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A guardrail hangs over the edge of a section of Paseo Del Mar in San Pedro that slid down the cliffside last November.
PHOTO BY DAVID ROSENFELD

Slip sliding away

On the Palos Verdes peninsula, engineers try to hold back the forces of nature as the ground shifts beneath their feet

by David Rosenfeld

In the rainy early morning hours of Nov. 20, Palos Verdes residents received a menacing reminder that they live on a bed of geologic activity far beyond their control.

A 600-foot section of Paseo Del Mar in San Pedro below the White Point Nature Preserve suddenly dropped down the cliffside. It was the most damaging landslide on the Peninsula since the 17th and 18th holes fell to the beach in 1999 from what's now Trump National Golf Club.

This month a consultant firm hired by

the City of Los Angeles to analyze the causes of the slide cited an unknown source of groundwater as a main culprit. Excess water, together with a general slope of the land toward the sea, the makeup of the ground and coastal erosion, led to the failure, according to a report by the geotechnical and environmental consulting firm Shannon & Wilson Inc.

Little has been done to repair the estimated \$62 million in damage done by the landslide.

"All government is in a hurt because of tax

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by the White Point landslide last
PHOTO BY DAVID ROSENFELD

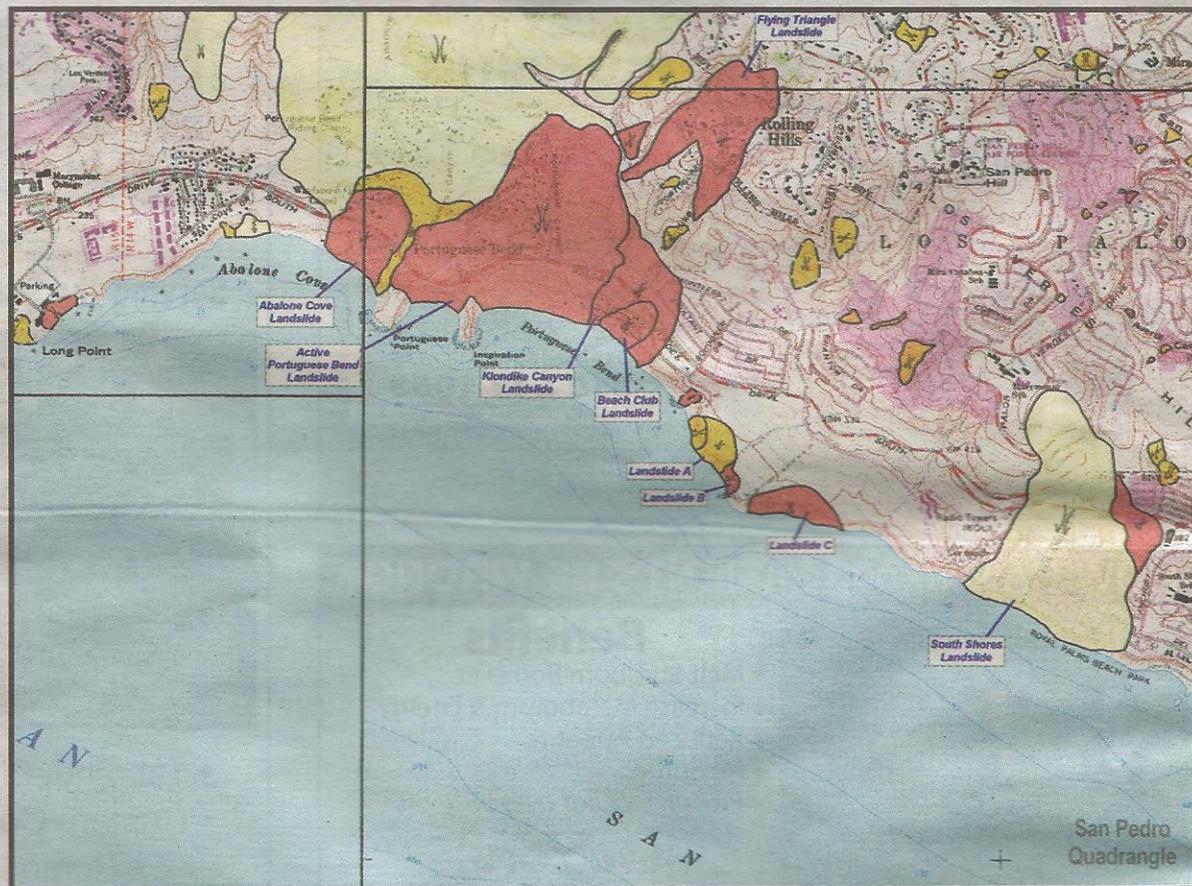
ified, the seafloor became the
onite clays now exist between
ry rock that make up the

os Verdes where the layers are
ean, these bentonite clays are
iding cake getting chipped away

White Point landslide, unusual
ter saturated the bentonite lay-
with coastal erosion and gravity
the bentonite clay that acts as
most every major landslide that
la, said Bob Douglas, professor
USC.

often see this whole gradation,
y with some volcanic ash,"
peninsula is just a large chunk
at's been moved around. It was
h further south than it is now."
une - or misfortune, as he puts it
living in Portuguese Bend, the
area on the Peninsula. Landslides
historic times. A series of de-water-
estimated 300 gallons of ground-
it into the ocean to prevent fur-
the wells needs to be replaced
actually severed the hole.

member of the Rancho Palos Verdes
mission and a resident in the 92-
Community Association, said
 accustomed to dealing with land
potential for slides.



MAP COURTESY OF THE US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY.

Potential landslides dot the Palos Verdes peninsula.

"Our roof isn't completely straight," Leon said, pointing to a dip in the shingles. "I've got stress cracks in different areas of the house. It's just something that we deal with. Most people here have the expertise to check."

Due to past landslides, Portuguese Bend for decades was subject to a building moratorium which prevented development on 16 lots. A court decision about five years ago overturned the moratorium and this year construction began on the first homes located on the hill above the existing residences.

The case boiled down to a difference of geological opinion. The city of Rancho Palos Verdes said it wasn't safe. The homeowners said it was. And the homeowners won. Jim York, who tried to develop on an adjacent lot subject to the past moratorium, said he's spent millions of dollars on geology studies also to prove the city wrong.

The City of Rancho Palos Verdes remains in constant battle of its own to repair the cracks and the sharp dips

on the nearby section of Palos Verdes Drive South. Entire sections of the road must be rebuilt every three months. This year repairs will cost an estimated \$500,000. Carolyn Lehr, RPV city manager, said the city constantly monitors geologic activity.

"Every locale has its own unique phenomenon," Lehr said. "We're always monitoring any changes in our geologic areas so that we can be responsive with projects that will help to minimize those impacts. It's one of the unique aspects of our city."

City engineers are also working to shore up another section of the road further east called the Terapaca landslide about two miles from the San Pedro border. A fix is estimated at \$19 million but so far the city has received state grant funding for just \$9 million, said RPV Mayor Anthony Missetich.

"We have a shelf-ready plan, we just need to get the

rest of the money to fix it so it won't undermine our roadway," Missetich said.

Lawsuits and foreclosure

Landslides have wreaked havoc throughout Palos Verdes over the years. In 1999, the 17th and 18th holes of what was then Ocean Trails Golf Club fell into the sea in a slide that would eventually contribute to the course being sold in foreclosure to Donald Trump in what would become Trump National Golf Club. A landslide geologist reportedly stood on the 18th tee box watching his subject matter occur before his eyes.

In Palos Verdes Estates, city officials worked for decades to resolve litigation arising from landslides. In 1981, a landslide caused by a sewer main leak that occurred over several years destabilized ten properties along the cliffside. Settlements resulted in the city owning the homes. Some were demolished. Others were left vacant, while the city manager and police chief now occupy the rest.

At this point the expense of maintaining the properties might not be worth it, said Christi Hogin, an attorney handling the cases for the city.

"The city has made a sound choice by finding this particular use," Hogin said. "But even this use can't be necessarily sustained forever, given that there has been some movement."

Allan Rigg, PVE public works director, said city planners purposefully chose not to put approve homes in landslide-prone areas like the cliffsides of Lunada Bay and Christmas Cove.

"We have a lot of rocky bluffs which you really don't have landslides on, which is where the majority of our bluff homes are located," Rigg said.

The city, of course, would not be liable if a home was damaged from a slide that occurs naturally.

"There are some things that are acts of God and not the city," Hogin said. "We're not responsible for every bad thing that happens."

Education

Water drainage is essential to minimize the chances of a slide, said Stephen Jacobs, a geology consultant.

"You've got the slope condition where bedding dips out," he said. "You also have slopes where bedding of the underlying strata is not necessarily relevant. You have soils that underlie the slope - when they get wet they expand, when they are dry they contract. These have a tendency to creep down the slope. The soil types really need to be kept under control with regard to drainage or moisture."

Jeff Miller, president of the South Coast Geologic Society, works to inform the general public about the geology in their area and what to look out for as a home-owner.

"Our goal is to reach out to the public and make sure they understand what's going on from a geologic perspective in Palos Verdes," Miller said. "Landslides have been occurring in Palos Verdes for a long time before development, and landslides will continue to occur in Palos Verdes. The most important thing is to be as prepared as you can be. It doesn't mean the whole place is going to slide away."

For more information about possible landslides in your area visit the web site for the U.S. Geological Survey. **ER**