

County deemed a high risk for landslides



A county worker uses an earthmover to try and clear a slide that blocks Glenwood Drive in Scotts Valley on March 25.

SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE



Neighbors living along Nelson Road snap pictures of the rock slide that closed the road in March.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL FILE

Geologists assess slide susceptibility statewide

By JASON HOPPIN

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SANTA CRUZ — Here's one that comes as no surprise to the residents of Nelson Road — Santa Cruz County is among the highest-risk counties for landslides in Northern California, according to the California Geological Survey.

With a handful of Scotts Valley residents still working around a massive rockslide caused by torrential March rains, the California Geological Survey on Thursday released a map showing the dangers of landslides around the state. The Santa Cruz Mountains

join parts of Marin County and the East Bay where residents should be on alert that steep slopes and rock instability could cause the ground to slide out from under them.

"Santa Cruz stands out even within the Bay Area because it has higher mountains, steeper slopes, and it has weaker rocks," said Chris Wills, a state supervising engineering geologist.

The maps look strictly at geological risks, without taking into account wildfires, earthquakes or weather patterns that could trig-

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ger landslides. When those are included, the county — which is used to all three — could move up on the list as potential disaster sites. Wills said the next step is to take weather into account.

"The goal in this was to develop a scenario for a major winter storm that we could talk to emergency managers about," he said.

About 57,000 landslides were mapped as part of the project, which was done in support of the U.S. Geological Survey's ARkStorm Scenario, which envisions a storm that brings up to 10 feet of rain and causes \$300 billion in damage statewide. The recent March storms caused an estimated \$44 million in damage statewide.

But despite widespread anecdotal evidence that could stake the county as California's landslide capital — including 1982's Love Creek disaster, which claimed 10 lives — the biggest risks for slides appear to be in Southern California, including Santa Barbara and Ventura counties.

"There are very weak rocks in pretty much all parts of the state," Wills said.



A Lompico man watches as searchers look through debris for the remains of the man's family members who died in the January 1982 Love Creek slide.

DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

The county's risk areas include the coastal ranges north of Santa Cruz and relatively more populated mountain areas between Highway 9 and across to the city of Watsonville. The most-dangerous spot for landslides in the county appears to be in an unpopulated area: the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park.

Southern parts of Monterey County on either side of the tip of the Salinas Valley also

are slide-prone.

Paul Horvat, the county's emergency services manager, said the county already analyzes landscape risks, especially in regions affected by fire. The county even sends notices to residents warning them of the danger and holds community meetings to go over the findings.

And emergency managers still rely on an old standby when it comes to understand-

ing local landslide risks: experience.

"A lot of my knowledge is based on past events and experience in the area," Horvat said.

To calculate the risks, the California Geological Survey used two factors: slope steepness and rock stability. Areas with previous rockslides are candidates for more slides since the ground is already weakened.