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## Coburg Peninsula under threat

### Winter storms undermining bridge to popular site; cost of remediation could run into the millions

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Colwood council is being warned that next year's winter storms could wash out the bridge at Esquimalt Lagoon.

But, with the potential of millions of dollars being needed for remediation, councillors are wrestling with what steps to take to protect the Coburg Peninsula that fronts the lagoon. Options even include letting nature run its course, which would mean eventually washing out the bridge. That option also comes with the potential of turning the peninsula into an island.

"The real problem in dealing with this, is what level of risk are we talking about, and we don't know," Colwood chief engineer Michael Baxter told the parks committee. "What we do know is three or four feet of the height at the end of the peninsula disappeared in one storm. That remains low and allows the waves to have much more direct impact on the bridge."

Erosion problems on the peninsula that stretches across a park and bird sanctuary are nothing new but came to the fore in January when a combination of high tides and crashing waves resulted in \$40,000 in emergency repairs to the bridge.

A sand bar once blocked waves and debris from hitting the bridge at the north end of the peninsula but it washed away during a storm. A subsequent storm, saw waves crashing directly into the bridge approaches and undermining their fill. Sinkholes appeared in the surface and on the side of the roadway.

Colwood crews patched the holes and ensured the bridge was stable. The next day, large rocks were brought in to form a barrier around the base.

Also at risk in the immediate area are an old DND ranger station, a sewage lift station and a private duplex.

It is estimated to cost about \$65,000 to rebuild the Lagoon Bridge north abutment and strengthen the south abutment and another \$100,000 to protect the lift station.

But with the vagaries of winter storms, no one knows how long the "fix" would last.

Council has until October to decide on a course of action, Baxter says. "I need to have instructions before October on what I'm to do. When the storms happened in January I just had to react — obviously, you just save the infrastructure."

Coun. Jason Nault, speaking at the Colwood parks committee this week, said protecting the bridge becomes a matter of cost versus the reasons for protecting it.

"If you look at the work they do on Dallas Road, for example, on a regular basis, are we willing to put that kind of money into that road? It would probably bankrupt the city to do that, if we're talking \$2.5 million a throw every five years."

Ocean Boulevard is not yet under immediate threat, Baxter said, but will be if nothing is done.

"What the consultant is saying is that the peninsula has been shrinking and eventually as it shrinks, the waves get close enough that they can go right over the road and then you would face the possibility of washout," he said.

The committee is recommending, in the short term, engineering consultants be hired to survey the spit to determine the rate of beach erosion and recommending protecting the bridge abutments.

The consultant notes that outwash fans on the lagoon side of the peninsula indicate it has been breached several times and over the years varied between being a peninsula and a series of islands.

The spit was reinforced for years with the opening in the early 1900s of the Lehigh gravel pit off Metchosin Road. In a practice that has long since stopped, the gravel operation discharged sand and silt on the shore adding to material that could be carried by waves.

