

**PAUL L. EVANS**  
**STATE REPRESENTATIVE**  
DISTRICT 20



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

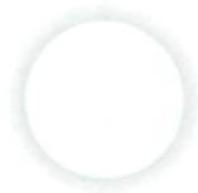
I am submitting the attached article for the subcommittee's review.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Paul L. Evans". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.





# 30 years later: The devastating February 1996 flood that changed the Pacific Northwest



Thirty years ago this month, the Pacific Northwest experienced one of the most destructive natural disasters in modern history.

By [Mark Nelsen](#)

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PORTLAND, Ore. (KPTV) — Thirty years ago this month, the Pacific Northwest experienced one of the most destructive natural disasters in modern history when the February 1996 flood devastated

communities across Oregon and Washington.

The catastrophic event transformed familiar landmarks into unrecognizable scenes. Willamette Falls disappeared, turned into rapids. The End of the Oregon Trail marker was submerged. Hundreds of Portland residents came together to build an enormous wall to keep floodwaters out of downtown.



February 1996 flood (KPTV)

Thousands of people left their homes as the disaster unfolded.



"We don't know if the water will be six inches deep, or 12, or 24 inches deep in here," said one homeowner at the time.

#### **Four days of continuous rain**

For four days and nights, rain fell constant and relentless as a pineapple express stalled over the region. Every single river in northwest Oregon and southwest Washington reached flood stage. Most went well beyond, and several broke all-time records.

Logs choked rivers in what became a "Portland roundup" as tugboats stayed on 24-hour duty, protecting bridges and floating homes from damage.





February 1996 flood (KPTV)

Mudslides and landslides tore through the landscape — over 100 just in the Portland metro area. Homes were destroyed, roads were washed away and highways were closed. Eight people died and half a billion dollars in damage was left in the flood's wake.

### **What made the 1996 flood so destructive**

The 1996 flood was particularly destructive because of several factors that aligned. In most floods, the region gets a day or two of heavy rain. But in 1996, four days of continuous rain fell on already-saturated ground after a wet winter.



All areas west of the Cascades picked up at least seven inches of rain, but in the surrounding mountains, over 20 inches fell.

The final piece was the melting of a deep snowpack in the mountains. In the three weeks leading up to the flood, several feet of snow had accumulated in the mountains and well down into the hills.

At South Saddle Mountain in the Coast Range, the rain gauge picked up 21 inches of rain in four days. About two feet of snow was on the ground, and the rain and warm weather melted all the

snow, adding about 13 inches of snow water. It was as if 34 inches of rain — almost three feet — fell in just four days.

## Record water levels



The amount of water flowing down the Willamette River was unprecedented. A marker showing a minor flood from the 1970s was 20 feet under water during the 1996 flood.

These "rain-on-snow" floods have always been part of Pacific Northwest winters. Starting in the 1930s, the Army Corps of Engineers constructed 13 dams in the Willamette River basin. A Corps of Engineers study estimates those dams prevented \$2 billion in damage during the 1996 flood.

Without them, the Willamette River in downtown Portland would have reached two feet higher, surging into downtown.

Another similar flood could happen again. Meteorologists will be looking for a wet winter with soaked ground, plus heavy snow in the hills, then extremely heavy rain from an atmospheric river or pineapple express.

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