



Waste-to-energy developer interested in 6-Mile mill property

By SAM PAUSMAN

Sentinel senior reporter

A Washington state-based bioenergy company is exploring potential development of the borough's 6-Mile mill property.

Next week, Dale Borgford

and other members of Borgford BioEnergy will fly to Wrangell ahead of a Wednesday, Dec. 18, public workshop with borough officials. The workshop will explore whether Borgford is a good fit for the property and vice versa.

The meeting is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. at City Hall.

Since purchasing the mill site for \$2.5 million in 2022, the borough has wanted to cater the property toward economic development. Borough officials hope the upcoming workshop

can provide insight into whether a possible deal with Borgford could spur the development they seek.

The company outlined some preliminary information in a project proposal it sent to the borough. Its aim is to build a "low profile ... plant capable of converting locally generated biomass waste material, including municipal solid waste, into fresh water, food and other

valuable products."

However, borough officials are taking a cautious approach until more details are made clear next week.

"I would caution the borough to be a champion of this," Economic Development Director Kate Thomas said. "Avoid getting starstruck by an opportunity."

Even if an eventual deal is

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SAM PAUSMAN / WRANGELL SENTINEL

A hot time in town

Leonie McHolland roasts her marshmallow while sitting on David McHolland's shoulders at the downtown tree-lighting celebration Dec. 6. Hundreds of people flocked to Front Street to watch the tree come to light, listen to carolers and attend a community market at the Nolan Center.



PHOTO BY SAM PAUSMAN / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Joe Gartrell fires his .45 handgun at the newly reopened indoor shooting range on Dec. 5. The 18-yard range is in the Public Safety Building basement and is currently open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5 to 7 p.m.

Home on the range:

Indoor shooting range reopens

By SAM PAUSMAN

Sentinel senior reporter

For the first time since it shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, Wrangell's indoor shooting range is up and running. One might even say it's ready to go — lock, stock and barrel.

The range's first day of operation was Dec. 3, and it will be open on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5 to 7 p.m. (dependent on the availability of range safety officers).

Eventually, the range, located in the basement of the Public Safety Building, will open on Saturdays from 2 to 4 p.m., but that will not begin until Dec. 21.

Police Chief Gene meek outlined the rules for the six-lane, 18-yard range.

For starters, it's handguns only. Anyone under 18 is required to be accompanied by an adult. Ear and eye protection is required for anyone inside the shooting area, and all weapons are required to be either cased or holstered until you are ready to live fire.

Meek also emphasized the importance of the four rules of firearm safety: Treat all guns as if they are loaded; always keep the weapon pointed downrange; keep your finger off the trigger until your sights are on target and you have made the decision to shoot; and always know what lies beyond your target.

The range is complete with a manual pulley system to adjust target distances as well as a steel-plated slanted backstop beyond the targets. Eventually, Meek wants to coordinate with the schools and teach a firearms safety course for students, but he said that would not happen until 2025.

There are six safety officers who supervise the range. Meek said the licensed safety officers have "ultimate authority."

There is no sign-up required, and the range is free of charge. Simply show up and shoot safely.

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Wrangell plays big role in D.C. in Capitol Christmas Tree event

By SAM PAUSMAN

Sentinel senior reporter

Five, four, three, two, one — wooooooooooooo.

And just like that, the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree was alit. Adorned with 10,000 Alaskan-made ornaments and glistening with the power of 5,000 LED bulbs, the 80-foot-tall spruce will remain lit from dusk to 11 p.m. through Jan. 1.

While the tree obviously headlined its own lighting ceremony, the Dec. 3 event was equally a celebration of Wrangell and the state. Members of Alaska's congressional delegation, Rep. Mary Peltola and Sens. Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan, all spoke at the event. Gov. Mike Dunleavy was also a featured speaker.

Wrangell residents were also featured.

Wrangell Cooperative Association tribal council member Sandy Churchill, clan leaders Lu Knapp and Mike Aak'wtaatseen Hoyt, and

tribal administrator Esther Aaltséen Reese performed two songs before the tree's illumination.

The first song was a paddle song to acknowledge the tree's cross-country journey that started on Zarembo Island in late October. The second was a welcome song, intended to welcome both the tree and everyone in attendance, Hoyt said. Reese also spoke of the tree's importance.

"For the Tlingit people, the trees are our life givers," she said. "They are how we create our canoes, our homes and our totems — which tell our stories."

Next, 9-year-old Rose Burke spoke. Burke is a student from Kenai who was named the winner of the statewide fourth grade essay contest about the tree. U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson introduced Burke, who read her essay to the

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Wrangell newspapers back to 1898 now available online

SENTINEL STAFF

After more than five years of work, Wrangell's newspapers going back to the Fort Wrangel News in June 1898 (when the town was spelled with one l) are now available in a searchable online data-

base.

And it's free.

The website, which went live on Wednesday, Dec. 11, is owned and managed by the Irene Ingle Public Library.

"This incredible resource brings over 6,000 issues to-

gether in one convenient location, providing a powerful tool for researchers, families and anyone curious about Wrangell's rich history to dive into the stories that shaped our community," said Sarah Scambler, library director.

"Users can browse, sort, download and search by keyword, making it easy to uncover Wrangell's vibrant past," Scambler said.

The archives feature The Fort Wrangel News (1898), Stikkeen River Journal (1898-1899),

Alaska Sentinel (1902-1909) and Wrangell Sentinel (1909-present).

The website is at wrangell-newspapers.andornot.net or scan the QR code that accompanies this story.

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Senior Center Menu

Thursday, Dec. 12

Roast beef sandwich with cheese, green salad, fruit with yogurt

Friday, Dec. 13

Turkey sandwich with tomato, green salad, fruit

Monday, Dec. 16

No meal service on Mondays

Tuesday, Dec. 17

Mac and cheese with ham, steamed zucchini and carrots, fruit salad

Wednesday, Dec. 18

Roast beef and gravy with potatoes, green beans, romaine and radish salad, fruit

Call the senior center at 907-874-2066 24 hours in advance to reserve a seat at lunch or to request delivery.

The senior van is available to take seniors to medical appointments, errands such as collecting mail, getting prescriptions or other essential items.



ALASKA AIRLINES CLUB 49 COMMUNITY EVENTS CALENDAR

STATE PUBLIC HEALTH NURSE will be in town on Thursday, Dec. 12, and will see clients in the clinic. Immunizations, birth control and STD screening, well-child exams for kids up to age 7, TB screening and medication, Narcan kits and medication disposal bags will be offered. The Public Health Center is in the Kadin Building, 215 Front St. Call 907-723-4611 to make an appointment so the nurse knows which immunizations to bring.

CHILDREN'S CHRISTMAS PARTY, 10 a.m. for last names starting with A-K; 1 p.m. for last names L-Z; Saturday, Dec. 14, at the American Legion Hall. Children 12 and younger are welcome to the annual Legion Auxiliary children's Christmas party. For more information contact Marilyn Mork at 907-470-0085.

NOLAN CENTER THEATER "Moana 2" rated PG, 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday, Dec. 13-14, and 1 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15. The adventure animation comedy musical film runs 1 hour and 40 minutes; tickets are \$7 for adults, \$5 for children under age 12. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

CHRISTMAS BOAT PARADE, the fleet will gather in front of the City Dock at 6 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 14.

PUPPET PLAY and CHRISTMAS COOKIE EXCHANGE 6 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15, at The Salvation Army. Teens will perform "Mr. Pennypinchers Christmas" puppet play. Bring a dozen cookies and take a dozen cookies afterward. Everyone is welcome.

SCHOOL BOARD will meet at 6:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 16, in Evergreen Elementary School Room 101. People can email comments to kpowell@wpsd.us or sign up under guests to be heard at the meeting by emailing the same address before 3:30 p.m. Dec. 16.

"BABE" 6 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 17, at the Nolan Center. The 1995 animal adventure, comedy, drama, family movie is free; presented by Island of Faith Lutheran Church as part of its retro-movie program. Concession stand will be open.

WRANGELL MARINERS' MEMORIAL board members will be available to assist in completing applications to add names to the commemorative plaques from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 19, Jan. 2, 13, 22 and 31 at the Nolan Center. Applications are available online at wrangellmarinersmemorial.com. Donations and memberships are also accepted online.

CHRISTMAS TREE LANE decorated trees are up for bid through 1 p.m. Dec 19 at the Nolan Center lobby. Half the proceeds go to the treemaker and half to Hospice of Wrangell. For more information, email rooney@aptalaska.net.

"POLAR EXPRESS" 4 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 21, at the Nolan Center. The 2004 family adventure animation movie will cost \$10 per person and includes hot cocoa, popcorn and a cookie. Children under 12 will receive a special sleigh bell from Santa after the film. All proceeds benefit the Wrangell Bible Bowl team.

COMMUNITY MARKET from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 21, at the Nolan Center. Check out the locally grown and handcrafted item.

CHILDREN'S CLASS 2:30 to 4 p.m. Tuesdays at the elementary school music room for kindergarten to fifth grade. The focus of the program is for spiritual growth to learn to apply virtues through stories, devotions, music, games and art. All are welcome. No charge. For more information call Kay Larson, 907-209-9117.

WRANGELL KIDS CLUB 2:30 to 5 p.m. Mondays at the community center for open gym, board games and coloring; 2:30 to 5 p.m. Wednesdays at the Irene Ingle Public Library for STEM activities and crafts. For ages 7 to 13 years old. Runs through Monday, Dec. 16. Free.

AA MEETINGS: North Star Group meets from 7 to 8 p.m. Tuesdays and Fridays, St. Philip's Episcopal Church.

WRANGELL PARKS and RECREATION is offering multiple activities to get your body moving. For more information on any of the activities visit www.wrangellrec.com or call 907-874-2444.

- **WATER AEROBICS** noon to 1 p.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at the swimming pool with volunteers Alice Rooney and Melody Hazel.
- **PICKLEBALL** 6 to 8 p.m. Mondays and Saturdays, noon to 2 p.m. Wednesdays at the community center gym. For ages 18 years old and up.
- **ZUMBA** 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays at the community center gym with Nene Wilson. For ages 16 years old and up.

Ferry Schedule

Northbound

Sunday, Dec. 15

Columbia, 10:45 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 22

Columbia, 4:45 p.m.

Sunday, Dec. 29

Columbia, 9:30 p.m.

Sunday, Jan. 5

Columbia, 4:45 p.m.

Southbound

Wednesday, Dec. 18

Columbia, 8:30 a.m.

Wednesday, Dec. 25

Columbia, 7:30 a.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 1

Columbia, 7:30 a.m.

Wednesday, Jan. 8

Columbia, 6:30 a.m.

Listings are scheduled departure times. Call the terminal at 907-874-2021 for information or 907-874-3711 for recorded information.

Tides

High Tides

Low Tides

	AM		PM		AM		PM	
	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft
Dec. 11	09:00	17.0	09:51	13.9	02:22	2.5	03:29	-1.0
Dec. 12	09:50	18.0	10:50	14.6	03:24	2.7	04:26	-1.8
Dec. 13	10:39	18.8	11:44	15.2	04:20	2.7	05:17	-3.1
Dec. 14	11:27	19.1	05:12	2.7	06:05	-3.8
Dec. 15	00:35	15.4	12:13	19.1	06:00	2.8	06:49	-3.8
Dec. 16	01:22	15.4	12:58	18.7	06:45	3.1	07:33	-3.4
Dec. 17	02:08	15.2	01:43	17.9	07:29	3.5	08:15	-2.6

The Way We Were In the Sentinel 100, 75, 50 and 25 years ago.

Dec. 11, 1924

E. Albright, who came north last week on business connected with reopening of the Columbia & Northern cold storage plant, leaves for Portland on the Northwestern. When seen by the Sentinel reporter, Mr. Albright said he is highly gratified over finding the plant in such excellent condition and that comparatively little work will be required to put the plant in shape to resume operation. "The building is 95 percent as good as new, and the piling under the building is sound and good. The machinery is in A-1 condition. I could not detect any

wear in the cylinders with calipers. The refrigeration piping is as good as the day it was installed, except in one room where the rust is slight. The insulation is just as good as it was the day the plant was completed."

Dec. 9, 1949

Everybody at Curtis' City Market is pointing with pride today at their new 12-foot Floating Air refrigerated meat showcase. The new unit arrived several weeks ago and was put in yesterday. It was installed by Tandy Bros. of Juneau, agents of the Friedrich Sales Corp. of San

Antonio, Texas. An outstanding feature of the new case is the controlled temperature which makes it possible for a housewife to select a piece of meat right out of the showcase, take it home and cook it immediately. Meat is kept pliable and just below freezing at all times. Although the case is 12 feet long it has double shelves, making 24 feet of shelf space, every inch well lighted and easy to see. Shortly after the first of the year, Curtis said, The Redmen, who own the building, will completely remodel the store.

Dec. 11, 1974

The Wrangell Wolves split a pair of games with Ketchikan on Friday and Saturday. But that's not the big story. The big story was the Wolves' heart-stopping one-point victory over the Kings in the second game to retain first place in the league. "This has to be the greatest win Wrangell has ever had," said Coach Paul Schweinberg. "It was unbelievable." Final score: Wrangell 76, Ketchikan 75. Excited rooters mixed with Ketchikan rooters to pour onto the floor, though Fred Angerman had been fouled and was getting ready to shoot. The

happy Angerman tossed the ball at the basket, missed and left the floor grinning.

Dec. 9, 1999

In Tuesday's election, Proposition 1 passed by an unofficial count of 359 in favor, 66 against. The proposition asked if the city should sell the property purchased by the city from Wrangell Fisheries Inc. in June 1998 by public bid for a minimum price of \$1.55 million. The property has been leased and operated this year by Wrangell Seafoods.

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WEEKLY
FARE SALES



FREIGHT
FOR LESS

Community leaders gather support for continuing federal air service subsidy

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Alaska Airlines has received a federal subsidy since 1976 to provide Wrangell with twice-daily jet service, and the mayor and chamber of commerce are rounding up community support to urge the government to issue a new contract after the current agreement expires in 2025.

"I want to ensure it stays around," Mayor Patty Gilbert said of her petition drive to show community support for Alaska Airlines under the U.S. Department of Transportation Essential Air Service program.

Wrangell is one of 65 communities in Alaska — which includes 10 more in Southeast — and 112 communities in the Lower 48, Hawaii and Puerto Rico included in the program as of last month.

Congress created the Essential Air Service program in 1978 to provide federal aid to ensure a minimum level of service for communities that otherwise may receive no regularly scheduled flights.

Alaska Airlines' current two-year contract to serve Wrangell, Petersburg, Gustavus, Yakutat and Cordova covers daily passenger flights and freighter service with an overall subsidy of \$14.362 million a year.

The airline, in its Nov. 18 application to the Department of Transportation, is requesting an increase to \$17.845 million per year under a new two-year agreement that would run from May 2025 to April 2027.

Of that total, \$698,000 is for the freighter service.

Of the \$17.146 million the airline is requesting for passenger service, more than two-thirds would go to cover losses on Yakutat and Cordova operations.

The airline specifies Boeing 737 service for the five communities, just as it has for years.

Alaska Airlines' application projects \$45.436 million in annual operating expenses for serving the five communities over the next two years, which includes fuel, payroll, equipment and overhead, against \$29.863 million in passenger, cargo and other revenues.

Wrangell's freight and passenger loads are significantly less than Petersburg, according to statistics included with the Department of Transportation's request for proposals. In 2023, more than 49,000 passengers boarded or got off a flight in Petersburg, with just over 28,000 getting on or off a flight in Wrangell.

Petersburg loaded or offloaded 416 tons of cargo in 2023, with Wrangell at 270 tons.

Daily jet service north and south from Wrangell "is a big economic factor for our community," particularly as the town wants to attract more independent travelers to boost summer business, Gilbert said.

The mayor started going around town last week, soliciting signatures on a letter of support for Alaska Airlines' proposal. As of Dec. 5, she had collected almost 100 signatures. People can stop by City Hall and add their names, she said.

The deadline for comments to the Department of Transportation is Dec. 19. Comments can be emailed to michael.gormas@dot.gov.

The department issued its request for proposals in October. The deadline was Nov. 18, and Alaska Airlines was the only applicant.

In its letter of support, the chamber of commerce highlighted the importance of daily air service for residents who need medical care: "Many residents rely on regular flights to larger urban centers for specialized care that is not available in their home communities."

Noting the importance of daily flights and the freighters that serve town — bringing in food, medical supplies, mail and general cargo — the chamber added that the service is "particularly vital" since the decline in state ferry service. "Due to the lack of ferry service, school sports teams in Southeast Alaska rely heavily on Alaska Airlines to transport them to participate in competitions."

The letter, signed by Tracey Martin, the chamber's executive director, said Alaska's flights under the Essential Air Service program are "not only a crucial part of daily life for those living in this region, but also play a significant role in the broader economic health, safety and well-being of the people who call Southeast Alaska home."

The airline received financial support from the federal government under a different subsidy program when it first started daily jet service to Wrangell in 1976. That five-year contract expired in 1981, at which time Alaska Airlines came into the newly established Essential Air Service program.

Other Southeast communities covered by the program include Angoon, Elfin Cove, Excursion Inlet, Hydaburg, Kake, Metlakatla, Pelican and Tenakee. Those communities are served by regional carriers out of Juneau or Ketchikan — Alaska Seaplanes, Taquan Air or Ward Air — at a much lower cost than the 737 jets into the larger cities but with much smaller aircraft with no more than nine passenger seats.

Mill property

Continued from page 1

reached with Borgford, the borough does not intend on selling or leasing the entire property to a single entity. For example, City Hall has received a \$421,000 federal grant that could help cover the some early costs of relocating the downtown barge ramp to 6-Mile.

"The borough envisions a multi-use site," Thomas said, adding that the Borgford proposal would not account for the entire mill property.

Thomas and the borough's economic development board met on Dec. 3 to plan for the upcoming workshop. She made clear that no one from the borough has many details — either about Borgford BioEnergy or what specific aims they have for the potential Wrangell project.

She described the upcoming workshop as the next step in the "vetting process," and that the borough's goal is to make public as many facts as possible.

Borgford BioEnergy, which is operating under the name Alaska BioEnergy for the potential project, has explored waste-to-energy plants in Alaska previously. Thomas said they attempted to buy land in Juneau as recently as last year, but there was no municipal land available and the company could not reach an agreement with a private seller. In its project proposal, the

company touted its "Octaflame combustion process ... a unique bio-burning technology developed by Dale Borgford (the company's co-owner)." The company claims its technology is more efficient and capable of producing higher temperatures than conventional biomass burners.

With no Borgford waste-to-energy plants currently in operation that can serve as reference points, the Dec. 18 workshop will give the borough an opportunity to delve into some of the company's claims and whether Wrangell is a suitable location for the plant.

The plant, according to Borgford, would provide "40 full-time jobs ... large volumes of greenhouse grown fruits and vegetables for the community ... 50,000 gallons of purified water products per day for public consumption ... and 3,000 tons of dry fish fertilizer produced from cannery waste."

However, some members of Wrangell's economic development board were skeptical about Borgford's claims. Board member Austin O'Brien was uncertain if Wrangell even produces enough biowaste to fuel such a facility. He suggested possibly shipping in biowaste from other Southeast communities if Wrangell's contributions fall short.

Borgford delegates are scheduled to arrive in town on Dec. 13. They will conduct a

site tour of the 6-Mile property on Dec. 16 before the borough conducts internal meetings with the developers on Dec. 17.

Members of the assembly, planning and zoning commission, port commission, economic development board and borough staff will all be in attendance at the Dec. 18 workshop. Though the two-hour presentation is open to the community, the public's involvement will be limited. However, if discussions continue to progress between City Hall and Borgford, a town hall meeting will be held in the near future, which could provide ample opportunity for members of the community to ask questions, according to borough officials.

When reached for comment, Borgford officials said they want to get to town and complete their evaluation of the site before speaking on the record with the Sentinel.

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petersburgtax@gmail.com



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- Link-Up service covers a portion of new service installation for non-recurring connection fees and is available only once per customer at the same residence.
- Internet speed and data must meet the FCC annual minimum.

To find out if you qualify for this program:

Go to www.lifelinesupport.org for information or to submit an application online. You may also print out a mail-in application or contact your local service provider for assistance.

Contact your local AP&T office for more information on this program or visit our website www.aptalaska.com



Johnson's Building Supply Help wanted!

Customer Service full-time position
Valid Alaska driver's license required.
Must be able to lift 50 lbs. Pay DOE.
Stop by Johnson's for an application.

FROM THE PUBLISHER

State agency ready to pipe up with \$50 million

BY LARRY PERSILY
Publisher

Unbelievable as it may sound, the state is preparing to burn up more public dollars in the fire pit of the mythical Alaska North Slope gas pipeline.

But unlike a real fire pit, which warms those who gather around, spending more money on a gas line dream will leave Alaskans in the cold and the state a little poorer.

The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) last week decided in a bout of fiscal foolishness and pro-development fervor to put up \$50 million to ensure the completion of engineering work on the line.

It's essentially the same pipeline the state has lusted over for more than 50 years; the same hundreds of miles of north-to-south steel that the state, North Slope oil and gas producers and others have spent a couple billion dollars on engineering, permitting and financial analysis over the decades; yet the dream always ends the same. The project is too expensive, too risky, the market doesn't want to pay for it and investors have better places to spend their money.

But the AIDEA board knows better, or so it thinks. Or maybe it's just gullible.

And when the last round of engineering is done, and if the project fails to go ahead, the state would own the blueprints.

Whoopee.

The state already owns all the paperwork and maps and engineering drawings from when it took over the project after North Slope oil and gas producers walked away in 2016. Owning even more data files, even if they are the final calculations, estimates and drawings, would be like buying the finished blueprints for a lavish mansion you can't afford and will never build. Both expenditures are equally pointless.

The Alaska Gasline Development Authority,

which the Legislature created in a fit of hope 14 years ago, says it has a secret North American pipeline company willing to spend \$50 million of its own private money to complete the engineering work — but only if the state promises to repay the \$50 million if the project fails to move ahead.

So in steps AIDEA to save the day, or at least save the dream. With minimal public discussion and with a resolution that is mostly "whereas" justifications, the decision-making document spends just 300 words to say the state agency is ready to guarantee the \$50 million just as soon as its staff can negotiate the terms.

It's a nifty way for the pipeline development authority and AIDEA to evade seeking legislative approval to commit \$50 million in state money. And it is state money, even if it is in AIDEA's account. The agency is required to pay a dividend to the state general fund every year, based on its profits. Writing off a failed \$50 million pipeline investment will trash the agency's profits, and thus equally trash its dividend to the state.

The two state agencies say this time is different. A downsized project is now proposed to bring North Slope natural gas to Railbelt utilities and industries that face a gas supply shortfall from aging Cook Inlet fields. The second, more expensive phase of the project to export gas overseas could come later.

The agencies figure that a \$10 billion to \$15 billion project looks better than the \$40 billion to \$50 billion export-focused development — and is worth \$50 million of state money to see how it looks.

All it really looks like is poor judgment. There are less expensive, temporary options to solving Southcentral Alaska's gas needs than taking on a multibillion-dollar mortgage charged to utility customers.

EDITORIAL

Borough will do its job
by asking a lot of questions

A Washington state developer with ideas of turning organic waste into new products is coming to town to look over the former mill property near 6-Mile, lay out his ideas and answer questions from community officials.

The borough plans to assemble most everyone from City Hall with an interest in development of the property, including members of the assembly, planning and zoning commission, port commission and economic development board. Officials will hear from Borgford BioEnergy, which set up a new company this year, Alaska BioEnergy. The open-to-the-public workshop — no formal action will be taken — is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 18, at City Hall.

The meeting is not a Q and A with the public; that would come later, if the company and the borough want to proceed. First, borough officials want to learn more — and they have a lot of questions.

"Avoid getting starstruck by an opportunity," cautioned Kate Thomas, the borough's economic development director, last week. The meeting is the first step in a vetting process, she said.

No doubt the town would like to find a buyer or long-term, large-area tenant for the mill property, which the borough bought from the owner of the closed sawmill for \$2.5 million in 2022. Since then, City Hall has advertised, promoted and hoped for someone to invest money and create jobs at the site.

In its preliminary pitch to the borough, Borgford BioEnergy said its goal for the mill property would be to construct and operate a "low profile ... plant capable of converting locally generated biomass waste material, including municipal solid waste, into fresh water, food and other valuable products."

The company said its unique "bio-burning technology" developed by Dale Borgford, the company's co-owner, is capable of producing higher temperatures than conventional biomass burners. But the company currently has no such plants in operation. That alone is a good reason for Wrangell to wear its skeptical hat. Being first can be rewarding, but it also can be a mistake.

Austin O'Brien, a member of Wrangell's economic development board, wisely asked at last week's board meeting whether the town even produces enough biowaste to fuel such a facility.

Borough officials are expected to ask those kinds of questions, and a lot more, as they listen to Borgford's presentation next week. The more questions, the better.

- Wrangell Sentinel

Newspaper archives

Continued from page 1

The project started in 2019 when the library received an \$8,250 grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services to digitize Wrangell's earliest newspapers, 1898 through 1956. "Valerie Ní hÉideáin and Margaret Villarma played a key role in securing the funding and working on the digitization efforts," Scambler explained.

With help from the Alaska State Library and the National Digital Newspaper Program, the 1898-1956 pages were posted on Chronicling America, a free national database of historic newspapers, in 2022.

Phase 2 began in December 2022 and was made possible by a \$17,000 grant from the Rasmuson Foundation secured by Larry Persily (the current publisher of the Sentinel) on behalf of the Friends of the Li-



The QR code will take you to the library's new archives.

brary.

Additional support came from the Juneau Community Foundation, the Friends of the Library, local organizations, community members and Persily's own contributions totaling nearly \$10,000.

"This project was a monumental effort involving many moving parts, but the result is worth it. Wrangell's entire newspaper history is now preserved in one place and will be updated annually to ensure continued access to our town's ongoing story," Scambler said.

The work included converting every page of every paper into a digital image, then uploading the files and constructing the search engine.

The Sentinel's Front Street office houses bound volumes of its old editions going back to the start of the newspaper's history, but those books are de-

teriorating and the older pages are literally crumbling, Persily said.

"When I started with the Sentinel more than 40 years ago, we bought a microfilm viewer to look through the reels of film, but that was only marginally better than turning pages one at a time," he said.

"The library project will preserve all of the papers as digital images for everyone to see, whether it's to look up a family member's high school sports accomplishments or news from City Hall."

The database was built and is maintained by Vancouver, British Columbia-based Andornot Consulting, which specializes in software, hosting and consulting for libraries, archives and museums.

The database will be updated annually with each year's Sentinels.

Oldest continuously published paper in Alaska

WRANGELL SENTINEL

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Phone: 907-874-2301

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Office Manager..... Amber Armstrong
Senior reporter Sam Pausman
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WCA blesses Christmas tree in D.C.

Continued from page 1

crowd before flipping the switch to light up the Capitol lawn.

"Just like Alaska, it is big and beautiful," Rose said of the tree.

Roughly 2% of Wrangell's population attended the tree-lighting ceremony. The high school students who helped construct its cross-country hydration system were invited to the ceremony. Seniors Anika Herman and Ander Edens were even reserved seats in the front row.

Sitting beside them in row No. 1 was U.S. Forest Service Wrangell District Ranger Tory Houser.

"It was such an honor to be able to be there," she said.

For Houser, the official lighting ceremony was a long time coming: She traveled with the tree on its road trip from Seattle to Washington, D.C. Often spotted in an elf costume throughout the 11-stop tour, Houser said her time in the capital city was a perfect capstone to her multi-week road trip.

Once in Washington, she



MARK SCHIEFELBEIN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Members of the Wrangell Cooperative Association — from left, Sandy Churchill, Esther Aaltséen Reese, Lu Knapp and Mike Aak'wtaatseen Hoyt — sing after giving a blessing to the Capitol Christmas Tree in ceremonies on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol on Dec. 3.

stayed quite busy (though Houser admitted she is not complaining). She went to the National Art Gallery and saw the Claude Monet exhibition; she saw garnets from the ledge near the mouth of the Stikine River at the Smithsonian, and even enjoyed a meal at the U.S. Botanic Garden. The Society of American Foresters flew in Alaska salmon, shrimp and scallops for the meal.

In between trips to the Capitol rotunda, National Archives and Museum of Natural His-

tory, Houser found time to toss on the elf costume one more time. At an event at the National Press Club, the Wrangell district ranger showed up dressed like one of Santa's helpers.

"It was a light occasion, but it was very, very fun," she said.

Houser added that there is one moment in particular she will relish. When the tree was on display and there were tourists taking photographs in front of it, she showed up with her family members and with

other Forest Service staff and handed out stickers.

"We'd give out our stickers — the logo stickers — and say, 'Hey, we brought this tree here. Let me tell you about it.' And we'd get to tell them a little bit about where it came from."

Getting the opportunity to connect Wrangell to Washington was something Houser was especially proud of.

"It was just really neat to have Wrangell in D.C.," she said. "All the pride from our community (got) to be shared."

Mariners' Memorial accepting names for 2025 plaques

SENTINEL STAFF

Now concluding its third year, the Wrangell Mariners' Memorial at Heritage Harbor has 71 plaques honoring people who were part of the community's maritime industry. The nonprofit organization is accepting applications through Jan. 31 for new plaques that will be installed in the spring.

Each application should include the name of the deceased, a brief tribute that will be featured on the plaque and a story about the life of the mariner, which will be stored and available on the memorial's online server.

The memorial's mission "is to help tell each mariner's story," the application form reads.

Mariners' Memorial board members will be at the Nolan Center from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 19 and again Jan. 2, 13, 22 and 31 to help people complete the form.

The forms also are available at the Nolan Center and harbor-master office, where office staffer Calleigh Miller can assist, and online at wrangell-marinersmemorial.com.

The fee is \$400, which covers the cost of creating the metal plaque and installation, and must be included with each application.

The 2025 plaques will be added to the memorial in late May, in conjunction with annual blessing of the fleet, said Jenn Miller-Yancey, president of the nonprofit's board.

The memorial opened in 2022 with 43 names, she said, with 28 added in 2023 and 2024.

The memorial was built with donations and volunteer labor "to remember those lost at sea and those who had a close connection with the water in the Wrangell area." Plaques are open to commercial fishermen, maritime transportation workers, recreational boaters and Stikine River runners — most any resident with ties to the sea — according to the organization's website.

Revised policy would protect political discussions as part of classwork

BY SAM PAUSMAN

Sentinel senior reporter

This fall, social studies teacher Jack Carney hosted a mock election for his junior and senior students. The kids learned about the issues, ballot measures and candidates, asked questions and eventually cast mock ballots of their own.

A newly updated school board policy will ensure such classroom efforts can continue in the future.

"In social studies classes, for example, we want things about the election and about political parties," Superintendent Bill Burr said. "We wanted to make sure that was allowed."

The new policy ensures this. Though political discourse inside classrooms was not previously prohibited by school district policy, it was not necessarily protected either. Instead, it lived in a rather blurry, un-

defined gray area. Burr said part of the reason to enact the changes is so that teachers would not get in trouble for teaching about current events that are inherently political.

"It allows the teacher to play sides when it is educationally important," Burr explained. However, teachers may only do so when it applies to "instruction that is part of the approved curriculum," per the school district's policy manual.

All district employees remain "prohibited from engaging in any activity in the presence of students ... where the activity is designed to promote, further or assert a position on any voting issue, board issue or collective bargaining issue."

Simply, politics are to remain separate from school grounds unless they exist in what Burr calls, "a teaching context."

He said the policy allows for teachers to express their personal opinions in class-

rooms with the context of an educational background — not to try and sway students' beliefs, but to be transparent about their own opinions and use classrooms as a place for healthy debate.

The policy was last updated in 2012, so it was well overdue for some alterations. Burr said the board's policy committee was scheduled to review the policy anyway, and that Carney's class mock election was a motivator for the changes.

"We want our students to be able to make their minds up," Burr said. "And (we want) our staff to have some flexibility in presenting all sides in an education standpoint."

The revised policy passed in first reading at the Nov. 18 school board meeting. The second reading and a vote to approve could come up at the Monday, Dec. 16, meeting.

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WRANGELL SENTINEL

Volunteers will look on land and at sea for annual bird count

By SUE BAHLEDA

For the Wrangell Sentinel

A seasoned group of Wrangell birders will be the primary volunteers for this year's Audubon Society Christmas Bird count on Saturday, Dec. 14. Coordinator Bonnie Demerjian has developed a group of experienced volunteers for this essential reporting, which samples the variety and number of land and seabirds in the area.

The bird count is an annual event nationwide.

While there is often a call for wider participation among community members in Wrangell, this year the reporting teams are set, including two boat teams, captained by Dan Rak and Bruce and Susan Wise Eagle, for seabird population counts.

The timing of the count is particular to capture resident bird numbers — after migratory populations have flown

out of town.

Annual counts can help measure the overall increase or decrease in bird populations and provide a window into the spread of invasive species which have taken up residence. Demerjian noted increased sightings of Eurasian collared doves, a non-native species that can affect local bird populations and can carry and transmit respiratory viruses to other species.

It is possible for interested people in Wrangell to participate in the work through bird feeder counts, also tracked on Dec. 14. Demerjian asks volunteers to contact her ahead of time as she needs to coordinate all of the reporting locations and will provide a species checklist.

After registering, people can track and count the birds that visit their feeder throughout the day and report those totals. Contact Demerjian at bonnie@aptalaska.net or at 907-796-9632.

The Audubon's Christmas Bird Count is a tradition that began in the early 1900s to counter a long-standing practice called the "Side-Hunt," in which teams would compete to kill as many birds and animals as they could in a day. Ornithologist Frank M. Chapman proposed a different perspective, counting and recording

the varieties of birds rather than hunting them.

The first 27 participants across North America tallied 90 species of birds; today over 500 species have been identified.

For people interested in honing their own birding skills in general, there are local and online resources available. The U. S. Forest Service office has a guide of birding hot spots around Wrangell, and Demer-

jian recommends areas around the golf course, with its variety of habitats including a shore, a pond and the greens.

She also recommends a variety of phone apps to help identify birds, including "The Sibley Guide to Birds" and the Audubon's own guides. The Merlin Bird ID app allows people to record bird songs on their smartphone for identification.

Advice for cutting down trees for the holiday — and without breaking Forest Service rules

By SAM PAUSMAN

Sentinel senior reporter

According to Clark Griswold, you have two choices when it comes to selecting your Christmas tree.

Your first option is to go to a tree lot: "They invented Christmas tree lots," Griswold says in the 1989 movie "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation," "because people forgot how to have a fun old-fashioned family Christmas and are satisfied with scrawny, dead overpriced trees that have no special meaning."

Instead, he advises, "to do what your forefathers did." Which is, "walk into the woods, pick out that special tree and cut it down with your bare hands."

In Wrangell, that means if you want a real tree in your living room, you'll probably need to venture out into the woods and find one for yourself. Just make sure you follow the U.S. Forest Service's rules and regulations.

For starters, there are no permits required to cut down a tree in the Tongass National Forest, as long as it is for personal use. All households are allowed to remove just one Christmas tree per year.

There are also "no regulations on what tree species or size to cut," according to Paul Robbins, the Tongass public affairs officer. "However, there is some guidance the Forest Services provides to (prevent) damaging the ecosystem."

For starters, any tree at a Forest Service recreation site or any tree within 330 feet of a bald eagle nest should not be cut down. The same rules apply for trees within 100 feet of salmon streams or roads.

Robbins recommends avoiding trees larger than seven inches in diameter (measured at the stump) and suggests cutting trees as close to the ground as

possible. Cutting the top off a large tree is prohibited — so is cutting down a tree, realizing you want a different one, and letting the original tree rot on the forest floor.

In order to protect muskeg areas, Robbins said trees in those areas are not to be harvested either.

Lastly, any cut tree "cannot be sold, bartered or used in any commercial-type exchange for goods."

For any questions, Robbins suggests reaching out to the Forest Service. The Wrangell Ranger District offices can be reached at 907-874-2323.

Hospice adds 52 names to Dove Tree; still time to add to annual remembrance

By SENTINEL STAFF

Though this year's Dove Tree public ceremony was canceled due to weather and dangerous driving conditions on Dec. 1, Hospice of Wrangell has hung paper doves on the tree at the Nolan Center for 52 residents, family and friends who have passed away.

"It includes several people who died more than a year ago, but obituaries or gatherings happened later. Some of these people had no obituary in the Sentinel," explained hospice volunteer Alice Rooney.

The public event has been rescheduled for 2 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 15, at the Nolan Center.

The tree — an annual tradition dating back more than 20 years — will remain up through the new year, and blank paper doves are available at the tree display for people to add additional names.

Hospice of Wrangell added the following names:

- Lyle Earl Benitz
- Chuck Bissonet
- Suzanne "Suzie" Byford
- Shirley Jean Bartlett
- Janet Buness
- Shandell Barlow
- Kim Thruston Christian
- David Roy Churchill
- Carl Campbell
- John Church
- Ken Davidson Sr.
- Chris Dahl
- Linda Davidson
- Tina Doak
- Brian Hernando Fennimore
- Otto Florschutz

Mike Gedney

- Steven Brian Gerard
- Daniel "Dan" James Gross Jr.
- Tony (Oskolkoff) Gularte
- Susan "Suzy" Virginia Hay
- Timothy Heller
- Beth Heller
- Mara Heller
- Derek Heller
- Kara Heller
- Marlene Johnston
- Patty Jean Kautz
- Doreen "Stretch" Keso
- Willard Dee Lowe
- Loretta "Jeanne" Lindley
- Lillian Patricia Lackey
- Steve Little
- Richard Marks
- Edward "Ed" Roland Ness
- Charles Martin Nore
- Lenny Petersen
- Barbara Lee Patrick
- Jacobus "Jack" Pino
- James Randolph Rinehart
- Riley Rooney
- Travis Saunders
- Arnold "Arnie" Sandness
- David Michael "Mike" Saunders Sr.
- Harold Snoddy
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Volleyball team falls short of state dreams, finishes fourth in Palmer

By SAM PAUSMAN

Sentinel senior reporter

The Southeast champions' season came to a close at the hands of Susitna Valley on Dec. 6 at the state tournament.

The double elimination, three-day tournament was held in Palmer. After plowing their way through Southeast competition the weekend prior, Wrangell had high hopes going into state. However, due to some injuries, illnesses and struggles to close out games, the Wolves were forced to settle for fourth place at the tournament.

"Fourth at state is nothing to hang our heads about," head coach Brian Herman said, "but it's still a little disheartening."

The Dec. 5-7 tournament started positively for the Wolves, beating Koliganek three sets to nil in the opening round. Wrangell took the first set 25-12 before a 25-17 victory in the second. All state tournament matches are best-of-five, and while the third set was closer, Wrangell prevailed 25-19.

In the second round, the Wolves were matched against



PHOTOS BY THE MAT-SU VALLEY FRONTIERSMAN

Addy Andrews (center) celebrates with Alexis Easterly (left), Christina Johnson (right) and Aubrey Wynne (far right) at the state volleyball tournament in Palmer on Dec. 5.

Unalaska. The Raiders were a force from the get-go, winning the first two sets handedly. Despite a 25-23 Wrangell win in the third, Unalaska finished off the Wolves 26-24 in a tight

final set that saw the Wolves blow a 24-12 lead.

However, the double elimination structure of the tournament meant Herman's team still had a lifeline to the cham-

ampionship: It was just going to be a lot more difficult.

In their first match in the losers bracket, Wrangell beat Glennallen 3-0, with set scores of 25-12, 25-14 and 25-14. Their "flawless volleyball" (per Herman) ended Glennallen's season, and, for a brief moment, it seemed that the Wolves had regained the mojo of the team that won the Southeast title.

Sadly, those hopes were dashed by eventual runners-up Susitna Valley High School in Talkeetna. The Rams won a convincing first set 25-12 before going up 2-0 with a 25-19 win in the second set. Wrangell won the third 25-18 before dropping the fourth and final set by just two points. In that final set, Wrangell once again led their opposition, but were unable to close out a 23-16 lead that would have extended the match to a tiebreak fifth set.

The two teams that beat Wrangell — Unalaska and Susitna Valley — met each other in the Dec. 7 champi-

onship match. Unalaska dismissed the Rams in three sets to win the Division 2A volleyball state championship. The Wolves finished in fourth place.

While the loss ends the season on a sour note for Wrangell, it's paramount to remember the team's success in Southeast play. The Wolves lost just one regular season match all season, finished the year 13-1 in conference play and three-peated as Southeast champions.

The team is losing four seniors after this season: Clara Waddington, Addy Andrews, Aubrey Wynne and Kayla Young. The Wolves will likely need to more heavily rely on players like junior Christina Johnson and sophomore Sophia Martinsen if they want to make it four in a row next season.

"We may not have quite the firepower from this year," Herman said, "but we might have a more well-rounded team."



PHOTOS BY THE MAT-SU VALLEY FRONTIERSMAN

Libero Kayla Young strikes the ball while teammates Addy Andrews (left) and Aubrey Wynne (right) watch in Wrangell's second-round match on Dec. 5. The Southeast champions came up short of their state hopes after falling to Susitna Valley at the state tournament in Palmer.

Girls basketball relying on youth and hard work for a new season

By SAM PAUSMAN

Sentinel senior reporter

"You have to do hard better."

That's what high school girls basketball coach Christy Good keeps telling her players. It's a phrase that she likes to fall back on, a mantra of sorts. Though those six words may not have any tangible meaning, they encapsulate Good's understanding of the game of basketball: Do the hard stuff and results will follow.

Good, who is now in her fourth season as head coach, sat down with the Sentinel on Dec. 5 to discuss the upcoming season, her mindset as a coach and even a little '80s hoops.

Since winning the Southeast title in 2022, the team has been rebuilding, a process that could start to yield results as soon as this season. The 12-player roster (pending any last-minute additions) is still strikingly young. Nine of the 12 are either freshmen or sophomores, and Vanessa Johnson is the only senior.

But this isn't anything new. Last year, the team graduated just two seniors, which gave Good the opportunity to play plenty of her underclassmen. Now, some of those younger players are ready to take the next step.

Wrangell's sophomore class is the core of the team, a "fab four" so to speak. Headlined by Alana Harrison, a forward with guard skills who captained the team as a freshman, the four players have played alongside one another since elementary school.

"They just know each other so well," Good said of the sophomores. "I saw that in them as freshmen and I think it's going to be a really, really good season for them."

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WRANGELL SENTINEL

Continued on page 8

Wrestlers maintain strong momentum in Petersburg scramble

By SAM PAUSMAN
Sentinel senior reporter

Wrangell asserted its wrestling dominance over 10 Southeast rivals at the Viking Invite held in Petersburg on Dec. 6-7.

While the competition was not organized like a traditional bracket-style tournament, the scramble-style play gave Wrangell wrestlers plenty of opportunities to get back on the mat after a week of rest.

On the first day of competition, Wolves won 27 of their 32 matches and led the 10-school invitational with 17 pins. On day two, they picked up right where they left off, winning 34 more matches and adding 23 pins to bring the total tally to 40.

With no traditional championship matches, organizers instead hosted several "spotlight" matches. In those, Wrangell wrestlers went 5-2.

Head coach Jack Carney said the tournament served as a good launch into the final two weeks of the season. He even pulled a couple wrestlers out of competition to make sure they were healthy for the upcoming regional and state tournaments.

"Our eyes are on the prize," he said. "We don't want to get greedy. A small muscle tweak at this point in season could be really bad."

However, the competition was not without its highlights. Carney said two matches in particular stood out.

The first was Lennex Gurule's last-second victory in which he beat his Ketchikan rival by pinning him with one second on the clock. Gurule went on to beat him again in the spotlight match on the tournament's second day.

William Massin was losing 1-11 in a 160-pound matchup against a Metlakatla rival who had beaten him repeatedly all year. But then, as his coach put it, "William turned it on." Massin went on to win the match by a single point that he gained with just two seconds remaining.

This was the final regular season meet of the season. Next up is the Southeast championship tournament in Haines on Dec. 13-14. The next week, the state tournament is scheduled for Dec. 20-21 in Anchorage.

"I'm super proud of this team and we're looking forward to regions up in Haines," Carney said.



PHOTO BY ORIN PIERSON / PETERSBURG PILOT

Wrangell wrestler Hailey Cook (right) faces off against Ella Sutton of Thorne Bay in the 114-pound class in high school wrestling action in Petersburg on Saturday.



PHOTO BY SAM PAUSMAN / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Selah Purviance works on her shooting form during practice on Dec. 4. Purviance, a 5-foot-9 freshman, will compete for minutes down low this season. The high school girls basketball team is scheduled to host Metlakatla on Dec. 20-21 in its season opener.

Girls basketball

Continued from page 7

Conveniently, the sophomore class is extremely well balanced. Shooting specialist Alexis Easterly will likely play down low while Sophia Martinson and Hailey Cook will plug in at the guard spots.

Christina Johnson, a junior guard, will compete for a spot in the starting five while her classmate, Shailyn Johnson, will offer the Wolves another option down low. Good has also liked what she's seen from Selah Purviance, a "raw but coachable" 5-foot-9 freshman who could potentially contribute at forward or center.

This year, Good wants to emphasize the small details that, when compounded together, lead to winning basketball games. The ability to dribble well with both hands, tight decision making, defensive intensity and excellence on the fast break are the traits Good wants this year's team to display. She envisions a team that not only wants to outwork the competition but is

capable of doing so.

Despite having just three players at the first practice of the year on Dec. 4 (due to the ongoing volleyball and wrestling seasons), Good made sure to hammer home the importance of conditioning.

"If you're not in good condition, you're not gonna win," she said. "All of our drills have some conditioning. We never practice set shots; shooting is always conditioned."

Her mindset is pragmatic, a point proven by naming a freshman to captain the team last year. Her expectations for all her players are the same: buy in and learn. But this also means that everyone is held to the same standards, regardless of class-year, previous experience, or even what they did the week before.

For Good, the players that will give the team the highest chance to win are the ones that are going to play. And if you're on the bench, you better take advantage of the opportunity to watch the game from up

close.

"The bench is a classroom," she said. "When you're on the bench, I want them to watch and learn. The bench is just as important as the starting five."

Kaelene Harrison will serve as the team's assistant coach. Though Mike Hoyt will fill in at the position until Harrison gets back in town later this month.

The girls will have their first games on Dec. 20-21, when they will play host to Metlakatla. This is the first of four home series this season. The second of which will take place against Haines on Jan 17-18 before Craig comes to town from Jan. 31 to Feb. 1. The final home games of the year will be against Petersburg on Feb 22-23.

The Wolves will have a bye week before the March 5-8 region championships in Ketchikan. Anchorage hosts the state championship this year, which will take place on March 13-15. The top two finishers from Southeast will make the trip to state.

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Fishing boat was making last run of season when it capsized

By ZAZ HOLLANDER
Anchorage Daily News

The five men lost in the sinking of a commercial fishing boat west of Hoonah early Dec. 1 had just delivered a load in Juneau and were making a last run before the fishing season ended.

The Sitka-based Wind Walker was transiting out to North Pacific fishing grounds when the boat capsized about 25 miles southwest of Juneau, according to several fishing industry representatives. The National Weather Service had forecast gale-force winds in the area, as well as freezing spray and snow.

The Coast Guard said the boat issued a VHF radio mayday call "reporting they were overturning" just before 12:10 a.m. Sunday, Dec. 1. The search for survivors continued for nearly 24 hours and covered more than 108 square nautical miles before it was suspended Dec. 2.

The Coast Guard has started an investigation into

the incident, according to Petty Officer 1st Class Shannon Kearney.

Authorities have identified the five missing men as Travis Kapp, Michael Brown, Emilio Celaya-Talamantez, Jacob Hannah and Alex Ireland, who used the name Alex Zaman-takis on social media.

Kapp is listed as the owner of the Wind Walker, according to a commercial fishing database that describes the boat as a 52-foot, diesel-powered vessel equipped with pots, long-line and purse seine gear as well as 1,000-gallon holding and live tanks.

Kapp bought the Wind Walker this year, according to the state database.

The boat delivered halibut and black cod at the Alaska Glacier Seafoods dock in Juneau on Nov. 30, according to an employee. Then the vessel took on ice and bait and departed for one last run before the season closes this week.

"They were headed back out," said Linda Behnken, a

commercial fisherman out of Sitka for more than 40 years and executive director of the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association.

The vessel departed Juneau at about 7:45 p.m. Nov. 30, according to a vessel tracking service.

The boat's crew issued an emergency mayday call just over four hours later, at 12:07 a.m., the Coast Guard said. A state ferry in the area watched as the boat's signal disappeared just over 10 minutes later.

Coast Guard officials said searchers located seven cold-water immersion suits and two strobe lights but no signs of any of the people aboard the vessel.

The sinking occurred near Point Couverden in Icy Strait, a deep but confined channel that's prone to big currents and waves that can "really stack up if the wind is against the current," Behnken said.

"Other boats are still fishing, not a lot," she said. "Most

are off the grounds and unloading as he had. I don't know that anybody else was heading back out into the weather that he was heading out into."

A marine forecast issued that afternoon for the southern Lynn Canal area the boat would have passed through included a gale warning with north winds to 35 knots, 7-foot seas and freezing spray through the night with snow, according to Nicole Ferrin, a Juneau-based warning coordination meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

The forecast for northern Chatham Strait, the next part of the trip, called for sustained winds of 30 knots and gusts to 40 knots, or about 45 mph, Ferrin said. An observation point near the area the boat went

down registered sustained 40-knot winds with higher gusts, she said.

The market for black cod, also known as sablefish, was depressed this year. Generally, industry advocates say, commercial fishermen and processors are grappling with challenges like worker shortages, a changing climate and market upheavals.

"It's been a tough year. Commercial fishermen are under a lot of pressure especially ... newer entrants trying to make big boat payments or support their families," Behnken said. "They're feeling a lot of pressure right now to make what they can. It's an inherently dangerous occupation, but this time of year, those dangers just increase."



PHOTO BY SAM PAUSMAN / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Kimberley Szczatko opened Cooper's Corner last month, taking over the Front Street space vacated by Midnight Oil.

Cooper's Corner moves its gifts and crafts into a downtown storefront

By SUE BAHLEDA

For the Wrangell Sentinel

In 2012, Kimberley Szczatko bought a sign that reads "Open, Come On In" in anticipation of one day hanging it on the door of her own store. That sign now greets you at Cooper's Corner, which celebrated its grand opening on Nov. 29 in the Front Street space recently vacated by Midnight Oil.

Szczatko has made the space uniquely hers, filling it with antique trunks and bookcases, enormous moose and caribou mounts, and a wide product mix.

While she has retained some goods from Midnight Oil, like candy, balloons and T-shirts, her expanded vision is to create a blend of ready-made gifts and crafting supplies.

"I want this to be a place where local folk can come and shop for birthdays, showers and celebrations," she said. Cooper's Corner will also carry a variety of craft supplies including yarns and crochet hooks, buttons and other sewing notions for people who like to create their own work.

She is particularly excited about the prospect of featuring locally handcrafted work and products. Alongside her own creations, there are quilts by Mary Fredrichs on display and poinsettias from Oceanview Gardens.

Before moving into the storefront, Cooper's Corner operated as an online shop, which she will continue.

Szczatko, who is a member of the chamber of commerce board, also has the capacity to do custom embroidery. Some are familiar with her mountain/wolf sweatshirt design created after the 2023 landslide for #wrangellstrong. While it is possible to bring in items for custom embroidery, she also has a range of products, including aprons, Christmas stockings, pillowcases and T-shirts that can be personalized with names and designs.

This opening is just the beginning of her vision: She plans on a book nook with comfortable chairs in the front window, and a coffee cart to encourage people to feel at home.

This moment has been a long time coming, and she wants to remind people there's no need to rush. Even so, Szczatko can't stop smiling, as she has finally realized her dream of having a shop. She anticipates "this is going to be an adventure, and it's going to be fun."

The shop is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday, ; phone 907-305-1026.

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Wednesday, Dec. 4
 Found property.

Thursday, Dec. 5
 Assault: Domestic violence.
 Debris in the roadway.
 Summons service.

Friday, Dec. 6
 Dog complaint.
 Traffic stop.
 Found property.

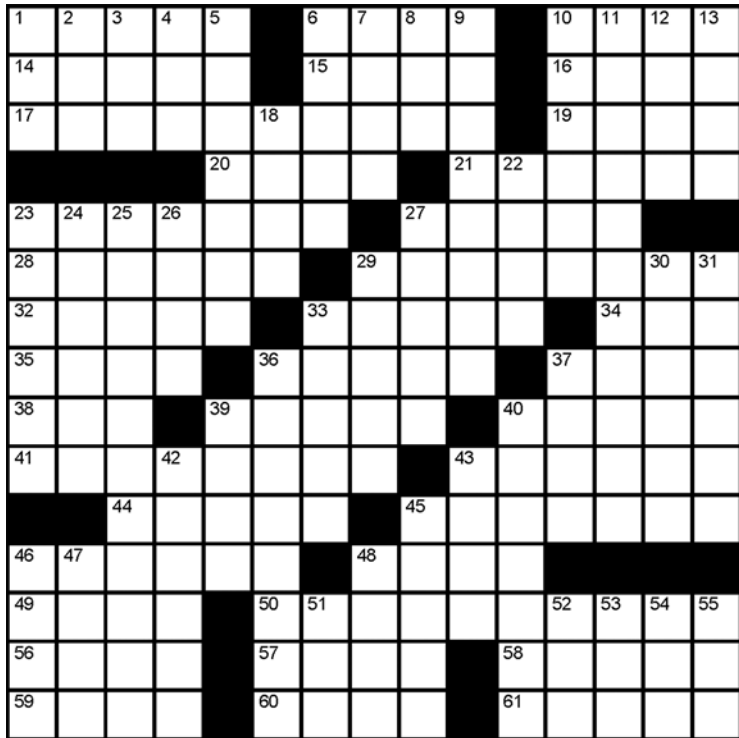
Saturday, Dec. 7
 Fire alarm.

Sunday, Dec. 8
 Traffic stop.
 Bar check.
 Civil standby.

There were four ambulance calls during this reporting period.

Crossword

Answers on page 12



CLUES ACROSS

- 1 Old computer dial-up device
- 6 Adjust
- 10 Impertinent person
- 14 Fort Utah, formerly
- 15 Food scraps
- 16 Cheat
- 17 Go-ahead
- 19 Subject of study
- 20 Mazuma
- 21 Baseball scorecard listing
- 23 Scott Pelley's employer
- 27 Into a state of decline
- 28 Melts together
- 29 Airline perks
- 32 Bankrupts
- 33 Turns on the waterworks
- 34 --- Arbor, MI
- 35 Utter a shrill cry
- 36 Panamanian singer --- Blades
- 37 Gumbo essential
- 38 Second sight
- 39 Point of a tale
- 40 Seen by those with 38 Across, perhaps?
- 41 Went home to disrupt a play with no men
- 43 Volkswagen classic
- 44 Prima donnas
- 45 Mischievous ones
- 46 Horse that has not won a race
- 48 Broadcasts
- 49 'It --- rocket science!'
- 50 The Martian --- (Ray Bradbury)
- 56 "Star Wars" monastic warriors
- 57 Send forth
- 58 GWTW's Scarlett ---
- 59 New Mexico artists' colony
- 60 In order
- 61 Course halves

CLUES DOWN

- 1 Auto efficiency measure
- 2 Boston Bruin great
- 3 Buck's mate
- 4 First of her kind
- 5 Found in barrels, often
- 6 Labors long and hard
- 7 Compulsion
- 8 Degree in mathematics?
- 9 Steroid hormone
- 10 Cascades peak
- 11 Flickertail State
- 12 "How obvious!"
- 13 Seckel or Bartlett
- 18 Hill products
- 22 Bear in Brittany
- 23 Magic transport
- 24 Slightly off-color, I'm in red
- 25 Put on top, wavy lines dip badly
- 26 Not one
- 27 Pitch
- 29 Name of eight popes
- 30 Register
- 31 Winds
- 33 Prepares for keeping
- 36 Wines and dines
- 37 Crude cartel
- 39 Chess turn
- 40 Official sitting
- 42 Side-to-side measurements
- 43 Where the cows come home to
- 45 Commotions
- 46 Spray finely
- 47 Largest of seven, round the world
- 48 Any of 44 Across could sing one
- 51 Care plan
- 52 Greek X
- 53 Intra-office computer system
- 54 Before
- 55 Carrier to Copenhagen, briefly

Alaska's average wage drops to 11th in the nation last year

By ALASKA BEACON AND WRANGELL SENTINEL

The average hourly wage in Alaska was \$33.60 in 2023, putting the state in 11th place among all 50 states and the District of Columbia, according to the Alaska Department of Labor.

The median hourly wage — which is calculated in a way that reduces the influence of the highest and lowest numbers — was \$26.99.

Alaska has been among the top states for wages since the oil pipeline boom almost 50 years ago, and was No. 1 as recently as 2013, but has been falling and was eighth in 2022.

Wage and job statistics were detailed in a pair of articles by state analysts and published in the December issue of Alaska Economic Trends, the Department of Labor's monthly magazine.

An article by research analyst Samantha Jenkins showed the wide range in hourly wages earned by workers in the state's top 10 occupations in 2023. Among those occupations, general and operations managers earned the most, at \$58.09 an hour on average, followed by registered nurses, averaging \$52.51.

At the bottom among those 10 occupations were fast food and counter workers, whose average pay was \$14.91 per hour, and cashiers, whose average pay was \$17.04 per hour, the article said.

The national average hourly pay in 2023 was \$31.48, Jenkins' article said.

Alaskans' average pay rose by 5.2% in 2023, outpacing the 1.5% inflation rate, said a separate article by Karinne Wiebold, a department economist. That was a reversal of the situation in 2021 and 2022, when inflation rates of 4.9% and 8.1% were higher

than average wage growth in the state, said Wiebold's article.

Wrangell was among the leaders across the state for job growth from 2022 to 2023, adding 76 jobs, 11%, to reach 749 in 2023, according to state Department of Labor numbers. In addition to growing tourism industry numbers, the higher job count likely was due to Trident Seafoods reopening its salmon processing plant after a three-year closure.

The average annual wage in Wrangell in 2023 was \$55,146, a gain over 2022's average of \$51,886. Though Wrangell was significantly below the statewide average annual wage of \$68,123 in 2023, the community was ahead of Haines, Petersburg, Skagway and Hoonah-Angoon, while behind the biggest towns in Southeast of Juneau, Sitka and Ketchikan.

The total number of jobs in the state in 2023 was 3% higher in 2023 than in 2022, Wiebold's analysis showed. But the total number of jobs was 1,135 lower than pre-pandemic levels.

In only four of 13 measured categories had job totals returned to levels above those in 2019, the last year before the COVID-19 pandemic. The health care sector had the biggest gains, with 1,640 jobs added from 2019 to 2023. In contrast, the oil and gas industry had 2,353 fewer jobs in 2023 than it did before the pandemic, Wiebold's article said.

The oil and gas industry is the highest-paying industry in Alaska, with an average annual pay of \$181,143, Wiebold's article said.

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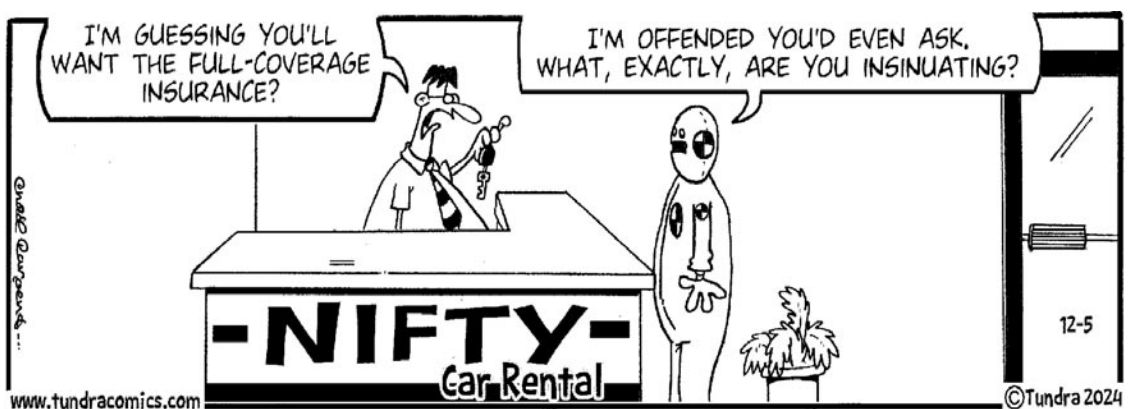
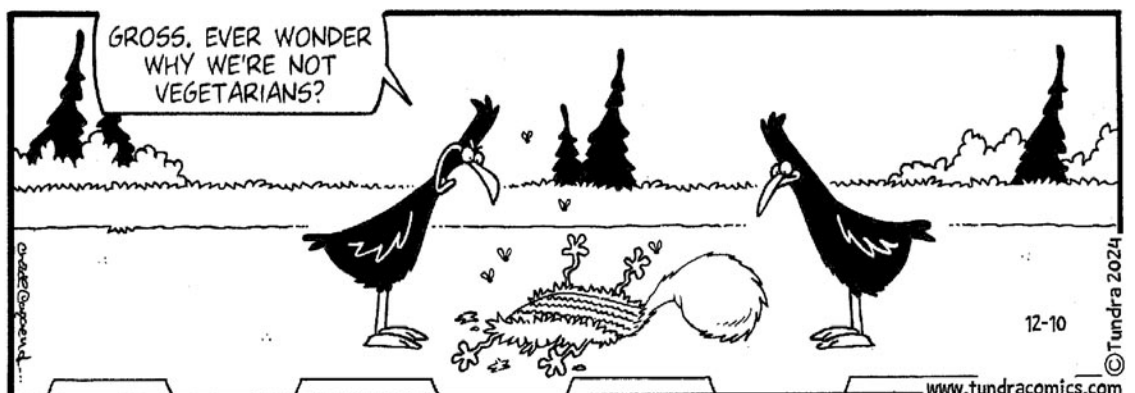
Ritter's River

by Marc Lutz



Tundra

by Chad Carpenter



Chinook are getting smaller in past decade in Alaska's two largest river systems

BY YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

The shrinking size of Alaska salmon, a decades-long trend linked in part to warming conditions in the ocean, is hampering the ability of chinook in Alaska's two biggest rivers to produce new generations needed to maintain healthy populations, a new study shows.

The University of Alaska Fairbanks-led study shows how the body conditions of chinook salmon, combined with extreme heat and cold in the ocean and freshwater environments, have converged in the Yukon and Kuskokwim river systems to depress what is termed "productivity" — the successful reproduction that results in adult spawners returning to the same area.

The study examines 26 different populations of chinook in those two river systems in areas from Western Alaska to the Yukon River uplands in Canada. Chinook runs in those rivers have faltered in recent years, and the situation has been so dire on the Canadian part of the Yukon that U.S. and Canadian officials earlier this year suspended all harvests of Canadian-origin chinook for seven years.

The analysis of multiple factors and conditions revealed that fish size was a major factor that determined productivity, defined as adult salmon returning to spawning grounds successfully producing a next generation of adults to come back to the same spawning area.

There are explanations for the relationship of size to productivity success, said Megan Feddern, who led the study when she was a postdoctoral researcher at UAF's College of Fisheries and Ocean Sciences. She is now a fish biologist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Smaller female fish carry fewer eggs to spawning grounds, as has been shown by prior research. Additionally, those eggs are in poorer condition than eggs in big fish, Feddern said. And smaller fish, whether female or male, are less robust and less likely to make the full journey, especially up the full length of the nearly 2,000-mile Yukon River, she said.

"It carries over into that next generation," Feddern said. "The

females and males that are making the migration and have that better body condition are able to produce more, but then it also sets that next generation up for success."

Other factors found to have hindered productivity for Yukon and Kuskokwim fish were warm summers at sea during the first year in the ocean for any given chinook salmon age group; unusually winter cold conditions encountered by fish in their first winters at sea; and unusually warm temperatures in freshwater river habitat.

The dangers of overly warm conditions for salmon have been documented before, as shown by past records of heat stress suffered by Yukon River salmon in 2016 and 2017. But just why cold winters in the Bering Sea are such problems is yet to be explained, Feddern said.

"I don't think we have a good grasp on what exactly is happening when it comes to those cold winters," she said. "We suspect it's just, these young adults that are in the ocean are just not surviving through those really cold conditions."

High runoff was another condition harming productivity for some populations, notably in the Canadian part of the Yukon River system, the study found.

The study evaluates conditions only up to 2016, so it misses events that happened during the recent and prolonged Bering Sea marine heatwaves, along with heat-related events in freshwater areas. For example, it does not include the ultra-warm river temperatures in 2019, a record-hot year in Alaska, that were blamed for a mass die-off of salmon in the Koyukuk River, a Yukon River tributary, and die-offs elsewhere.

Feddern said there are plans to update the study with data from recent years.

The study's research questions were inspired by community concerns. Those were expressed at a 2022 workshop in Fairbanks that was hosted by UAF's International Arctic Research Center.

There, as residents of river communities talked about their experiences and their relationships with fish, UAF researchers learned that the shrinking salmon size was a major worry, Feddern said.

"I would say that the size component that was included in this research was really driven by folks being concerned about that," she said.

All species of Pacific salmon have been shrinking in size over the past decades, but the change has been most dramatic among chinook salmon, also known as king salmon.

The smaller size has hurt the fishing industry. In the Bristol Bay region, the site of the world's biggest sockeye salmon runs, the average sockeye salmon size this year was the smallest on record, according to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Even though this year's total number of fish that returned was above the 20-year average, the total number of fish commercially harvested was below average, the department reported. The reason appears to be related to fish size, with many of the returning salmon being too small to be caught in gillnets, a department biologist said in September.

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No injuries in Ketchikan landslide during three-day deluge of 13 inches of rain

BY ANNA LAFFREY
Ketchikan Daily News

Nobody was injured in a small landslide in Ketchikan that dropped from a Hillside Road property on Dec. 1, unearthing approximately 4,000 square feet of a family's backyard and sweeping about 200 feet down a steep, forested slope into Carlanna Creek.

The landslide did not cause any structural damage to the family's home or outbuildings, but yanked a kayak, a canoe and some fishing buoys from their yard to the creek below.

Portions of unstable land on the family's Hillside Road property continued to fall Dec. 2 and 3, although the house appeared to be stable, according to homeowner Robert Booth.

Another small landslide on Dec. 1 fell down the slope directly across the valley from the Hillside Road landslide, on the west side of Carlanna Creek beneath Vallenar Lane.

The Ketchikan area experienced 13.14 inches of rain between the evening of Nov. 30 and midnight on Dec. 3.

Booth said he heard the Dec. 1 landslide "rumble" at about 11:20 p.m. He said his "dogs started running around" inside the house that's about 20 yards from the landslide site. "I didn't get up because I didn't think it was my property."

Rather, Booth said he "assumed it was movement on Third Avenue," more than a mile away from his home, where a large landslide tumbled approximately 550 feet down a steep mountainside into a downtown Ketchikan neighborhood on Aug. 25.

Bonnie Steinberg, who owns the Hillside Road home with Booth and has lived there for 22 years, said she assumed the loud, late-night landslide was an airplane.

Meanwhile, Amanda Bolton slept through the landslide as it fell behind the home where she grew up.

Bolton said that since the Third Avenue landslide struck Ketchikan in August, the potential for similar geohazards "is pretty much all you think about when it rains, and the dam up there" at Carlanna Lake, upstream from her family's property.

Mexico will start charging \$42 fee per person for all ship passengers

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mexico's Senate has voted to charge cruise ship passengers \$42 per person for port calls, drawing sharp criticism from the tourism industry.

Mexican business chambers say the immigration charge — from which cruise passengers used to be exempt — may hurt the country's half-billion-dollar-per-year cruise industry.

The measure approved Dec. 3 has already been passed in the lower house and will go into effect in 2025. The changes were part of a bill that also increases airport immigration charges and entry fees for nature reserves.

Mexico's Caribbean coast is home to Cozumel, the busiest port of call for cruise ships in the world. The National Confederation of Commerce, Service and Tourism Chambers said the \$42 charges could make other countries' Caribbean ports more competitive than Mexico's.

"This could result in a significant decrease in visitors," Octavio de la Torre, the president of the federation, said.

In the past, cruise ship passengers were exempted from the immigration fee because they slept aboard the vessels and some didn't even get off the ship during port calls. Now, even those people would be charged the \$42 fee, according to the new law.

There have been initiatives throughout the world to curb cruise ships for fear of over-

tourism, but that train left the station long ago in the case of Mexico's Caribbean coast. Cozumel has been the world's busiest port of call for years, welcoming about four million cruise passengers per year.

Two-thirds of the money raised would go to the Mexican army, not to improve port facilities.

Most locales charge a per-passenger fee, which the cruise lines pass on to their customers. In Alaska, the state collects a \$34.50-per-person fee and shares most of it with port communities, with the money restricted to cruise ship-related projects and services.

Wrangell expects to receive \$70,000 as its share this fiscal year, according to the borough budget.

The Mexican Association of Shipping Agents cried foul last week over the government's decision to extend its immigration fee to cruise passengers.

"If this measure is implemented, it would make Mexican ports of call among the most expensive in the world, severely affecting their competitiveness with other Caribbean destinations," the association said in a statement.

Mexican states also impose their own passenger fees.

Mexico's ruling party is already running enormous budget deficits to fund its favorite building projects like railways and oil refineries — some of which are being built by the army. The government is desperate to find new revenue sources.

Wrangell Cooperative Association REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL Tourism Business Plan

Wrangell Cooperative Association (WCA), a federally recognized tribe, is soliciting proposals and rate information from experienced firms for a comprehensive Tourism Business Plan.

For more information and to request a copy of the RFP, please contact Esther Ashton at 1002 Zimovia Highway, Wrangell, AK 99929, or call 907-874-4304 extension 102, or email wcatribes@gmail.com and tourism.wca@gmail.com. Office hours 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Deadline: December 23, 2024.

Publish Dec. 11 and 18, 2024

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Do you have an opinion that you would like to share? Send us a typed or clearly written letter up to 400 words with your phone number and we will get it published in the paper. Contact Amber at 907-874-2301 or email wrgsent@gmail.com.

Alaska oil company will test small data center on the North Slope

By NATHANIEL HERZ
Northern Journal

Hilcorp is set to host a new project that will test the idea of using plentiful natural gas from Alaska's North Slope oil fields to generate electricity for data centers — the digital infrastructure that keeps the internet running and is essential to the emerging artificial intelligence economy.

Privately owned Hilcorp, one of Alaska's biggest oil producers, is working with a Texas-based firm to place a small, pilot data center at its Endicott field, inside a shipping container on a gravel pad, according to a permit application filed recently with state land managers.

The Texas firm, TA Infrastructure, said in the application that it will use the computers inside the shipping container for Bitcoin mining — a digital process that creates more of the cryptocurrency. Power will come from gas, using Hilcorp's existing generators, according to the application and a public notice posted by the Alaska Department of Natural Resources.

"The goal of this pilot project is to demonstrate the ability to operate computers and associated data center infrastructure in the unique environment of the North Slope, as well as identify any logistical and operational challenges that a larger project might present," the application said.

The computers will operate on a continuous basis for four years, according to the applica-

tion, with a starting date this month for the permit.

TA Infrastructure's contact listed on the application, Tim Bonstaff, did not respond to requests for comment. Neither did a spokesperson for Hilcorp.

The proposed project comes amid increasing demand for, and scrutiny of, data centers, which are needed to power the heavy computing demands of AI but also consume huge amounts of electricity.

The industry is facing a backlash in some communities in the Lower 48, while Gov. Mike Dunleavy has been trying to recruit data firms to Alaska, citing its ample undeveloped real estate and lower potential for conflicts over location.

Another selling point touted by Dunleavy is that Alaska has

huge amounts of natural gas associated with its North Slope oil fields.

That gas, in theory, could be used to generate electricity to power new data centers. But there's no pipeline to carry it from the thinly populated North Slope to markets in urban Alaska or Outside. The state has long sought to build such a pipeline, which could cost tens of billions of dollars.

Dunleavy, in a recent interview, said he thinks new data centers could generate enough demand for electricity to support construction of a gas pipeline; the gas could be used in urban Alaska to run power plants that would support the data centers.

The Bitcoin project at Hilcorp's North Slope field,

though, would test a concept that would not need a costly gas line. Instead, it would use electricity derived from natural gas on site at the region's oil fields — using Hilcorp's pre-existing generation infrastructure.

TA Infrastructure wants to install computers that will collectively use 1.4 megawatts of electricity, according to its permit application — enough to power hundreds of homes.

Using that much computing power to mine Bitcoin could earn the equivalent of roughly \$300 an hour, said Colin Read, an economics professor at State University of New York Plattsburgh who has studied cryptocurrency.

But, he said, relying on natural gas to mine Bitcoin is "bad for the environment" because "you're belching out a lot of CO2 (carbon dioxide) in the

process, as well." Other leading cryptocurrencies, he added, have abandoned the mining process and now keep their networks functioning using different methods that consume far less electricity.

"Fossil fuels are just not a sustainable model, and the greenhouse gas implications, to me, are really troubling," said Read, who's also taught at University of Alaska Fairbanks. "If they could solve those, that would put them in a much better situation."


Dunleavy's administration is reviewing TA Infrastructure's permit application, the state's commissioner of natural resources, John Boyle, said in a prepared statement.

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