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NEWS RELEASE

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Coastal cities adopt tsunami land use regulations

The city of Gearhart is one of three coastal communities to recently and voluntarily adopt land use regulations addressing their local tsunami risk; the others being Rockaway Beach and Port Orford. There are now seven communities on the Oregon coast with locally-adopted tsunami hazard overlay zones, whose work has been supported by Federal grant money awarded to the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD).

Through two federal grants totaling \$530,000, DLCD has been working with eleven coastal communities in preparing for a local Cascadia tsunami. The project, which began in August 2017, has resulted in more detailed pedestrian tsunami evacuation maps, comprehensive evacuation planning, and innovative land use strategies tailored to each participating community's tsunami risk. The tsunami hazard overlay zones focus on two main approaches: prohibiting critical and essential facilities from being built within the riskiest of tsunami zones; and incorporating evacuation improvements as a requirement of new land divisions being sited within the tsunami zone. The provisions do not apply to existing development or to single family dwellings on existing lots or parcels.

In Gearhart, local leaders and citizens have been working together with DLCD staff to learn about their community's evacuation vulnerabilities and to identify land use tactics to minimize the loss of life and property from a catastrophic tsunami. This effort led to the eventual adoption of new tsunami hazard overlay zone provisions in July (which will take effect in early September).

"Public safety is always our number one concern and emergency preparedness has been one of the city's top priorities since I took office. I'm very proud of the work our planning commission and our city council has accomplished with the help of DLCD to lead the way on the north Oregon Coast and help mitigate the threat of natural disasters," says Gearhart Mayor Matt Brown, "It's very important that our residents and visitors have every chance to find safe evacuation routes in case of a Cascadia event and that we have critical infrastructure in place to become resilient in the face of all natural disasters."

The resources provided by these project grants are supporting community planning efforts specific to the tsunami hazard, such as identifying evacuation route improvements and thoughtful development siting and design.

“It is important for communities to have the ability to recover and care for their displaced residents and tourists after a local tsunami event,” says Meg Reed, coastal hazards planner for DLCD. “We are helping communities identify their most vulnerable areas and plan to their community’s acceptable level of risk, in order to improve evacuation and recovery success in both the short- and long-term. This planning may look different in each coastal jurisdiction.”

Coos County, Reedsport, Florence, and North Bend are the coastal communities that have already adopted tsunami hazard overlay zones. The communities of Tillamook County, Lincoln City, Newport, and Waldport are other jurisdictions currently working with DLCD on this tsunami resilience grant project, due to be completed in June 2020. In combination, these projects will provide a significant foundation for advancing the ability of Oregon’s coastal communities to plan, prepare, and recover from a local source tsunami event.

The federal grant money comes from two programs within the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Office for Coastal Management: Projects of Special Merit and Coastal Resilience Grants.

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