the hospital. "It didn't turn out the way we hoped." Deputy Mundell, 44, was one of two deputies shot while responding to a domestic-violence call Dec. 21 outside Eatonville, Pierce County. A 10-year veteran of the Pierce County Sheriff's De-

See > **MUNDELL, A4**

Confused about new air rules? Get in line

Seattle Times news services and staff

By now, everyone knows the airport drill, its inconveniences offset by its clarity: Take off your shoes, pop your laptop in a tray, have your driver's license ready. But since a Christmas Day terrorist plot on a Detroit-bound jet was foiled, beleaguered travelers again have been beset by confusing, inconsistent rules. Could you keep your blanket, as on Continental, or would it be snatched at the end of the flight, as on Lufthansa? Would security measures be visibly unchanged, as they were in Houston, or would passengers be surprised by a careful swabbing of their hands and purses, like those in South Carolina? Would entertainment systems be shut down on international flights, as they were Sun-

See > **SECURITY, A3**

POLITICAL FIGHT prevents Senate vote on new TSA director > **Close-up A3**



Fund For The Needy

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Homeless couple with kids find a lifeline

WELLSPRING FAMILY SERVICES | Suddenly jobless, they told their children they were 'camping out' in the car, but the family's desperate ordeal took an emotional toll not easily healed.

BY JONATHAN MARTIN
Seattle Times staff reporter

With nowhere else to go, Monica Luna and Louis Padilla pushed the bench seats in their Chevrolet Suburban all the way to the back, making a little room. They laid down blankets to ward off the early winter cold, and pulled out some books and a Spanish card game called Loteria.

This, they would tell their children — ages 2, 3, 5 and 7 — was "camping out." Being forced to move into their car was not the first indignity for the Padilla family, and it would not be the last. Within a few months last year, they went from a relatively stable, double-income married life, living in a mobile home they owned in Renton, to utter destitution. They lost their jobs. Then their

house. Then, finally, their car. "It broke my heart. It felt awful," said Luna, 27. "Things were OK, and then all of sudden they were not." A year later, the family is still somewhere short of stable. The couple and their kids are squeezed into a subsidized apartment at 25th Avenue and East Union. Luna has steady work, but Padilla is still looking. For their children, the year had a ripple effect that Padilla and Luna are now sorting out. One son grew withdrawn, vacant. Another lashed out. They asked where

See > **FUND, A5**

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< Green River

FROM A1

DECAYING LEVEES ADD TO FLOOD RISK

Repair funds far short of amount needed

flooding — quickly draining the reservoir between storms — may, in some cases, cause even more levee damage.

“That’s the thing that’s causing me the greatest concern,” said Hillman Mitchell, public-works director for the city of Tukwila. “Rapid draw-down of the river creates suction on the earthen structure and actually pulls pieces of it into the water.”

Evidence of shifting

An easy place to track the depth of levee problems is a half-mile stretch in northeast Auburn. On a recent winter morning, Bean, the county engineer, wandered a path above the river pointing out disrepair.

During high water, flood patrollers used to drive these banks 24 hours a day, looking for signs of damage. But the rows of thick sandbags means vehicles don’t fit, so inspections can take four times longer.

Bean pointed to a tree trunk curved like a pistol rising from the bank — evidence that the levee had shifted over time. Cracked pavement farther downstream confirmed his analysis. A few hundred feet beyond, he saw erosion-steepened banks, which further increases the risk of collapse. And there are other issues.

When the river is high, flap gates that cover storm culverts draining into the river can get propped open by debris, causing water to run backward through the pipes. On this day, water was seeping through the levee and creating ponds in nearby woods. The cloudy brown water told Bean the moisture was thick with sand, which suggested the levee actually was liquefying. County engineers warn that can lead to a blowout.

All this is taking place a few dozen yards from a mobile-home park that already fills with river water during modest flows within the normal range. A levee failure could flood these homes — and cause millions of dollars in damage downstream.

“I have relatively high concerns about the levee system as a whole,” said Steve Bleifuhs, who runs the county’s river plain section. “That’s one of the places we worry about most.”

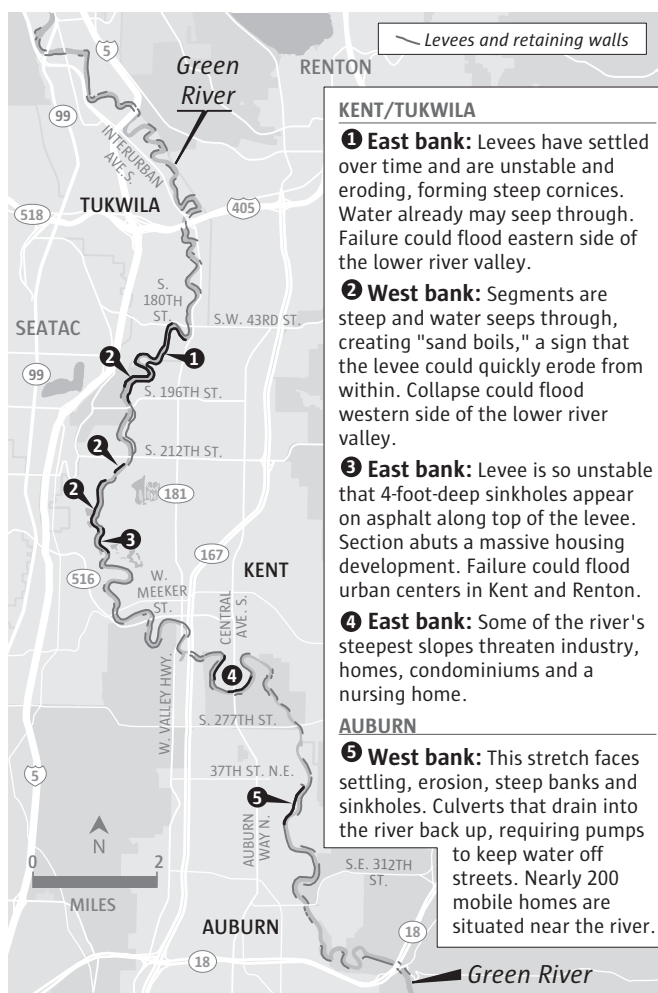
There are several others like it downstream.

Old and poorly made

It’s no secret why the levees are in bad shape: Poor construction, decades of neglect and the power of moving water over time have weakened these mounds of sand and earth severely. Most were constructed at least 50 years ago by farmers who pushed mud and rock up with plows or bulldozers. Some levees are mixed with old tree stumps and rusting car frames.

They never were designed to last this long, but the Howard Hanson Dam upstream provided false security. Be-

Problem levees on the Green River



Sources: King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks; King County Flood Hazard Management Plan; flood-control maps; Green River “areas of concern map;” Steve Bleifuhs; Tom Bean.

Reporting by CRAIG WELCH, Graphic by MARK NOWLIN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

tween Highway 18 and Interstate 405, the levees are high enough generally to hold flows of up to 13,900 cubic feet per second (cfs.) of water. But the corps never has let the flows exceed 12,400 cfs. since the dam was built in 1961. There hasn’t been a major flood here in a half-century.

But decades of wear have

taken a toll. So much water leaks through levees on a heavily industrialized stretch between Kent and Renton that engineers have reported seeing “sand boils,” volcano-like burlbes of water and earth that appear on what should be the dry side — another sign that the levees are eroding from within. A stretch near a massive

housing development regularly sloughs into the water. Condominiums in one short section near a horseshoe bend in Kent are stacked within 10 feet of a dangerously steep river bank.

Recognizing that a changing climate might only make winter rain more frequent, the county in 2007 created a flood-control district and started collecting taxes to fix crumbling levees. It made repairs on the Green River a priority. Some parts, including a stretch in downtown Kent, are finished.

But the district’s budget for repairing levees on rivers across the county is \$39 million a year, while rebuilding levees only on the Green is expected to cost nearly \$300 million.

Combined with emergency money from Kent and the state, about \$65 million has been allocated for Green River bank reconstruction.

Many fixes are years away. Design of repairs to the section near the Auburn mobile-home park will come next year, but construction won’t start until the year after, if not later.

“In some cases the cost is tens of millions of dollars,” said Mark Isaacson, who runs the county’s water and land division. “In some cases we don’t even own the land.”

Private developers often are reluctant to sell river-front property. In one stretch near Kent, a developer plans to fix the levees across his land, but only in the course of developing his property, a multiyear process.

The Legislature set aside \$10 million to begin acquiring land along another sec-

tion next year, but improvements will take several years.

Meanwhile, Tukwila has built temporary retaining walls, similar to more permanent structures erected in New Orleans, some of which failed during Hurricane Katrina. Meanwhile, the levees continue to decay.

Dam-release dangers

Even with temporary fixes to the dam, the reservoir can’t hold nearly as much water as normal.

The corps is counting on being able to release up to 13,900 cfs. of water — the capacity of most of the levees — in heavy storms.

But some of the most troubling stretches have a 2 to 6 percent chance of failing every time they near their capacity. And a 100-year flood — always a possibility — could leave the river running at full bore for more than a week.

“When we have a higher likelihood of high flows, we’ll have a higher likelihood of failure,” said Larry Karpack, a consulting engineer for the county.

For now, the county and the corps seem to be doing what they can, said Derek Booth, a University of Washington geology professor who has studied Green River flooding scenarios. But Booth is convinced the true odds of serious flooding probably are higher than 1 in 33.

“We’re looking at having to go five years without any problems,” Booth said. “But it only has to come up bad once.”

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< Mundell

FROM A1

WAIT FOR ‘MIRACLE’ COMES TO AN END

Deputy’s zest for life inspiration for many

partment, Deputy Mundell, of the Spanaway area, leaves behind his wife, Lisa, and two children, 16 and 10.

“All of us suffered a tremendous loss because of who this man was,” Pierce County Sheriff Paul Pastor said. “None of us is doing well. This is somebody we knew, someone we worked with, someone we have taken risks with, someone who has backed us up.”

Troyer said a memorial service for Deputy Mundell is tentatively scheduled for Jan. 5 at the Tacoma Dome.

Deputy Mundell was shot multiple times after he and his partner, Sgt. Nick Hausner, 43, responded to a call to remove an “unwanted guest” from a house near Tanwax Lake, about 7 miles north of Eatonville and about 18 miles south of Puyallup.

Jason Crable had wanted his brother, David E. Crable, who was drunk, removed from the home.

When the deputies arrived, Jason Crable invited them in. They talked with David Crable, who seemed cooperative, and he agreed to leave the home with the deputies, according to sheriff’s officials.

But before they left, David Crable suddenly pulled a gun concealed under his arm and started shooting.

Deputy Mundell returned fire and killed David Crable, but not before the deputy himself was critically injured, the sheriff’s officials said. Deputy Mundell was flown to Harborview Medical Center. Law-enforcement personnel from numerous departments have been standing vigil all week at Harborview, a show of support for Deputy Mundell and his family.

Hausner was shot as well



PHOTOS BY CLIFF DESPEAUX / THE SEATTLE TIMES



Pierce County sheriff’s spokesman Ed Troyer announces Deputy Kent Mundell Jr.’s death. “Everybody was waiting for a miracle,” he said. “It didn’t turn out the way we hoped.”

and sent to Madigan Army Medical Center at Fort Lewis. He was released from the hospital Thursday morning and spent a portion of that day visiting Deputy Mundell. Troyer said Monday that Hausner was “despondent” at the news of his partner’s death.

Deputy Mundell is the sixth law-enforcement officer to be killed in the Puget Sound area in the past eight weeks.

Seattle police Officer Timothy Brenton was fatally shot Oct. 31 while sitting in his patrol car with his partner, who was injured. A Tukwila man, Christopher Monfort, has

been charged in the shootings.

Four Lakewood police officers — Mark Renninger, Tina Griswold, Ronald Owens and Gregory Richards — were fatally shot on the morning of Nov. 29 at a Parkland coffee shop. The gunman, Maurice Clemmons, was killed a few days later by a Seattle police officer after a manhunt.

Outdoors enthusiast

Deputy Mundell loved the active life, according to his friends and family.

“He wasn’t a guy who was going to sit at a desk. He was wired as a thrill-seeker,” his stepbrother Mark Stafford said last week.

Police work was not Deputy Mundell’s first career.

He gave up a job in manufacturing when he was in his mid-30s to become a Pierce County sheriff’s deputy, his stepbrother said.

“He wanted to get the bad guy,” said Stafford, 38, who referred to Deputy Mundell as “my brother.”

Stafford, who works for Tacoma Public Works, said he learned the morning after the shootings that Deputy Mundell was fighting for his life at Harborview. Stafford said he first got to know Deputy Mundell, who was about six years older, when he was growing up in the South Hill area of Puyallup.

They were friends then,

years before Stafford’s father, Patrick, and Deputy Mundell’s mother, Patricia, married in the mid-1980s.

After the marriage, Stafford said, he and his new stepbrother became close when they were young adults.

For the past 10 years, they had traveled every August to lakes in Eastern Washington or Idaho with other family members for camping trips, where they would go boating and wakeboarding.

Deputy Mundell lived for those adventures, Stafford said.

He became a licensed pilot and bought a plane after renting one. He also was a sky diver, Stafford said.

“His motto was: ‘If you’re not living on the edge, you’re taking up too much space.’ That’s how he lived his life,” Stafford said.

Deputy Mundell, who married his high-school sweet-

heart more than 20 years ago, also doted on his daughter, 16, and son, 10, Stafford said last week.

“I never imagined that grief could be so deep,” Deputy Mundell’s mother, Patricia Stafford, said Monday night. “But in the midst of the grief, there is something more. I am so honored to be Kent’s mother. He was not only my son, he was my joy.”

Deputy Mundell’s stepmother, Dorene Mundell, of Belton, Texas, described her stepson as “one of the best fathers I have ever seen in my life.”

Deputy Mundell also was close with his larger family. Dorene Mundell said when she and Kent Mundell Sr. married six years ago, they brought together their families, with their own grown children and grandchildren.

“He seemed so happy for all of us to be welcomed into his side of the family,” she

said last week. “My daughters loved him. My only grandson calls him Uncle Kent, and I’m about to cry talking about it.”

Gov. Chris Gregoire issued a statement, calling Deputy Mundell a “fallen hero.”

“Though his life was cut far too short by this act of violence, his memory will live on in the many people he protected and served,” the statement read.

Gregoire has called on law-enforcement groups to meet this week to compile a list of potential changes to state law, policy or the state constitution to address the recent slayings of law-enforcement officers. She also hopes to meet with them Jan. 8.

Pierce County sheriff’s Deputy Tony Messineo was on duty when reached Monday night. “I’m terribly sad,” he said. “The community lost a good deputy, and I lost a good friend.”

Outside of the hospital Monday, Pastor, the Pierce County sheriff, spoke emotionally about the loss of Deputy Mundell in one breath and, in the next, praised the everyday heroism of the deputies in his department.

Even as Deputy Mundell died, Pastor said, other deputies were preparing for their next shift.

“People will be putting on uniforms and putting on badges,” he said. “They will be taking the same risks. Thank God, there are people willing to do that.”

Information from Seattle Times archives and The Associated Press is included in this report.

Wild-horse capture starts in Nevada

BY OSKAR GARCIA
The Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — A two-month capture of about 2,500 wild horses from public and private lands in northern Nevada began Monday amid protests that the roundups are unnecessary and inhumane.

Federal officials said the roundup is needed because the 850 square miles of land is overpopulated and could become unlivable to wildlife and livestock within four years.

Bureau of Land Manage-

ment spokeswoman JoLynn Worley said the agency began gathering horses Monday in the eastern portion of the Black Rock Range, mountains more than 100 miles north of Reno, Nev.

A contractor was using two helicopters to move the horses to corrals, Worley said. They were then being trucked to Fallon, Nev., for

immunizations and veterinary care, she said.

Worley said the agency would likely be in the range for one week to 10 days — with a goal of capturing 250 mustangs — before moving on to the next of five areas.

Plans call for the mustangs to be placed for adoption or sent to holding facilities in the Midwest.

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