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Wet weather closes 7 miles of Highway 1

By CHRIS COUNTS

THE RAIN keeps falling in Big Sur, where a 6.8-mile stretch of Highway 1 is blocked just south of Esalen Institute. The closure comes after wet weather soaked the coast this week, bringing down enough rocks and debris to



PHOTO/CALTRANS

During this week's downpours, mudslides and rocks flowed down a steep hillside in Big Sur, closing Highway 1 in the same spot where it reopened Jan. 14.

create a mess at Regent's Slide, where the road reopened with great fanfare on Jan. 14 after being blocked since 2024. Adding to the winter drama was snow, which dusted Big Sur's sharp and distant peaks.

According to Caltrans, the road is closed from Esalen to about 2 miles north of the hamlet of Lucia, with flashing signs alerting motorists in advance. The state roads agency reported that a catchment area at the base of Regent's Slide "has filled with debris" that flowed down the hillside in recent rains. "Debris in the catchment area has overtopped the concrete barriers on the northbound shoulder, allowing debris and rocks to travel directly on to the highway," the agency said.

Treacherous route

Highway officials weren't surprised. Not only do landslides regularly close Highway 1 as it makes its way along the perilous Big Sur coast, "this erosion activity is an expected outcome following recent slide repairs and will continue as the slope ages over time," Caltrans observed.

Highway 1 remains open from Carmel to Esalen, making most of Big Sur's inns, shops

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Monterey residents, officials resist housing plan

By KELLY NIX

A PROPOSED 11-story, 239-unit apartment complex near Del Monte Shopping Center has drawn the attention of residents and officials, who say the plan raises a host of concerns, from water supply to fire danger.

Fullerton-based Carmel Housing Group LLC has proposed a 386,510-square-foot complex at 711 Viejo Road, an undeveloped 4.7-acre forested area east of Highway 1

near the Munras Avenue exit. The developer envisions 191 market-rate and 48 low-income apartments on the land. It is just outside the Monterey city limits, which means it will be up to the county to decide whether to approve it. Nevertheless, at a Monterey City Council meeting Tuesday, officials and residents shared their worries.

'Fire hazard'

For one thing, city community development director Kim Cole noted in a report, the property is in a high-risk fire zone.

"As proposed, the development at 711 Viejo Road jeopardizes the region's safe environment," said Cole, who told the council she was "extremely concerned" about the proposal.

She said it's also too big. "It's basically the height of the Monterey Marriott or Embassy Suites," Cole said, adding that 85 percent of the property is severely sloped.

Other issues, according to the city, include traffic, evacuation routes, wildlife habitat and municipal services.

"If the county approves the project at 711 Viejo Road, it will have significant impacts on city services," Cole's report said. "There will be increased mutual aid calls for public safety services such as police and fire," which are paid for by City of Monterey taxpayers.

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Sacramento considers teen social media ban

CALIFORNIA COULD follow in the footsteps of Australia this year and ban social media for kids under 16.

A bipartisan group of seven lawmakers introduced a bill this month that would establish a minimum age to open or maintain a social media account. The age limit has yet to be put in writing, but one of the authors, Assembly member Josh Lowenthal, said based on pediatric research and what's happening internationally, they're gravitating toward 15 or 16.

Capitol Access

By CAITLIN CONRAD

"We've set age limits for many addictive issues and products — drinking, smoking, gambling, pornography. Social media should be no different," said Lowenthal, a Democrat from Long Beach.

He traveled to Australia in December to be

See **TEENS** page 23A



PHOTO/PINE CONE FILE

Almost as soon as they were invented, smartphones sparked controversies — and California teens may soon face a ban.

Spanish Bay gets ready for major renovation

Hotel, golf course are 40 years old

By MARY SCHLEY

THE PEBBLE Beach Company's plans for a course that better accommodates golfers of all skill levels while offering challenges to the most proficient players will begin taking shape next month, when the Links at Spanish Bay close March 18 for an overhaul expected to take more than a year.

"The golf course was built in the 1980s, and in the 1980s, the popular golf style was to make courses sharp and hard," Pebble Beach Co. CEO David Stivers explained this week. "At Spanish Bay, you have a lot of holes where there are very difficult bunkers."

Removing some of the sand traps, along with making the greens larger and less undulating, will make it a "much softer, friendlier, more fun golf course to play," he said.

"At the same time, we want it to be a good test of golf for the elite player, so we were able to move the back tees farther back so you can take on additional challenges," he said.

A long path

More than a year ago, the company announced its plans to overhaul Spanish Bay, following its hiring of Hanse Golf Course Design in September 2023 to oversee the

Verizon prepares to fight for cell tower on Carmelo

By MARY SCHLEY

THREE DAYS after the Carmel Planning Commission unanimously rejected its application to install a cell tower and other equipment on a power pole on a residential street, Verizon Wireless filed an appeal asking the city council to overturn the decision. The move marks the latest in a years-long battle between the city and the telecom giant over the effort to install wireless facilities in a neighborhood south of Ocean Avenue.

On Feb. 10, planning commissioners voted against Verizon's application based on what they said was the company's failure to prove installing a tower on the Golden Bough Playhouse wouldn't be feasible. Locating equipment on the theater would be less intrusive than putting it on a power pole in front of a historic residence on Carmelo south of 10th, they reasoned.

Without that proof, they said, refusal to approve a tower at the Carmelo location does not constitute an effective prohibition or "material inhibition" of the company's ability to provide telecommunications services, and therefore doesn't violate state or federal laws.

They also called out its potential impact on Ned Spieker's historic cottage and conflicts with the city's general plan, zoning standards and design guidelines.

After the council has its say, the next venue could be a courtroom

'Little or no explanation'

Pete Shubin of Sequoia Deployment Services, which applied for the permits on behalf of Verizon, was quick to object, saying the denial violates numerous state and federal laws and is not backed by the city's municipal code, its general plan or its ordinance regulating wireless facilities.

"Specifically, the decision was not supported by substantial evidence," he wrote. Associate planner Jacob Olander's notice of decision, which was dated Feb. 11 and amended Feb. 13, "generally recited municipal code findings or standards, but provided little or no explanation of why the proposed facility would not comply."

The commission's decision, Shubin said, focused on the city's desired alternative, the Golden Bough, "without providing substantial evidence to rebut Verizon Wireless' evidence and expert testimony that the playhouse is not a feasible alternative to fill a significant gap in service."

In contrast, the company provided plenty of

See **VERIZON** page 14A

course's transformation. Gil Hanse started the Pennsylvania-based firm in 1993 and brought Jim Wagner in as a partner two years later. They and their associates have had a hand in designing notable courses all over the world, including North Carolina's Pinehurst No. 4, TPC Boston

See **SPANISH BAY** page 20A



PHOTO/PINE CONE FILE

The inn will stay open, but the golf course at Spanish Bay will close next month for a redo the P.B. Co. says will take more than a year.