



THE PLAIN DEALER

Waterlogged Headlands still closed after flooding

Friday, August 11, 2006

Michael Scott
Plain Dealer Reporter

Mentor -- Powerful floodwaters loosed by the July 28 storms have carved a sand canyon right through the middle of Mentor Headlands Beach State Park.

Two weeks later, Headlands -- a mile-long beach and sand dunes preserve that draws 2.2 million visitors a year -- remains waterlogged and closed to the public. It will open no sooner than Monday.

Much of its parking lot and half of its 126 sandy acres were still underwater earlier this week, and state crews were working overtime Thursday trying to fill in a newly cut, 30-foot-wide, 4-foot-deep river running through the beach.

Actually, it's not a new river, at all -- just an old one returning.

"It's nature's way of saying This is the way I want to flow," said Stacey Fineran, an environmental researcher at Ohio State University, who is advising state officials on the Headlands flooding.

Fineran, whose doctoral studies included a lesser Headlands flood in 1997, said the water in both floods was the overflow from nearby Shipman Pond, a manmade reservoir that keeps Mentor Marsh from draining directly into Lake Erie.

Fineran said the seemingly wild waters of July 28 were simply following a streambed that shows up on maps as far back as 1796, when Moses Cleaveland's surveyors came to town.

"The flood proved what the old maps and the data predict -- this stream will go where it goes," Fineran said.

State officials agreed.

"Water seeks its own route," Ohio Department of Natural Resources spokeswoman Jane Beathard said. "We know that, of course, but it's a pretty powerful example when it does something like this."

Beathard said park officials hope to open parts of Headlands by Monday. Officials have yet to calculate the cost of repairing a washed-out maintenance road, restoring the beach and cleaning out sand-filled restrooms.

Workers on Thursday marveled at how pumping out water 20 hours a day and backfilling nearly 5,000 tons of sand into the stream have not yet stopped it.

"You know water is the most powerful force on earth, but until you see it, you can hardly believe it," said park manager Connie Borris.

The Headlands flood of 2006 was set in motion a half-century ago, experts say.

In 1959, six years after the park opened to the public, workers blocked a marsh-fed stream, rerouting it to

the Grand River through a series of culverts under Ohio 44.

Fineran said recent events should send a message to state officials to consider letting the park remain natural.

"In my opinion, nature has done something really neat here," she said.

"Now, it's up to the state to have ears to hear it and leave it alone."

Plain Dealer photographer Lynn Ischay contributed to this story.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter:

msscott@plaind.com, 440-602-4780

© 2006 The Plain Dealer

© 2006 cleveland.com All Rights Reserved.