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The Forum

Erosion troubles West Fargo

Landowners along Sheyenne River concerned with land's slow slide

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The ground beneath a narrow strip of West Fargo's Sixth Avenue West is falling into the Sheyenne River.

Nearby, Gary and Glenda Prieve watched this summer as a 1½-foot crack appeared at the back edge of their yard and the land near it slumped.

"If you walk on it, it's so soft, you almost feel like you're going to fall into a big hole," Glenda Prieve said.

These aren't new problems along the Sheyenne or other rivers, but the slow slide is a bigger concern for some West Fargo landowners this year.

"I haven't called and complained about it – I just figure it's part of living on a river – but I'm kind of concerned about how bad is it going to get," said Gary Prieve, who noticed the crack after river levels fell so low that his stepson scavenged on the river bed.

He hasn't seen problems like this since moving into the modest house at 602 Morrison St. in 1999.

West Fargo Public Works Director Barry Johnson doesn't know how widespread the problem is, but he said riverbank instability is common, especially along the outer edge of a bend in the river. He's trying to figure out what, if anything, can be done to help residents like Prieve.

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"Right now they're at the mercy of the river," Johnson said.

He may check whether funding is available from sources such as the Southeast Cass Water Resource District or the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The Public Works Department asked the testing firm Braun Intertec to look at the crumbling river bank on Sixth Avenue West.

The section of avenue is narrow, flanked by the river on the south and houses on the north. It serves as the only access road into the Sheyenne Estates housing complex.

Earlier this year, the earth alongside and under the south edge of the road gave way, West Fargo Engineering Assistant Chris Brungardt said. Attempts to fill the empty space under the road with a concrete-like material called controlled-density fill didn't work. A pipe that was underground this spring now sticks out about 12 feet.

The problem is typical on river bends, said, Steve Nagle, a senior engineer at Braun Intertec. Water on the outside of the bend moves faster and takes earth on the banks with it, making the earth above it less able to resist gravity.

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