



Trident expects to double last year's summer hiring

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

After a scaled-back reopening last summer following a three-year closure of its Wrangell processing facilities, Trident Seafoods anticipates having 200 to 240 workers on the job during the peak salmon months this summer.

That would be about double the 100 to 120 workers at the shoreside facility last summer.

"Trident is looking forward to operating its Wrangell plant

again this year. We anticipate employing 200 to 240 people at peak this summer. The company will focus on processing pink and chum salmon starting in mid-June," Alexis Telfer, vice president for global communications for the Seattle-based company, said in an email Feb. 22.

Trident added pink salmon to its headed-and-gutted-and-frozen salmon line at the Wrangell plant last year, after handling mostly chum salmon in prior

years.

The industry sees promise in delivering more pink salmon products to price-sensitive consumers, Allen Kimball, board chairman of the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute and a former vice president at Trident Seafoods, said during an industry webinar Feb. 22.

"Pink salmon is one of the species that we're spending a lot of time on," he said of the seafood marketing agency's efforts to build more consumer de-

mand for wild Alaska salmon.

Soft markets "absolutely demand innovation," Kimball said.

"We have to improve the value of the fish that don't sell," and focusing on quality and consumer-friendly products is part of ASMI's marketing efforts, he said.

Trident cited weak Southeast chum returns for its decision to keep the Wrangell plant closed 2020-2022.

Though returns have picked up, pretty much the entire seafood market is oversupplied, with inventory stacked up and consumers choosing less expensive foods, according to Alaska seafood industry and state officials.

"People are buying less seafood," Jeremy Woodrow, ASMI executive director, told Southeast business and community leaders earlier this month.

Rising food costs, tight household budgets and overall inflation have made it harder for processors to sell to wholesalers and retailers.

High interest rates also have hurt Alaska seafood sales, Kimball explained at the webinar, as buyers cannot afford to hold high inventories of unsold fish. They are looking to take on less risk and reduce their interest payments on borrowed money, which means holding less inventory.

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Governor may veto school funds increase

By JAMES BROOKS
Alaska Beacon

A bill significantly increasing state funding for public schools is on its way to Gov. Mike Dunleavy, but the governor issued a statement Monday indicating that he may veto the measure — and it isn't clear whether the Legislature has enough votes to override a veto.

The governor was scheduled to hold a press conference Tuesday afternoon in Anchorage to talk about the bill.

The boost to the state's per-student funding formula, added last week by the House to a Senate bill focused on improving internet service for rural schools, would be the largest increase in state history.

Statewide, the 11% increase in the funding formula would cost about \$175 million a year.

If signed into law and fully funded in the state budget, the increase would produce an estimated \$440,000 more for the Wrangell district for the 2024-2025 school year, covering most of the deficit in the draft budget presented to the school board this week.

State formula funding covers about 60% of the district's operating budget.

With an 18-1 vote Monday, the Senate agreed to the House version of the multipart education bill that also provides more money for school bus operations and K-3 reading programs.

The House voted 38-2 to approve the measure Feb. 22. Wasilla Rep. David Eastman and North Pole Rep. Mike Prax were the lone votes against the final bill.

The bill is significantly different from a Dunleavy-backed version that failed to pass the House. That version included a governor-proposed plan to offer cash bonuses to teachers. That idea failed by a single vote in the House.

The unsuccessful House version supported by the governor also would have created a new avenue with the state for creating charter schools rejected at the local level, and additional funding for homeschooled students.

The compromise bill approved by the Senate and House includes the additional funding for homeschooling and a state appeal process for new charter schools denied at the local level.

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PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Head Start lead teacher Sandra "Sandy" Churchill will retire at the end of the school year after 26 years.

Teacher will 'miss those hugs' after 26 years with Head Start

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

Sandra "Sandy" Churchill didn't expect to get her first paid position in 1998 at the Head Start program as a teacher's aide/cook. "There's hardly ever any openings here," she said. "I was so surprised when I got in."

She also didn't expect to still be working at Head Start over 26 years later as lead teacher. "My goal was for 25," she said, laughing.

Churchill will retire at the end of the school year. "It's a whole new chapter for me," she

said. "I wonder what's it's going to be like, retiring."

She likes to say with a kind smile that after so many years of working in the program, kids as well as their parents, who also grew up in Head Start, know her as Teacher Sandy. "I'm working on the second generation," she said.

"Even the kids that have graduated and moved on, they always wave at me, say hi to me, talk to me in the stores. ... The ones that are like, middle school, are still hugging me. It's pretty amazing."

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Wrangell loses three summer cruise ship stops to Klawock

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Wrangell has lost three cruise ship stopovers this summer to Klawock, where a partnership of three Native corporations is developing a tourist destination with facilities, shore excursions and other activities for passengers.

The 746-passenger Seven Seas Explorer has crossed Wrangell off its schedule for a May visit, with the 670-passenger Regatta canceling a stop in June and one in September but retaining a Wrangell stop earlier in Septem-

ber, according to the schedule posted by the Wrangell Convention and Visitor Bureau earlier this month.

The loss of the three stops drops the number of potential cruise ship visitors to town this summer to 28,000, down from 30,000, if all the berths on every ship are full.

This summer's cruise ship season in Wrangell is scheduled to run from the second week of May to the third week of September, according to the visitor bureau's latest calendar.

The Regatta and Seven Seas Explorer are operated by separ-

ate companies owned by Norwegian Cruise Line.

The loss of the three port visits didn't surprise Kate Thomas, the borough's economic development director.

"It's something that I think we're going to see continue ... and we can't ignore that," she reported to the assembly earlier this month.

Cruise lines increasingly are looking for all-in-one destinations with shore excursions, shops and other attractions designed for passengers.

"Klawock is poised to take the very ships that Wrangell is

trying to retain," Thomas said in an interview, noting that cruise ships of around 800 passengers or so is a good size for Wrangell.

"What do we do with that," Thomas said of the new competition from Klawock. "Wrangell's going to have to figure out what it wants."

The largest ships that can carry more than 4,000 passengers mostly stick with Ketchikan, Juneau and Skagway, which provide more excursions and attractions with enough capacity to better handle such large crowds.

Huna Totem Corp., the vil-

lage corporation for Hoonah, started developing its Icy Strait Point cruise ship destination in 2004, and has been building up its attractions and facilities since then and growing its visitor traffic, totaling more than 200 cruise ship visits last summer and getting close to 500,000 passengers.

The development is a big employer in Hoonah, a community of about 850 people at the northern end of Chichagof Island, about 160 miles northwest of Wrangell.

The Icy Strait Point amenities

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Senior Center Menu

Open for in-person dining. Must be fully vaccinated.

Thursday, Feb. 29

Pineapple lemon chicken, green beans, sukiyaki salad, rice and vegetable pilaf

Friday, March 1

Moose meatloaf with mushrooms, carrots in orange sauce, romaine radish salad, mashed potatoes and gravy, fruit

Monday, March 4

Closed. Shelf-stable meal delivered on Friday, March 1

Tuesday, March 5

Salmon and rice balls, Brussel sprouts, carrot raisin salad, Pilot Bread

Wednesday, March 6

Cheese sandwich, split pea soup, apricot salad

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.

Ferry Schedule

Northbound

Friday, March 1

Kennicott, 4:30 p.m.

Monday, March 4

Kennicott, 5 p.m.

Friday, March 8

Kennicott, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, March 15

Kennicott, 3:15 p.m.

Southbound

Monday, March 4

Kennicott, 1 a.m.

Thursday, March 7

Kennicott, 4 p.m.

Monday, March 11

Kennicott, 4 a.m.

Monday, March 18

Kennicott, 5 a.m.

All times listed are scheduled departure times.

Call the terminal at 907-874-2021 for information

or call 907-874-3711 or 800-642-0066 for recorded information.

Tides

High Tides

Low Tides

	AM	PM	AM	PM	AM	PM
	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft
Feb. 28	02:47	15.7	03:00	14.4	08:46	1.3
Feb. 29	03:11	15.4	03:33	13.4	09:20	1.4
March 1	03:38	15.1	04:12	12.3	10:00	1.7
March 2	04:11	14.6	05:06	11.1	10:49	2.2
March 3	04:57	13.9	06:35	10.2	11:52	2.6
March 4	06:12	13.4	08:24	10.5
March 5	07:50	13.6	09:41	11.7	01:05	6.7
					02:43	1.9



ALASKA AIRLINES CLUB 49 COMMUNITY EVENTS CALENDAR

INDIAN EDUCATION ACT COMMITTEE MEETING 5 p.m., Wednesday, Feb. 28, at Room 205 of the high school. The Indian Education Act is for Native/Indian students in Wrangell public schools. The meeting is open to everyone.

FAMILY GAME NIGHT 6 p.m. Thursday, March 7, at The Salvation Army. Free snacks and board games. All are welcome. Call for more information, 907-874-3753.

TLINGIT CANOE PADDLE-MAKING WORKSHOP Friday, Saturday and Sunday, March 8-10, at the high school shop class. Paddles will be for dancing or actual boat paddling. One People Canoe Society will send artists and workshop leaders. Sealaska contributed red cedar planks and the high school contributed use of the shop and tools. To reserve your spot, email khoyt@searhc.org.

COMMUNITY MARKET 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, March 9, at the Nolan Center. Check out the locally grown and handcrafted items.

FREE TAX RETURN PREPARATION every Saturday through April 13 at the Nolan Center classroom. Open to everyone, regardless of age. IRS-certified volunteers will prepare and e-file your return for you at no charge. By appointment only. Call Paula at 907-874-3824 or 907-305-0309.

NOLAN CENTER THEATER no movies until March.

STORY TIME AT THE LIBRARY, 10 to 11 a.m. Fridays. Come enjoy the stories, crafts and snacks at the Irene Ingle Public Library. Call 907-874-3535.

VIRTUES MATTER activities for children, 2:35 to 4 p.m. Wednesdays at the elementary school music room. An interfaith effort hosted by the Baha'is of Wrangell and open to all. For more information and to register, call Kay Larson, 907-209-9117, or email wrangell@akbnc.org.

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

- **YOUTH OPEN GYM** 10 to 11:30 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays at the community center gym for ages 0-10; \$3 for first child, \$2 for second, \$1 for third child, fourth plus is free. Bring clean gym shoes or take shoes off in the hallway.
- **SKATE NIGHT** 5 to 7 p.m. Saturdays at the community center gym. Limited quantity and sizes of skates available to borrow. Family focused, kids 12 years and under must be supervised by a parent or adult. Open-gym style activity. Drop-in fee: pay before you skate.
- **OUTDOOR CHALLENGE** March 1 through April 28 is built to encourage consistent movement, with a goal of completing at least 30 minutes of exercise 5 to 7 days per week. This challenge is for people of all fitness levels. The participant who completes the most workouts within the challenge dates will win a six-month pass to the Parks and Recreation facility; prizes donated by local businesses will be raffled off at the end of the challenge. For ages 14 and up. Registration required for this free activity.

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

Open swim is open by appointment. Locker rooms are available.

Arthritis class, 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

Lap swim, 6 to 7:30 a.m. Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

Lap/tot swim, 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. weekdays, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Thursday, and 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday.

Open swim, 6 to 7 p.m. Monday and Wednesday; 6 to 7 p.m. Friday; 1 to 2 p.m. Saturday.

Water aerobics class, 10 to 11 a.m. Monday, Wednesday, Friday.

Weight room: 6 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 to 7:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 6 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and 3:30 to 8:30 p.m. Friday; 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturday

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

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

Feb. 28, 1924

Wrangell's champion basketball team returned Monday afternoon on the Alameda from their two-week trip throughout Western Washington; a trip that demonstrated that basketball in Alaska is on par with that of the states. Even during the heavy playing schedule that was forced on the boys in order that they might return to their studies sooner - with seven games in nine evenings - the boys held up under the strain. Such a schedule is seldom attempted even by colleges, and it is a credit to the condition of the players that such a stiff schedule could be played with only one substitute

player. Throughout the series of games the boys were welcomed at the various schools, where assemblies were held in their honor. Mr. Garfield was the principal speaker on the tour, but was ably supported by Rev. Corser and Elton Engstrom. The purpose of the talks was to dispel the old beliefs that Alaska was a land of ice and snow.

Feb. 25, 1949

H. A. Wells, it was announced, is now manager of the Wells Sawmill out Zimovia Highway. The mill was leased a short time ago by Francis Bernardo, and J. Hurn was put in charge as manager. However, Mr. Hurn

left today to return to his former home in Marysville, Washington, and Mr. Wells, who owns the sawmill, succeeds him as manager. Wells will handle affairs of the sawmill until further notice. The mill will continue to operate, weather permitting.

Feb. 27, 1974

Wrangell Wolves wrestlers rose from third to second place in league standings last weekend when they defeated the Petersburg Vikings. The Wolves took two matches from their Petersburg rivals, 30-27 and 29-18. In first-match competition, Wrangell Wolves registering pins were Kevin Castle at 101,

Alan Ollivant at 108, Frank Johansen at 115 and Iver Nore at 158. The match, which was the first of the two-contest trip and, as such, counted in league standings, put the Wrangell club in second place behind Ketchikan. Wrangell now has a 3-2 league record, with four league matches remaining in the season. The Wolves will wrestle next tomorrow and Friday here against Petersburg again.

Feb. 25, 1999

If the Alaska Department of Transportation successfully woos the cities of Wrangell, Petersburg and other points on Prince of Wales Island, lo-

cals may be able to hop a ferry (a new, smaller and faster one than the current ships of the Marine Highway), travel quickly to Ketchikan, shop most of the day, then return home that evening with their new packages in hand. There is a slight hitch - ferry passengers would need wheels or a lot of stamina to walk to the terminal, as it would be located on the southern tip of Wrangell Island. This was one of the scenarios presented to the Wrangell Chamber of Commerce and to other interested residents last Thursday by Jeff Ottesen from the Department of Transportation.

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State, tribe and borough wait on federal disaster funding

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

The borough is waiting on a federal disaster declaration to cover the expense of power line repairs and other immediate and near-term costs from the Nov. 20 landslide at 11.2-Mile Zimovia Highway.

The Wrangell Cooperative Association is seeking federal funding for the longer-term expense of cleaning up the tidelands of debris and toxic material.

Under federal law, only the governor can request a federal disaster declaration, which the Federal Emergency Management Agency reviews before sending it to the president for signature.

The state has requested the

designation, said Jeremy Zidek, public information officer for the state Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

There is no timeline for a federal response, he said.

The community is waiting for a decision and signature from the White House, Interim Borough Manager Mason Villarma said Friday, Feb. 23.

In addition to paying borough and WCA costs, a federal disaster declaration would open up funding opportunities for the state, which estimated in December that clearing and rebuilding the highway will cost more than \$1.2 million.

Repaving the rebuilt section of damaged highway has been postponed to wait for better

weather.

The state also has spent money on personnel and equipment to station a drone and weather station in the slide area to monitor the hillside.

The borough has estimated its expenses at about \$600,000, "and climbing," Villarma reported to the borough assembly earlier this month.

The expenses have been for police and fire department personnel, search and rescue operations, providing fuel and generators for residents who lost power, and rebuilding power poles and transmission lines in the area of the slide.

While the state paid for repairs to the highway, new drainage culverts and clearing the right of way of mud and

trees, the borough handled clearing outside the right of way, Villarma said.

The borough filed its request for federal reimbursement in December, he said.

And while state disaster relief grants are limited to no more than \$21,250 per household for housing repairs and up to the same amount for other disaster-related needs such as clothing, furnishings, energy costs and temporary storage expenses of families displaced by the slide, a federal disaster declaration would open up much larger funding opportunities for the borough, state and tribe.

FEMA officials met extensively with WCA in January, Villarma said, discussing the possibility of federal funding

for the tribe to take on cleaning up the state-owned tidelands, where the heavy outflow of mud from the landslide buried vehicles and fuel tanks.

The slide, which started at almost the 1,500-foot elevation, flowed approximately 3,750 feet to tidewater and then extended an additional 500 feet into Zimovia Strait, according to a state report.

A federal declaration also could cover response and repairs costs from other Southeast landslides that occurred Nov. 20, including snapped power poles and washed-out roads on Prince of Wales Island near Hydaburg, Thorne Bay, Coffman Cove, the Klawock-Hollis Highway and between Craig and Klawock.

Wrangell firefighters step up for cancer research fundraiser

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

Wrangell firefighters will join the 33rd annual stairclimb competition in Seattle next month to raise money for the fight against leukemia and lymphoma.

Clay Hammer, Dustin Johnson and Steve Prysunka are taking part in the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's Firefighter Stairclimb on Sunday, March 10. It's the world's largest such event where the climbers breathe through their airpicks.

The contest will be held at Seattle's tallest building, the Columbia Center.

All 2,000 participants are career, volunteer or retired firefighters from all over the world, who must make their way to the top in full turnout gear using only the building's 69 flights of stairs, which total 1,356 steps reaching 788 feet straight up.

The competition raises funds for blood cancer research and patient services, collecting more than \$25 million since its start.

"It's a combination of a really good cause and great bragging rights," Hammer said. "It's an amazing thing to be a part of, and a great motivator to get some good exercise as well as helping to raise funds."

Hammer explained that participating in full gear means wearing boots, turnout pants and coat, an airpick assembly, helmet and visor. Participants

generate a lot of heat wearing full gear in this kind of competition. "The gear weighs 35 to 40 pounds altogether," he said. "It's a long way to the top."

This will be his second time competing in the Stairclimb, and Johnson and Prysunka have also done it before. The last time they competed was in 2018 with six of their fellow firefighters, including Scott McAuliffe, Adam Sprehe, Walter Moorhead, Chris Hatton, Dorianne Sprehe and Jordan Bunes.

"My big goal this year is to not embarrass my team," Hammer said. "Last time, I believe it took me 21 minutes. If I can do it (this time) in 25 minutes, I figure that'll be a pretty good accomplishment."

"At the end of the year, I'll be 60, and it's my way to celebrate my 30th year with the fire department."

He said that the type of training that goes into getting ready for this type of race is mostly conditioning. "Some of the guys like to do some swimming, running, doing whatever you can to increase your cardio."

Hammer has been regularly practicing on the stairclimber at the fire station in full gear. Other times, he uses the stairclimber at Parks and Recreation's community center, bringing his gear from home.

As to why he and his fellow firefighters do this, he said, "Foremost, we've all lost some-

body to cancer in the past and that's what the proceeds go for. As far as a noble cause, you can't ask for better."

Hammer added that another incentive is the view from the top of the Columbia Center, being able to look down on the Space Needle, the Seattle Great Wheel and every big skyscraper in town.

"When you get there, you spend the first five minutes just

catching your breath," he said. "Try to get feeling back into your legs and then you move to the windows to check out the view. You get 10 minutes or so to enjoy that. Then you catch the elevator down to let somebody else get their shot at it."

The Wrangell team has chosen Dr. Lynn Prysunka, a leukemia survivor, to be their designated honoree at this year's Stairclimb.

Hammer said that Steve and Lynn Prysunka's son Sam and his wife Emily will be there to assist and change airpicks for the team.

People can donate with their local firefighters or online by visiting the website at llswa.org. The Wrangell team page can be found through the "Donate" menu, and donors can pick either the team or individual climbers for their contributions.

Head Start

Continued from page 1

Before working at Head Start, Churchill had very different jobs, starting when she worked in office management for 10 years, and then home health care, mostly with the elderly, for another 10 years. Her last home health care job involved taking care of her father for the final few years of his life. "It was after he passed away when I said, 'I think I need to be on the other end of the spectrum,'" she said. "And so I ended up being a teacher."

At first, her work at Head Start began in the most innocuous way. "I had a son here, and so I just came as a parent-volunteer."

When the teacher's aide/cook position opened, she was encouraged by others at Head Start to apply. "They said, 'You've already got your first aid and CPR. You already know the program because you've been working here. You should apply. And there were 35 applicants that year, because the mill had shut down,'" she said.

Churchill was nervous as she went through the application process and interviewed with a panel of Native elders, parents and other Head Start teachers, but they offered her a job the next day. At the same time, she also received a job offer from Evergreen Elementary School as a paraprofessional that paid more money.

"But I said no, I think I'm going to stick with the tribe. I want to give back to the community through my culture, and so I stayed here, and it was the best thing for me. It changed my life."

The Tlingit and Haida Central Council operates the Head Start program in Wrangell and nine other Southeast communities.

Aspects that Churchill had to learn as an educator included flexibility, adaptiveness and patience. "I could write the most excellent lesson plans, and then something will come

up," she said. "Somebody will have a baby, or somebody will lose a tooth and the whole lesson plan changes on the floor."

As she moved into other positions with the program, she reinvented herself. "I went back to school," she said. "I was in my 40s and got my second associate's (degree) in applied science, and then I got my bachelor's in early childhood education and family studies so I could be a social worker or a youth educator up to second grade."

"They kept raising the bar and I just kept going after it."

A few years ago, the program expanded its hours, changing from a half-day program of 8 a.m. to noon, to a full program of 7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Churchill decided to retire this year to help care for her grandchildren, including twin 2-year-old girls, while their parents are at work. "I'd been thinking about it, mostly because there's no day care in town," she said. "After school, I'll have the older kids for a little while."

She'll strive to make the transition for her replacement as smooth as possible. "There's been a lot of projects that I've wanted to get finished before I leave," she said. "Still waiting for the new playground; should be here this spring."

While she won't miss all the paperwork that includes assessments, evaluations and monitoring, Churchill admits it will be difficult to go without her students' affection. She mentioned how one former teacher referred to the preschoolers as "legwarmers" because they're often hanging onto the teachers' legs or sitting in their laps. "I get so many hugs a day. I'm going to miss those hugs."

There will be a retirement potluck party for Churchill at 5 p.m. May 25 at the Nolan Center. All residents are welcome to attend.

WCA tribal citizens elect four council members

Two incumbents and two former members to serve two-year terms

Sentinel staff

Wrangell Cooperative Association tribal citizens last week reelected two members and voted in two other members for the tribal council.

Tribal citizens on Feb. 20 reelected Frank Churchill and Edward Rilatos to two-year terms on the council, said Esther Aaltséen Reese, tribal administrator. They also elected Thomas Gillen Sr. and Richard Oliver, who had previously served on the council, she said.

The members were sworn in Feb. 22, and the eight-member council selected Rilatos to serve as president, Jason Clark to serve as vice president and Churchill as treasurer.

There are about 890 tribal citizens in the WCA, of which about half live in Wrangell, Reese said. Only those members who live in Wrangell are eligible to vote. About 90 members voted by paper ballot in the Feb. 20 election, she said.

Borough considers short-term tenants for 6-Mile mill property

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

The borough has been looking for a developer or long-term tenant after paying \$2.5 million for the former 6-Mile sawmill property in June 2022, but now is turning its attention to short-term leases to generate income and jobs until something bigger and more permanent comes

along.

"The borough would like to consider making the mill property as productive as possible in the short term," Interim Borough Manager Mason Villarma told the assembly earlier this month, asking for direction on negotiating leases for the waterfront property.

His preference is short-term

leases for the next five to 10 years while the borough looks for a long-term development plan.

The assembly was clearly supportive of short-term leases, with Assembly Member David Powell adding he would back anything that puts the property to use.

Mayor Patty Gilbert concurred with Powell, with one additional comment: "The public does not want a cruise ship port" at 6-Mile.

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Make all schools better, not just some

By LARRY PERSILY
Publisher

The governor's growing obsession with charter schools is frightening for the future of public education in Alaska.

He talks as if charter schools are by far the best answer to the state's low student test scores.

He has told Alaskans he would not support an increase in state funding for public schools unless the Legislature also backs his proposal to bypass local school boards when parents want to start up a new charter school.

At the same time, he resists providing adequate support for public school districts that have not seen any real increase in the state funding formula in seven years, falling far behind in what they need to provide a quality education.

He admires charter schools and seems to dismiss public schools as money pits.

OK, I get it, Gov. Mike Dunleavy believes charter schools are the future for turning young Alaskans into the best and the brightest. And therefore, they deserve more state help and encouragement.

Yes, charter schools can provide a wonderful environment for some students, often specializing in a particular area of study or approach. Good for those students; not so good for everyone else.

Charter schools pull the most promising students with the most engaged parents out of our schools, further weakening public education. Charters are not required to provide bus transportation, making it hard on single-parent and lower-income households to enroll their children in a charter if they cannot afford to shuttle kids to and from school.

Charters are not the answer to low test scores, governor, they are an abandonment of the students left out.

It says public schools are sinking and it's too hard to save everyone, so we'll provide lifeboats for some, while the rest can swim as best they can.

It separates the potential winners and losers at an early age, with the state helping to pick the teams.

It's a reminder of what I experienced in high school in Chicago in the 1960s.

Back then, Chicago Public Schools believed in a national trend to put students into "tracks" based on their test scores. The "smart kids" who tested well got the best classes, the best teachers and extra credits toward our grade point average.

The schools would put students into one of three tracks: Honors, Star or Century. If your scores were just average, you stayed behind with all the other kids. Students in the Century track would get a full extra grade point for each class.

What it meant is that the students who already were ahead in school and in life by virtue of higher test scores and, in most cases, engaged and active (and pushy) parents, had a better chance of learning more and getting into college.

The kids not enrolled in the Honors, Star or Century tracks, well, they had a harder time. Sure, we all went to the same school, but their classes were larger, I don't remember that they had team teachers like we had in Century English and, generally, less was expected of them in school.

I know that in many ways schools have changed for the better since I went to high school. Gym class teams are no longer segregated and the lunchroom food is better (I always wondered about the orange-colored grilled cheese sandwiches and why the creamed chipped beef solidified into one shiny blob on the plate).

Charter schools strike me the same as the tracks of the 1960s. Provide a better educational opportunity for some, but not all. That's what the governor sounds like when he praises charter schools and dismisses public education.

That is not equal opportunity for all.

School funding

Continued from page 1

"My initial review of the education bill is that it falls far short of improving outcomes for students," the governor said in a statement posted online after the Senate voted on Monday.

If the governor does veto the bill, the Alaska Constitution instructs legislators to meet in a joint session of the House and Senate within five days to either override or sustain the veto. Votes from 40 of the Legislature's 60 members would be needed for an override, otherwise, the veto stands.

Although the combined vote the education bill was 56-3, some lawmakers who voted in favor of the bill said they are prepared to sustain a veto. Others said they aren't sure.

"The ball's going to be in his court after this vote," said Palmer Republican Sen. Shelley Hughes, shortly before voting for the bill on Monday.

But before her vote, Hughes made it clear: If the governor vetoes it, she will vote to sustain that veto. "If he decides to play hardball, I will be on his team."

Last year, Dunleavy vetoed two policy bills — one dealing with firefighting foam linked to cancers, the other with e-bikes — that the Legislature passed by wide margins. Lawmakers declined to hold override votes on either bill.

Earlier this year, Republican opposition blocked an attempt to override last year's budget vetoes, including Dunleavy's decision to slice in half a one-time

appropriation to send more state money to school districts.

The House vote last week on the compromise education bill ended days of deadlock with an unusual bipartisan majority.

"I've been around for a few years, and tonight really is a historical night. We have flipped the script of a major omnibus bill by doing it early in the session," said Dillingham Rep. Bryce Edgmon, a House member since 2007.

"We came together: Republicans, Democrats, independents, nonpartisans, and we got something done," said Tok Rep. Mike Cronk.

School boards, district officials and education advocates have been pushing hard for an increase in state funding for public education. The funding formula has essentially been flat since 2017.

It's somewhat of a disappointment for education advocates, however, because the \$680 per-base-student increase in the negotiated bill is less than half of the \$1,413 increase needed to make up for inflation since 2015.

"Six hundred eighty dollars is the bare minimum. It should be much higher. But it's remarkable to see," said Anchorage Rep. Genevieve Mina.

A 24-hour negotiation sprint between Feb. 21 and 22 broke the deadlock in the House, as members of the House's predominantly Democratic minority dealt with members of the predominantly Republican House Majority and three delegates from the Senate's bipartisan supermajority.

"Trident's vision is to grow a value-added, consumer-driven future for the company, and we need to focus the investments and build the products that support that," Telfer said in December. "Wrangell is included in the plans to continue modernizing our Alaska plants."

Trident bought the downtown waterfront Wrangell plant almost 15 years ago. It can handle up to 750,000 pounds of fish per day, significantly more than the Petersburg operation, according to the company's website.

The Ketchikan plant, with canning lines in addition to freezing lines, is the company's largest facility in Southeast.

Trident

Continued from page 1

Alaska salmon prices crashed last summer, dropping as low as 20 cents a pound for Southeast chums.

In December, Trident announced it would scale back its Alaska operations and wanted to sell its processing plants in Petersburg and Ketchikan.

The company said it intends to keep its Wrangell operation. "Wrangell is a highly efficient plant that makes products that feed our value-added salmon operations," Telfer said in December.

EDITORIAL

It's a competitive business Wrangell cannot afford to lose

It's nothing personal, just business.

But it still hurts.

Wrangell has lost three cruise ship stops this summer to Klawock, where a partnership of Native corporations is developing a visitor destination complete with a deepwater dock, retail shops, shore excursions, walking trails and more.

Two of the corporations, Huna Totem and Fairbanks-based Doyon, are already active in the tourism industry. The third, Klawock Heenya, wants to get into the business to provide jobs and income for its tribal shareholders in the Prince of Wales Island community.

The cruise ship stopovers that switched to Klawock for June and September mean the loss of more than 2,000 visitors to Wrangell this summer, if the vessels run at close to full capacity.

For the town that had been looking forward to as many as 30,000 cruise ship passengers this summer, a drop of 2,000 hurts.

Based on numbers from last year's Wrangell Visitor Economy report, prepared for the borough by Juneau-based Rain Coast Data, those lost tourists might have spent more than \$350,000 in town. That could have generated almost \$25,000 in sales taxes for the borough.

Attracting the lucrative tourist trade to town is important for Alaska communities, particularly those living with weak economies. Klawock, like Wrangell, misses the timber industry of earlier decades, and miserable salmon prices are hurting residents in both towns.

It's not that Klawock took from Wrangell; rather, it went out and competed for its own benefit.

"It's something that I think we're going to see continue ... and we can't ignore that," Kate Thomas, Wrangell's economic development director, reported to the assembly earlier this month.

Cruise lines increasingly are looking for all-in-one destinations with shore excursions, shops and other attractions designed to keep passengers busy — and happy.

"Klawock is poised to take the very ships that Wrangell is trying to retain," Thomas added in a later interview.

"What do we do with that," Thomas said of the competition from Klawock. "Wrangell's going to have to figure out what it wants."

Figuring out what the community wants will be the easy part. Residents have expressed their preference to move the borough's barge landing facility out of downtown, making more room for visitor attractions. And not just for cruise ship passengers, but independent travelers who spend more money on accommodations, food, river trips and sightseeing.

Figuring out who will take the lead on expanding Wrangell's visitor experience and who will find the money and where — those are the hard questions.

Residents say in polls that they do not want to ruin the community's charm and working waterfront personality for the sake of more tourist dollars. But for the sake of a stronger economy, the community needs to step up its game against the growing competition.

— Wrangell Sentinel

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Aleutian waters warmest in more than a century

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

The waters off the Aleutian Islands registered the warmest winter temperatures last year in over a century, part of a decade-long period of warming, according to a report issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The record-high temperatures in the western and central Aleutians moderated later in 2023 but warmer-than-normal conditions persisted for the rest of the year throughout the waters around the 1,100-mile chain extending from southwestern Alaska, according to the 2023 NOAA Fisheries Ecosystem Status report for the region.

The Aleutians report is one of three annual ecosystem status reports issued by NOAA Fisheries for marine areas of Alaska. The reports, compiled by large teams of scientists, were released in December and presented to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, the panel that sets regulated commercial fishing in federal waters off Alaska.

The annual reports provide snapshots of current conditions and clues about future conditions in a warming climate, information needed to manage fish harvests and other activities, NOAA Fisheries said in a statement.

"Warming at rates four times faster than the rest of the ocean, Alaska's Arctic ecosystems are a bellwether for climate change. Now more than ever having ecosystem and climate-related data and information is essential to support adaptive resource management and resilient commercial, recreational and subsistence fisheries, and rural and coastal communities," Robert Foy, director of NOAA's Alaska Fisheries Science Center, said in the statement.

The Bering Sea and other marine waters off Alaska produce more than half of the nation's commercially harvested seafood.

In the Aleutians, the fish most vulnerable to the warm condition are Pacific cod, according to the Aleutian ecosystem status report. There are several reasons for that, NOAA Fisheries biologist Ivonne Ortiz told the council in her presentation of the report.

"Pacific cod has a very narrow range of temperatures for the eggs to hatch," Ortiz said. That range, from 3 degrees to 6 degrees, has been exceeded in the waters, she said.

Higher temperatures also increase Pacific cod's energy needs, Ortiz said. "The cost of living is higher, the cost of growing, feeding, pooping, having sex, swimming around is higher, so they need to either consume prey that has higher caloric content or consume more prey to make up for that," she said. But high-quality food for Pacific cod is less available in the Aleutian region, she said.

Also vulnerable and sensitive to higher temperatures are Atka mackerel, an important species for commercial harvests, according to the ecosystem status report. But pink salmon originating from eastern Kamchatka, on the Russian side of the ocean, appear to be thriving, with the third-highest population on record, the report said.

With warming temperatures come higher risks of algal toxins, and the past year's record provides evidence of the association. Mussels found in June at Sand Point, Unalaska, False Point and Akutan, communities in the eastern Aleutians or at the western tip of the Alaska Peninsula, had levels of paralytic shellfish toxins that were 47 times the amount deemed safe for human consumption, according to the Aleutians ecosystem status report.

The Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska are recovering from extreme marine heatwaves that struck in recent years, according to the ecosystem status reports issued for those regions. Temperatures there have returned to more normal levels, but the unprecedented heat waves have lingering effects, according to the reports.

The Bering Sea remains warmer than the long-term average, though it has cooled since the heatwaves, NOAA Fisheries biologist Elizabeth Siddon told the North Pacific Fishery Management Council in her presentation of the report.

"It has cooled but is not cool," she said.

Ecosystem conditions there are mixed, complex and in some cases not easily explained, Siddon said.

On the negative side, some crab stocks have continued to decline, forcing disruptive harvest closures,

according to the report for that marine region. In the northern part of the Bering Sea, jellyfish — a less-nutritious prey for other fish in the food web and a competitor with groundfish for food — are proliferating.

In the southern part of the eastern Bering Sea, there has been continuation of a decade-long slide in production of high-quality plankton that is the base of the food chains. This year, the concentration hit the lowest levels in several years in that part of the Bering Sea, Siddon said. Conversely, there was a continuation of a trend to high levels of coccolithophores, a type of phytoplankton that are considered poor quality food for the food web, she said.

On the positive side, according to the Bering Sea ecosystem report, were some increases in juvenile chinook and chum salmon found in the northern region, hinting at possible improvement for Western Alaska salmon runs that collapsed in recent years.

There was improved reproduction success for some seabirds, a result that follows years of successive bird die-offs, the report said.

In the Gulf of Alaska, where the marine heat waves caused Pacific cod stocks to crash so drastically that harvests there were canceled in recent years, there is a continuing pattern of low populations of cod, as well as low population halibut and arrowtooth flounder, according to that region's ecosystem status report. But populations of sablefish and perch, both commercially important species, continue to increase, according to the report.

Since larvae and juvenile groundfish are the most sensitive to changes in water temperature, warming seas could potentially harm the larvae of cod, pollock and northern rock sole, NOAA Fisheries biologist Bridget Ferriss told the council.

"That could harm future years' stocks," she said. Some adults could be vulnerable, too, because warming would diminish quality and fat levels of zooplankton.

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6-Mile

Continued from page 3

"From a series of town halls, work sessions and surveys, it is clear that the community would like to see the deepwater port have an industrial concentration," Villarma said in his report to the assembly. "The community seemingly does not want mass cruise line investment at the deepwater port."

Currently, the borough's only tenant on the almost 40 acres is Juneau-based Channel Construction, which has operated a scrap metal recycling operation at the site the past few years. Channel has a month-to-month lease with the borough, Villarma said in an interview Feb. 16.

The company leases two acres

at the site but would like to expand that to six acres, perhaps adding a building and construction equipment storage, Villarma said.

Channel Construction, owned by William "Shorty" Tonggard Jr., lost use of its waterfront shop in Juneau when the building suffered a partial roof collapse under a heavy snow load on Jan. 23.

Tonggard would want something longer than month-to-month to make an investment in Wrangell, Villarma said, adding that a five-year lease could be possible.

The goal is to make the property as profitable for the borough as possible while waiting for a long-term user, Villarma

said. "We're not in the business of passing up an opportunity."

In his report to the assembly three weeks ago, the manager explained the proposal could include work at the property on behalf of the borough in exchange for the lease.

The bulkhead and barge landing at the south end of the property are usable, Villarma said, but extensive repairs are needed on the rest of the bulkhead that extends across the front of the water side.

Another issue is that two submerged barges and a sunken tug are on the state tidelands in front of the property, the manager said.

Eventually, the borough will need to deal with those leftover relics from the operating days of the mill. "We want a clean site," Villarma said.

At the time it purchased the property from the former sawmill owners, the borough signed an agreement with the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, providing that the state would hold Wrangell harmless if any contamination from past activities is discovered at the site.

In 2014, the Department of Environmental Conservation determined "that the contamination concentrations remaining on site do not pose an unacceptable risk to human health or the environment."

In exchange for the hold-harmless agreement, the borough needs to pay for a second assessment and monitoring of the property. If any soil contamination is found during excavation or construction on the property, the borough's liability

would be limited to \$50,000, Villarma explained.

He did not have an estimate for the cost of further assessing the property.

That assessment "will test specific areas of concern at the 6-Mile mill property and scope potential remediation efforts," the manager told the assembly.

Long-term, the borough is hoping that maybe the U.S. Coast Guard or Navy would decide to establish a base at the site, Villarma said.

"It is worth noting that no federal investment will be made into a property that is not fully remediated (cleaned up)," he said.

Cruise

Continued from page 1

include a zipline, ATV and Jeep tours, whale watching trips, several food and retail offerings.

Na-Dena, a joint-venture tourism company of Huna Totem Corp. and Fairbanks-based regional Native corporation Doyon, is working with Klawock Heenya Corp. to develop a similar operation in Klawock.

Until the former log dock is ready to handle large cruise ships, expected by next year, the vessels will anchor offshore and lighter their passengers to a waterfront landing.

The first phase for Klawock will include a welcoming center featuring local artists, retail, walking trails, history displays, a bus tour departure area and bathrooms. The development had planned to start operations last year, but work delays pushed the first cruise visits to this summer.

The cruise destination is being developed on 16 acres on Klawock Island, on the west coast of Prince of Wales Island. There is a bridge to connect the port to the island's extensive road system.

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WRANGELL SENTINEL

Student hopes to restructure senior projects for the future

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

Alicia Armstrong's senior project is unique in that it could change the timing of future senior projects, which are a requirement to graduate from Wrangell High School. She wants to make the concept more structured and planned so that students can start preparing for it in their junior year. "The idea would be to meet with the counselor that first semester of junior year to go over the expectations of what a senior project is ... what it looks like," Armstrong said. "And then, you would then schedule another meeting for the second semester of your junior year where you actually choose a project, and you would get it approved by your counselor and your principal."

That way, she explained, students would have the entire summer and the first semester of their senior year to complete their projects, unhampered by time constraints or inclement weather.

"And the goal would be, right before Christmas break, you would do the whole presentation so you would be done," she said.

Armstrong said early completion of senior projects would free up students to concentrate on other assignments during their senior year, such as scholarship applications, especially in their last semester.

Starting projects in the fall semester of senior year can be challenging, she said, if students want to do something outdoors, as the weather often turns cold and rainy. "So, if you want to do anything outside ... your options are limited."

Her assignment choice was inspired by her music teacher Tasha Morse, who once talked of how she started her senior project when she was a junior in high school.

"I thought that was a great idea," Armstrong said. "Because you're always hearing about how busy senior year is, especially that second semester. ... Me, personally, I didn't really know what counted as a senior project, and what the expectations were, so that would help, knowing what you're get-



PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Student Alicia Armstrong's senior project involves restructuring the timeline for future senior projects so that students can start preparations during their junior year.

ting into."

Given her schedule, Armstrong found a way to merge two tasks into one, using a proposal that she wrote as an assignment for her U.S. government class and took to an advisory committee meeting with the principal and a few school

board members on Feb. 20. "My proposal was supported, and they agreed to write a letter of recommendation for the (full) school board," she said. "I still have to attend a school board meeting and present it there."

Thus far, most of the feedback regarding her proposal has

been positive, and she pointed out that, in the past, other students have completed their senior projects over the summer break with school approval, but awareness of that option isn't common knowledge.

Classmate Mia Wiederspohn was one such student who com-

pleted her assignment last summer. "Because I have college classes and a bunch of scholarships to do, and pretty hard classes in high school this year as well," she said. "So, I got it out of the way early, which I wish more kids knew to do, because it took a lot of stress off of my plate."

Armstrong thinks the most challenging part of the project will be meeting with the school board to get approval for the change regarding future senior projects, as she hasn't had any experience operating in that kind of public forum. "My goal is to start (senior projects) as soon as possible because it just takes a load off of everybody, the sooner you start it," she said.

One of the things she learned from this experience was civic engagement with her community. "Just figuring out how to work with the school and how to make changes that I'd like to see, that would be helpful," she said. "Maybe that I don't benefit from but would benefit others in the school after I leave."

While Armstrong has found her exploration of government processes interesting, her career interests lie elsewhere.

After graduation, she plans to attend college (her first choice being Indiana University) to study for a degree in animal behavior. "It's a building block for most jobs in the animal field," she said. "You could take that degree and go into veterinary (medicine or science), you can go into marine biology, you can take it and become an animal trainer. It's a very basic degree that you can take just about anywhere in the field or continue to build on."

As for what she'll miss the most about high school, Armstrong stated it would be the people. "I think seeing the same people every day, you get to know them and just hang out with them," she said. "That's probably what I'll miss the most. And band. I'm a band kid, so I'll miss the jazz band and the high school band, just the atmosphere."

As for what she will not miss, she said with a smile, "Being here all day long. I will not miss that."

REAL Financial program teaches students to handle life's curveballs

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

The Get REAL Financial Reality Fair for high school students isn't just about learning to balance a checkbook, manage money and handle credit cards.

It's also about learning what their parents deal with in managing the family's finances, said Marisa Fulgham, Wrangell branch manager for Tongass Federal Credit Union, which is organizing the event.

"We give each kid a life and a budget. ... (Then) we threw curveballs at them."

Those include expected expenses, such as housing, groceries, medical bills and a vehicle, and maybe the unexpected, such as a child, Fulgham said.

The financial fair is open to middle school and high school students, and is scheduled for Tuesday morning, March 12, at the school campus.

Someone from the Financial Reality Foundation, a nonprofit organization that partners with Alaska and Hawaii credit unions, will lead the Wrangell event, Fulgham said, assist-

ed by 10 or so local volunteers staffing different stations of life in the room to help advise students.

"They guide the kids, like 'maybe you don't need that Ferrari with four kids,'" she said.

The financial guides in the room will include credit union staff and volunteers from Wrangell businesses and borough employees.

Each student will receive an information sheet on their make-believe life as they enter the room, then spin a wheel at each station to learn how their life changes. "You just got a promotion, or you just got a divorce," Fulgham said.

"We've had students be like, 'I didn't know this is what my parents deal with all the time,'" she said of comments received after the financial fair in past years.

Though this is the first year for the Financial Reality Foundation to help out, similar educational fairs were held in Wrangell in 2017 and 2018, she said, before disappearing during the pandemic.

"This will be my first year helping out," the branch manager said. "This was something I did not know even existed."

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Senate committee advances measure to reject governor's takeover of ferry advisory board

The Juneau Empire
and Wrangell Sentinel

A state Senate committee has advanced a measure that would block an executive order giving the governor total appointment authority over the entire Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board.

State statute currently provides that House and Senate leaders appoint four members of the nine-member advisory panel.

The executive order removing legislative power to appoint members to the board is one of a dozen issued by Gov. Mike Dunleavy in mid-January. The orders, dealing with various state boards, will take effect unless the House and Senate meet in joint session before mid-March and vote to reject any of the orders.

The Senate Transportation Committee met twice last week to consider a measure that would block the governor and retain legislative appointments to the ferry board. At the Feb. 20 committee meeting, state Department of Transportation officials argued a board consisting entirely of governor-appointed members would be less contentious.

The Transportation Committee on Feb. 22 advanced the ferry board measure, setting it up for a vote if legislators agree to meet in joint session in the next three weeks.

The bipartisan Senate majority, comprised of 17 of the Senate's 20 members, has been taking up resolutions to reject most or all of Dunleavy's dozen orders. Many of the orders, including the one for the ferry system's advisory board, give the governor more control over a policymaking body.

Dunleavy, in a Feb. 7 press conference, said having a ferry operations board fully in sync with the administration is why he issued the executive order giving him the authority to appoint all nine members, including replacing those with time remaining on their terms.

Referring to his order to take full control of appointing members to the ferry advisory board, Dunleavy said: "Are there some people that aren't gonna like it? Of course."

Department of Transportation officials referred to adversarial and awkward "dynamics" among current board members during their testimony at the Transportation Committee hearing on Feb. 20.

Juneau Sen. Jesse Kiehl questioned the philosophy of having an operations board designed to be in lockstep with the administration.

"I will say that over the last two-and-a-half decades or so I have often seen ma-

Continued on page 12

Feds buy Alaska seafood for national food programs

By YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will purchase about 50 million pounds of Alaska seafood to use in national food and nutrition-assistance programs, state officials said on Feb. 20.

The seafood purchase is to benefit needy children and adults and school lunches, said the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, which announced the department's plans.

The purchases are authorized through a federal law which allows the Agriculture Department to buy surplus food products, and through the department's Commodity Credit Corp., a government entity cre-

ated to help stabilize agricultural income and prices.

In all, the Department of Agriculture has put bids on 1.4 million cases of canned pink salmon (24 cans per case), 300,000 cases of sockeye salmon and 15 million pounds of pollock fish sticks and fillets, the Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute said.

It is a big purchase. In comparison, the USDA last year made purchases from Alaska of 3.7 million pounds of sockeye salmon, 47,000 cases of pink salmon and about 2.2 million pounds of pollock in combined transactions from May to July, according to ASMI. The USDA last year also bought \$8 million worth of rockfish from Alaska

and U.S. West Coast processors, according to ASMI.

The purchase is timely. Alaska's industry is coping with a worldwide glut that has driven down prices and made sales much more difficult, ASMI Executive Director Jeremy Woodrow said in a presentation Feb. 20 at the Capitol in Juneau.

"Due to inflation, really globally, consumer demand for seafood is incredibly low right now and our inventories are historically high. We aren't able to push as much product through, so you get that supply and demand crunch," Woodrow said.

That leads to lower prices paid to fishers and processors, he said.

"We're in an incredible economic crunch that we haven't seen for decades right now, where we're looking at severe economic impacts," Woodrow added.

Earlier this month, Doug Vincent-Lang, commissioner of the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, told a conference of

Southeast business, community and municipal government leaders: "I've never seen market conditions as bad as they are now."

The Alaska Beacon is an independent, donor-funded news organization. Alaskabeacon.com.

Advisory group will help tribe select totems for restoration

Sentinel staff

The Wrangell Cooperative Association has established an advisory council of clan leaders and representatives, in particular to help the tribe with a totem restoration and replacement project.

Feedback from the advisory group will help WCA determine which totems to select for the project, said Esther Aaltséen Reese, tribal administrator.

The tribal council received a \$20,000 donation last year from the Wrangell Tlingit and Haida Community Council to pay for carving two replacement totem poles while also repairing older poles in town.

"It's looking like it will start this summer," Reese said of the work.

The advisory group will take on a more formal role in the totem project, she said, providing feedback on which poles to replace and which to restore, respecting the preferences of the several clans in Wrangell. "We look to the clan leaders for guidance."

The funding came through a federal pandemic aid grant to the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska. Matching funds from another grant will supplement the WCA budget for the work.

"It's to start or repair totems because this whole island was full of totems," Sue Stevens, speaking as president of the Wrangell Tlingit and Haida Council, said at last summer's funding announcement.

The Wrangell Sentinel and Wrangell Convention and Visitor Bureau are working together to create a visitor guide showcasing all that Wrangell has to offer!

The guide will be available online year-round, in addition to 10,000 high-quality printed copies to mail out, take to trade shows and hand out to spread the word of Wrangell as a great destination.



The deadline to reserve your ad space is March 1.

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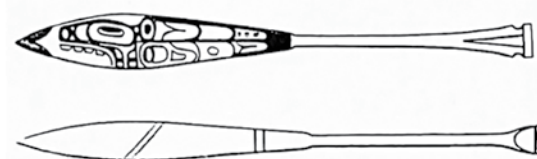


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OBITUARIES

Former resident Robert James Shilts dies at 87

Robert James "Snuffy" Shilts Sr., 87, passed away peacefully on Feb. 1, 2024, at home surrounded by family in Ketchikan.

No memorial services are planned.

Born Dec. 28, 1936, in Greenville, California, to Edith and Robert Shilts, Snuffy was the second youngest of eight children. He attended high school and played football for the Bandon Tigers in coastal Oregon. Fast cars, hunting, fishing and logging were his passions.

He met and eventually married Louise Marie Wenzel on May 23, 1964, at the cathedral of the Trees of Mystery in Klamath, California, among the giant redwoods.

In 1965 Bob and Louise loaded up their pickup and drove to Prince Rupert, British Columbia, to catch the Alaska state ferry Taku to Wrangell because he wanted to "climb big trees and cut them down," the family wrote.

He worked for many logging companies in the 1950s and 1960s, including

Sunny Bay Logging, Illinois Valley Logging, Simpson Lumber, Sykes Logging, John Lemay and Dave Drewey until his brother-in-law was killed when hit by a tree.

Snuffy became a longshoreman, loading the log ships bound for Japan. Eventually, he joined the Laborers Union to work construction for Ritchie Transportation, Dawson Construction, Green Construction and Johnson Construction. At the end of the construction season you would find him out commercial fishing for king salmon to supplement the family income through the winter.

He lived in Ketchikan with his family for six months in 1972 while building the airport on Gravina Island.

There are multiple projects in and around Wrangell which Snuffy completed over the years: concrete paving of Front Street, Case and Zimovia Avenue; plus the photography blind at Anan, the fish ladder at Mill Creek, Earl West rock wall, Pats Creek bridge and many others

for the U.S. Forest Service around Southeast.

His leisure time was usually spent with family and friends — playing cards, pinochle and cribbage were his favorites, along with hunting, snowmachining, woodworking and fishing. After retiring with the laborers union he started Bob's Backhoe, doing odd jobs around town. He loved commercial fishing on the Blue Lightening and later the Misty.

He is survived by wife, Louise Shilts; children Roxanna (Terry) Coblentz, LaDonna Botsford, James Shilts Sr., Keith Shilts Sr., Robert (DaVonna) Shilts Jr., Elizabeth, Manfred and Daniel Schnur; grandchildren Kimberly (Eddie), Rachel (Wes), Tristan, Travis (Caroline), Holly, Casey, Kehli, Darren, James Jr., Keith Jr.; a multitude of great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren; sisters Donna Grover, of Wrangell, Roberta Kennedy, of Molalla, Oregon; and many, many nieces and nephews.



Robert James "Snuffy" Shilts Sr.

Alaska Airlines flight attendants authorize strike but nothing planned yet

By ALEX DEMARBAN
Anchorage Daily News

Flight attendants with Alaska Airlines have voted to authorize a strike for the first time in more than 30 years.

News of the vote emerged as more than 60 flight attendants protested for better pay outside the Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport on Feb. 13.

The vote does not mean a strike will occur. But the decision raises the stakes in an effort by the attendants to negotiate what they say is their first new contract in a decade. They say Alaska Airlines has awarded large pay increases to pilots but does not provide a livable wage to some of its flight attendants.

The negotiations have dragged on for more than a year, and flight attendants have held multiple protests outside the Anchorage airport and other airports nationally.

Alaska Air flight attendants on Feb. 13 picketed outside 30 airports in three countries, said Rebecca Owens, spokesperson for the Local Council 30 in Anchorage for the Association of Flight Attendants.

Alaska Airlines said in a statement on Feb. 13 it is making progress in the negotiations.

"We remain optimistic in the negotiations

process," the company said. "With six recently closed labor deals at the company and a tentative agreement reached in January for a new contract for our technicians, we're hopeful to do the same for our flight attendants as soon as possible."

Alaska Air is making a profit and has offered \$1.9 billion to acquire Hawaiian Airlines, Owens said. But it hasn't offered reasonable pay increases to flight attendants, she said. Many flight attendants receive poverty-level wages, forcing some to rely on their partner's or spouse's incomes for financial stability, she said.

First-year flight attendants at the airline make an average base pay of less than \$24,000 annually, union officials have said.

More than 5,900 flight attendants at the airline voted 99% in favor of a strike, Owens said. The union had said ballots would be sent to 6,800 flight attendants.

Before a strike can occur, the National Mediation Board must declare that negotiations are deadlocked, placing both parties in a 30-day "cooling off" period leading to a strike deadline, the union has said.

The last time Alaska Air flight attendants went on strike was in 1993, the union said in a statement.

Veteran and former KSTK radio host Jack Pino dies at 72

Jacobus "Jack" Pino, 72, passed away peacefully on Jan. 26, 2024, in Wrangell.

No funeral or memorial services are planned.

Jack was born in Gouda, Netherlands, on June 1, 1951.

"Jack as bigger than life, he had a wicked sense of humor and a quick wit. He was adventurous and a force to be reckoned with. He always told you the truth, even if it was not what you wanted to hear. His vocabulary was more than highly proficient at curse words. He loved four-letter words as much as he loved his bacon cheeseburgers with a cold beer and a shot of Jack Daniels on the side," his family wrote.

His biggest passion was music, which was evident with his radio show at KSTK for 25 years. He also loved to hunt and fish. "He was a great husband, father, grandfather and provider. His love for family and country set a precedence in his life," his family wrote.

"He touched many lives in his lifetime." He was a Vietnam veteran with the U.S. Marine Corps; road builder for a logging camp near Sitka; propane tank truck driver in Oregon; fence erector and builder in southern California; hardware man; furniture builder; and even worked the slime line at fish plants in Wrangell.

Jack is survived by wife, Terree Lee; two sons, Jacobus De' "Kosha" and Jon Ryon; two daughters-in-law; two grandchildren; two brothers; two sisters-in-law;



Jacobus "Jack" Pino

a brother-in-law; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Jack was preceded in death by his mother and father, mother-in-law and father-in-law, a brother and sister-in-law.

There will be no funeral or memorial services at Jack's request. Everyone who remembers him is asked to celebrate Jack's life in their own way. "Raising a glass of their favorite drink in his memory would be quite appropriate," his family wrote.

"Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim," by U.S. author Vicki Harrison.



Celebration of Life
for
Otto Florschutz
Saturday, March 16
11 a.m.
at the Nolan Center

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Lady Wolves get a split in tight games against Craig

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

The Wrangell varsity girls split against Craig in tight games last weekend, ending their nine-game losing streak in the second game. The team ended the regular season with a 3-and-9 record.

Craig hosted Wrangell on Friday and Saturday, Feb. 23 and 24. In the first game, the home team beat the visiting Lady Wolves 52-48, but Wrangell came back on Saturday to defeat the Lady Panthers 49-41.

Both games were tight con-

tests. The first one could have easily gone in their favor, but it was in the second game's fourth quarter where Wrangell steadily pulled ahead, giving them a definitive lead.

Lady Wolves head coach Christina Good said that while her team suffered from momentum changes in the first game, she felt the girls played great games on both nights, citing the players' efforts in putting together an excellent press and great rebounding. "Our defense in general was just really good," she added.

She admitted that in their first game, the team didn't do a good job of shutting down Craig's star player Sara Steffen, who scored 34 points. However, in the second game they were able to contain her and held her to just 10 points.

Friday's top scorers for Wrangell were freshman Alexa Easterly with 11 points, while sophomore Christina Johnson and freshman Hailey Cook both scored 9. Freshman Alana Harrison was at the top scorer Saturday with 17 points, while Easterly scored 10.

Leading in rebounds on both nights were sophomore Shailyn Nelson, Easterly and Harrison.

Good also gave a special shout-out to senior Mindy Meissner for her tremendous defense on Saturday.

During Craig's senior recognition event prior to Saturday's games, where athletes playing their final home games are recognized and honored by the school and fans, the school also recognized seniors from Wrangell, including Meissner.

The final games of the regular season will be between Craig

and Petersburg on March 1-2 in Petersburg, which will determine if the Lady Wolves will be ranked third, fourth or fifth seed in regionals and whether the first team they play will be Metlakatla, which is currently ranked as the first seed with a 16-2 record. Good is hoping that her team won't play Metlakatla too soon in the tournament.

"Everything is going to depend on Craig and Petersburg," she said. "It's super important. There's a lot of pressure on that, so we'll see."

Wrangell varsity and JV boys enjoy double victories at Craig

By MARK C. ROBINSON
Sentinel reporter

The Wolves varsity team scored decisive victories in their final regular-season

games this past weekend as the visiting team against the Craig Panthers. It makes three wins in a row for Wrangell, now at 6-6 for the season.

Craig hosted Wrangell on Friday and Saturday, Feb. 23 and 24. In the first game, the varsity team won 73-52, and the Wolves scored another win the

second night, 76-63.

The junior varsity team also earned double wins against Craig, winning their game on Friday 36-12, and the Saturday game 29-19.

"The lead always felt comfortable in both games," said head coach Cody Angerman, "Overall, it was a good weekend for us and securing our placement (third seed at regionals) was a good thing for us."

Angerman said the team knew going into both games not to underestimate their opponents. "Craig does play hard. They're lacking in a little bit of talent, but they play hard. They're a lot better than their record shows."

The top scorers in the first game were juniors Kyan Stead with 20 points, Daniel Harrison at 18, senior Keegan Hanson at 11 points and Boomchain Loucks with 9. Stead and Harrison were again at the top in scoring Saturday, this time Stead had 24 points and Harrison 21, with Loucks contributing 7.

While Harrison ran into trouble with referees and fouled out on both nights, the rest of the team picked up the slack. Angerman also cited the efforts of juniors Trevyn Gillen and Lucas Schneider, as well as Hanson and Loucks. "They never get tired," he said.

"We had pretty balanced scoring," he added. "We had contributions pretty much from everybody. You've got to carve out your niche and figure out a way that you can contribute and get points."

Junior Keaton Gadd had been out for a few games due to

illness, but he quickly got back into the rhythm of playing, especially on Saturday, contributing vital scoring, rebounds and defense.

On the JV team, the head coach credited sophomores Brody Knecht and Jackson Powers for their contributions, particularly Knecht for his work ethic and leadership on the court.

"Fundamentally, he's super sound," he said. "He works really hard."

During Craig's senior recognition event prior to Saturday's games, where athletes playing their final home games are recognized and honored by the school and fans, the high school also recognized Wrangell's seniors, including Hanson who spent much of his high school years at Craig.

The Wolves are the No. 3 seed in Southeast regionals in Sitka; their first game will be against Petersburg on Wednesday, March 6. "Preparing for regionals is right up my alley," Angerman said. "I know what (the Petersburg Vikings) do defensively and offensively."



PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

All aboard for Craig

Members of the high school boys and girls basketball teams boarded the Rainforest Islander on Thursday, Feb. 22, for travel to Prince of Wales Island for games against Craig High School on Friday and Saturday, Feb. 23-24. The school district often relies on Breakaway Ferry and Freight's landing craft to ferry teams to and from games.

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Juneau plans consolidation into one high school to save money

By MARK SABBATINI
Juneau Empire

Facing a multimillion-dollar budget hole, the Juneau school board has approved a plan to consolidate the district's two high schools into one, close its two middle schools, close an elementary school and rearrange where sixth, seventh and eighth graders go to class.

The board approved the plan in a contentious all-night meeting that ended at about 12:30 a.m. Friday, Feb. 23.

The decision followed hours of testimony from a crowd that board members called one of the largest in recent memory, with attendees overflowing the high school library into a video viewing area set up in the school commons where students eat lunch.

People testifying online said they had difficulty following at least some portions of the meeting because the Zoom feed consistently was at its maximum of 500

viewers.

The restructuring is necessary to close a projected budget deficit of nearly \$10 million in a roughly \$77 million operating budget for the 2024-2025 school year — and similar ongoing deficits in future years — due to a multitude of causes including faulty accounting, declining enrollment and several years of flat funding from the state.

The district is facing a projected deficit of nearly \$8 million in the current year, although the Juneau city and borough assembly has tentatively agreed to provide a \$4 million zero-interest loan and take over \$3.9 million in "shared costs" for buildings used by both the city and school district.

Although the Alaska House has approved a substantial increase in state funding for public school districts, the legislation, which still needs approval of the Senate and the governor, would not be enough to close Juneau's budget gap. It would provide an estimat-

ed \$5.2 million in additional state money for the district next year, still leaving the schools several million dollars short.

"It could lessen the severity of the actions we need to take, but I don't think it eliminates it," Will Muldoon, chair of the school board's finance committee, said of the legislation during a break in Thursday night's meeting.

The plan will consolidate students in grades 9 through 12 at Juneau-Douglas High School: Yadaa.at Kalé; turn over Thunder Mountain High School for use by students in grades seven and eight and the HomeBRIDGE program for correspondence and homeschool students; and add sixth graders to the elementary school system of kindergarten through fifth grade.

The district's alternative and optional programs also will be af-

ected, with Yaa□oosgé Daakahidi High School, Montessori Boreal and Juneau Community Charter School relocated to the Dzantik'i Heeni Middle School building.

In addition to disbanding the Dzantik'i and Floyd Dryden middle schools and disbursing those students to other buildings, the plan will close Marie Drake Elementary School and the district's administrative office, turning those buildings back over to the City and Borough of Juneau that owns them.

Many of those who testified during Thursday night's meeting reiterated a main point during weeks of previous meetings, saying that both of Juneau's high schools should remain open because they have distinctly different identities befitting different types of students. There were also

concerns consolidation into one high school would result in fewer opportunities to participate in sports teams and other activities.

Juneau-Douglas High School alumni Charles Van Kirk said consolidation "robs the identity" of "two totally different communities." Juneau-Douglas High School is near downtown; Thunder Mountain High School is in the Mendenhall Valley, about nine miles away.

The board voted 5-2 to move forward with the plan.

Numerous additional steps need to be taken before the plan is official, including board approval of a budget for next year that implements the plan. The state Department of Education, which has agreed to give the district up to five years to pay off its existing deficit without penalty, must also approve the plan.

Police report

Monday, Feb. 19
Agency assist: State Office of Children's Services.

Tuesday, Feb. 20
Violating conditions of release: Unlawful contact.
Bird complaint: Dead crane.
Agency assist: Ambulance.
Unattended death.
Motor vehicle accident: Arrest for driving under the influence.

Wednesday, Feb. 21
Agency assist: Ambulance.

Agency assist: Public Works Department.

Thursday, Feb. 22
Agency assist.
Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.

Friday, Feb. 23
Agency assist: Ambulance.
Traffic stop: Verbal for no tail-lights.
Agency assist: State Office of Children's Services.

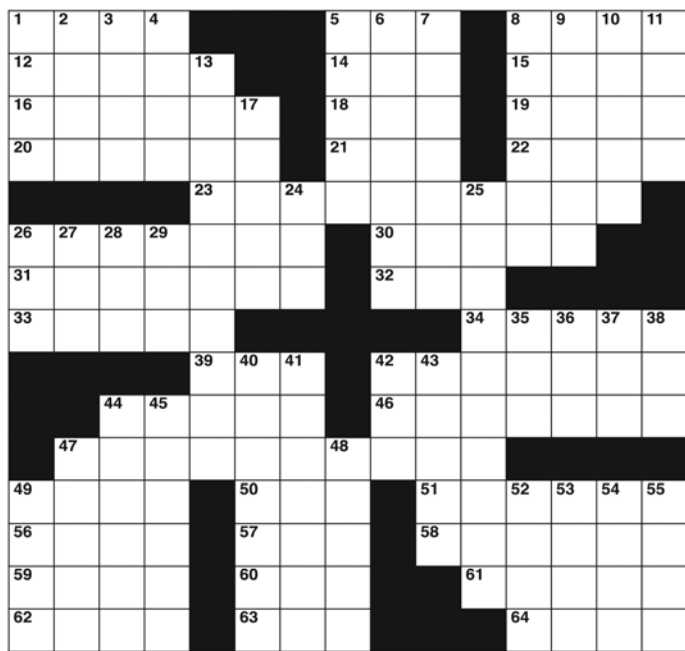
Saturday, Feb. 24
Violating conditions of release: Arrested.
Traffic stop.
Citizen assist.

Sunday, Feb. 25
Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.
Agency assist: Metlakatla Fire Department.

There were five subpoenas served during this reporting period.

Crossword

Answers on page 12



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Home of Iowa State University
- 5. ___-fi (slang)
- 8. Mottled green and yellow fruit
- 12. Capable of thinking and expressing oneself clearly
- 14. Sports broadcaster Eagle
- 15. Midday
- 16. Kinsmen
- 18. Cable network
- 19. Simpleton
- 20. Brunch beverage
- 21. Fed
- 22. European capital
- 23. Native inhabitants
- 26. Mechanical device
- 30. Rare geese native to Hawaii
- 31. Bedroom furnishing
- 32. The products of human creativity
- 33. Mass transit option
- 34. Made a mistake
- 39. Sacred sound symbol
- 42. Large N. American reindeer
- 44. Dull and flat
- 46. Partner to huffing
- 47. Written works
- 49. Monetary unit of Serbia
- 50. Midway between east and southeast
- 51. Peninsula of southwestern Asia
- 56. Widely used multiuser OS
- 57. Aggressive dog
- 58. Varnished
- 59. Hindu queen
- 60. Time units, abbr.
- 61. Farm animals
- 62. Capital of Latvia
- 63. Where golfers begin
- 64. Takes to civil court

CLUES DOWN

- 1. One who graduated
- 2. An inspired holy person
- 3. Electronic counter-countermeasures
- 4. A place to store things
- 5. Indian instrument
- 6. Spanish saloon
- 7. Whole number
- 8. Not fastened
- 9. Gives a boost
- 10. Lounges about
- 11. Interested in
- 13. Remove salt
- 17. Type of sword
- 24. Naturally occurring solid material
- 25. Gets involved without being invited
- 26. Feline
- 27. Bobby ___, NHL champ
- 28. "Kill Bill" actress Thurman
- 29. Hawaiian dish
- 35. Moroccan coastal region
- 36. Baseball statistic
- 37. Long period of time
- 38. Moved earth
- 40. Central Netherlands city
- 41. Take stock of
- 42. Central processing unit
- 43. Distinctive qualities one generates
- 44. Getting stuck
- 45. Loss of bodily movements
- 47. Veranda
- 48. Abrupt
- 49. What cats do
- 52. Expresses pleasure
- 53. Type of cheese
- 54. Professional STEM organization
- 55. Automatic data processing systems

Ritters River

by Marc Lutz



Tundra

by Chad Carpenter



Volunteers smash purple sea urchins to save California kelp

By JULIE WATSON
Associated Press

CASPAR BEACH, Calif. — A welding hammer strapped to her wrist, Joy Hollenback slipped on blue fins and swam into the churning, chilly Pacific surf one fall morning to do her part to save Northern California’s vanishing kelp forests.

Hollenback dove into the murky depths toward the sea-floor. There, she spotted her target: voracious, kelp-devouring purple urchins.

Within seconds she smashed 20 to smithereens. “If you’re angry, it’s a cathartic way to get it all out,” Hollenback joked. “It’s ecologically sanctioned mayhem.”

The veterinarian who lives in Berkeley, California, is part of a crew of volunteers who swim, snorkel and dive armed with pick axes and hammers on a sole mission: To crush purple urchins that largely destroyed 96% of California’s iconic bull kelp forests between 2014 and 2020, and with it harmed red abalone and other sea life they supported.

The pilot project off the Mendocino County coast is one of many initiatives California is testing to save such leafy marine ecosystems, which are declining worldwide due to climate change.

Kelp forests play an integral role in the health of the world’s

oceans. Based on early observations, efforts like urchin culling appear to be helping.

Biologists say they have started to see small successes with the experiment started several years ago, offering hope of reversing destruction likened to a rainforest being clear-cut. Healthy patches of kelp and schools of fish returned this summer to small sections where urchins were crushed at Caspar Cove, 160 miles north of San Francisco.

Nearby at Albion Bay, where commercial divers removed many of the urchins in 2021, biologists put tiny kelp grown in a lab on 98-foot lines. In August, they discovered the kelp not only had reached the surface but was reproducing.

“That’s the first time we know of that happening in an open coastal environment,” said Norah Eddy of The Nature Conservancy, one of several organizations participating in the experiment. “What we want is for the kelp to start putting out babies. This is showing these methods can be done in these kinds of rugged environments.”

There are still huge challenges to overcome before California’s bull kelp is on the path to recovery. But scientists say the progress has relieved fears the forests were lost forever.

“This is really setting the sys-

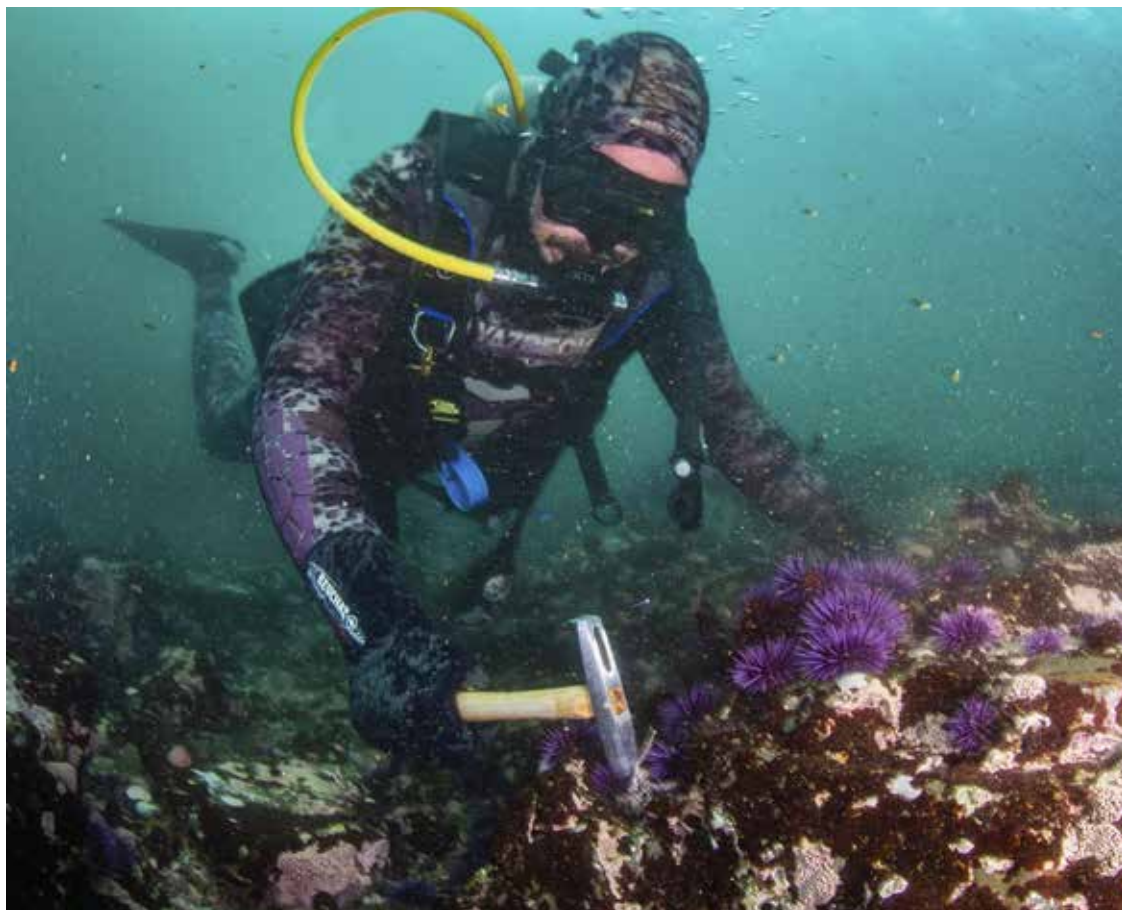


PHOTO BY RALPH PACE / THE NATURE CONSERVANCY VIA AP

Josh Russo smashes urchins at Van Damme State Beach, near Caspar, California, in this 2019 photo. From urchin crushing to lab-grown kelp, efforts to save California’s kelp forests show promise.

tem up to hold on to the kelp that we do have until we’re in a better place,” said Kristen Elsmore, a senior scientist at the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Scientists will be collecting data over the next three years to determine what methods are most effective as California builds its first plan to restore and manage kelp.

Kelp was so abundant that the state managed it solely as a fishery, overseeing commercial and recreational harvests. Under the plan, kelp will be managed now as an ecosystem, reflecting the heightened understanding of kelp’s importance.

“Kelp forms whole forests that are supporting so many other species and so it just has this cascading effect on the near-shore ecosystem when you lose your kelp,” Elsmore said. “You’re losing a whole forest, not just one species.”

The plan could inform restoration efforts from Australia to Chile, where kelp faces similar threats. “The ultimate goal is for

these systems to really be self-sustaining and the restoration part to really just be giving it a gentle nudge in the right direction,” she said.

Kelp has been disappearing as a warming planet raises ocean temperatures. Along the West Coast, the problem started after 2013 when a warm water mass nicknamed “the blob” developed off Alaska and stretched south, lingering for four years as it wreaked havoc on marine ecosystems all the way to Mexico’s Baja California peninsula.

At the same time, a mysterious wasting disease decimated sunflower sea stars, causing their arms to fall off and turning them into gooey masses, killing 90% of the population.

The sea star is the purple urchin’s main predator. After the disease killed more than 5 billion sea stars, the urchin population exploded, devouring kelp and leaving seascapes with almost nothing but the spiny, globular echinoderms.

The kelp loss prompted the California Fish and Game Commission to close its recreational red abalone fishery in 2018. Commercial harvests of red urchins have also been hurt. Red urchins are favored over the purple urchins because they contain more edible uni or roe inside, but commercial divers say the amount has shrunk with less kelp.

Bull kelp, an annual seaweed, starts as a microscopic spore that grows up to two feet per day until it reaches up to 98 feet before dying off in the cooler months. It

Continued on page 12

CLASSIFIEDS

HELP WANTED

Petersburg Indian Association is accepting applications for a full-time Tribal Administrator. Position will be responsible for general oversight of operations and staff at PIA. Job description and application available at the PIA office or at www.piatribal.org. Open until filled. Interviews will be scheduled starting on March 1, 2024. Salary \$75K to \$90K DOE. Native preference applies.

HELP WANTED

Are you looking for summer work? Alaska Charters & Adventures, Heritage Fisheries & Marine Art are looking to hire new team members. Full- or part-time potential for retail customer service, tour guest services, production, fish processing, and marketing. Potential part-time preseason work also. Salary DOE. Call 907-874-4157 or email info@alaskaupclose.com.

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LETTERS WANTED

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.

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the matter of the estate of Otto Heinz Florschutz III, Notice to Creditors is hereby given that Christina Florschutz has been appointed personal representative of the above-named estate. Pursuant to Alaska Statute Title 13.16.450, all creditors are hereby notified to present their claims within four months after the date of first publication of this notice or said claims will forever be barred. Claims must be presented to:

Christina Florschutz
PO Box 547
Wrangell, AK 99929

Publish Feb. 14, 21 and 28, 2024

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the matter of the estate of David Roy Churchill, Notice to Creditors is hereby given that Franklin J. Churchill Sr. has been appointed personal representative of the above-named estate. Pursuant to Alaska Statute Title 13.16.450, all creditors are hereby notified to present their claims within four months after the date of first publication of this notice or said claims will forever be barred. Claims must be presented to:

Franklin J. Churchill Sr.
PO Box 1590
Wrangell, AK 99929

Publish Feb. 28 and March 6 and 13, 2024

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL PUBLIC HEARING PUBLIC NOTICE

During the Regular Assembly Meeting of Tuesday, March 12, 2024, starting at 6 p.m. in the Wrangell Borough Assembly Chambers at 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska, there will be a **PUBLIC HEARING** on the following item(s):

- a. Approval to move forward with the Sale of Borough-Owned Real Property within Wrangell Townsite (Lots 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9), of Subdivision Plat Block 54, according to Plat No. 68-81, Zoned Open Space and Requested by Wayne Johnson.

Kim Lane, MMC, Borough Clerk
City and Borough of Wrangell

Publish Feb. 28 and March 6, 2024

PUBLIC NOTICE

Alaska Charters and Adventures LLC, dba Alaska Charters and Adventures, is making application for a new liquor license, per AS 04.09.260, located in Alaska waters.

Interested persons should submit written comments to their local governing body (Wrangell Borough Assembly), the applicant, and to the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board at 550 W. 7th Ave., Suite 1600, Anchorage, AK 99501, or email alcohol.licensing@alaska.gov

Publish Feb. 28, March 6 and 13, 2024

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Publish Feb. 14, 21, & 28, 2024

Permanent Fund trustees support investing borrowed money

By JAMES BROOKS
Alaska Beacon

The leaders of the \$77 billion Alaska Permanent Fund have voted unanimously to adopt a strategic plan that calls for borrowing up to \$4 billion in order to increase the amount of money available for investments, looking to earn more on the investments than the fund would owe in interest on the debt.

The Feb. 16 board of trustees' vote, however, has limited effect: The borrowing could take place only if the Alaska Legislature and Gov. Mike Dunleavy change state law to allow it.

The Alaska Permanent Fund is the No. 1 source of general-purpose state revenue for public services and the annual Permanent Fund dividend. Each year, the fund transfers

more than \$3.5 billion to the state treasury, and members of the board of trustees hope to increase that amount by growing the value of the fund faster.

"This is going to require policymakers, the Legislature, the governor to get their minds wrapped around a concept," said Deven Mitchell, the corporation's executive director.

Public comments on the borrowing plan generally opposed the idea, but the six members of the corporation's board of trustees said in prior meetings that they felt the approach gave fund managers a valuable new tool to increase the value of the Permanent Fund.

That tool, known as leveraging the fund's accounts, is used widely by other pension funds and endowments, some of which borrow more than 25% of their funds' value.

If investors' earnings are greater than the rate of interest

on the loan, the approach can boost returns beyond what's normally possible. If they fall short, the strategy can compound losses.

Members of the board of trustees said they recognized public discomfort with the concept and amended the plan to involve a maximum of \$4 billion instead of 10% of the fund's value, which would have been close to \$8 billion.

"I think 10% is concerning to many people," Mitchell said.

Mitchell suggested that if the fund's leverage plan is adopted by the Legislature and succeeds, then trustees will ask for permission for more money.

The Alaska Beacon is an independent, donor-funded news organization. Alaskabeacon.com.

Alaska seafood shippers agree to pay \$9.5 million penalty

By ALEX DEMARBAN
Anchorage Daily News

Two Alaska seafood shipping companies agreed to pay a \$9.5 million penalty to the federal government for violations related to their use of a tiny rail track in Canada that the federal government said was an illegal attempt to avoid requirements of the U.S. Jones Act.

Kloosterboer International Forwarding and Alaska Reefer Management accepted the settlement in January, agreeing to what amounts to the second-largest settlement involving the act, the U.S. Department of Justice said in a statement Feb. 23.

The companies provide trans-

portation and logistics services as part of the American Seafoods Group family. A Kloosterboer representative declined to comment Feb. 23.

A spokesperson with the Justice Department in Alaska declined to release the settlement.

The Jones Act requires goods, commodities or equipment is shipped between American ports to travel on American-flagged vessels. An exception allows seafood from Alaska to be transported by a foreign-flagged ship to the mainland U.S. if it later traveled on a Canadian rail line.

The Justice Department said the shipping scheme worked like this: For more than a decade, the companies moved frozen

seafood from Dutch Harbor in the Aleutian Islands to a port in New Brunswick, Canada, on foreign-flagged vessels.

Once in Canada, Kloosterboer arranged for the seafood to be offloaded from the vessel onto trucks in the port, the agency said.

The trucks were driven onto a flatbed rail car on the Bayside Canadian Railway, a roughly 100-foot length of railroad track located entirely within the Port of Bayside, the Justice Department said.

The trucks rode the length of the rail, and returned, before being driven off the train cars and proceeding directly to a border crossing in Maine for final shipments across the Lower 48, it said.

The settlement grew from steep

fining handed down by U.S. Customs and Border Protection alleging that the 100-foot rail track was illegal because it did not meet the Jones Act's exception for transportation on a Canadian railway.

In 2021, the seafood shipping companies filed a complaint in U.S. District Court in Alaska, challenging the fines. The Justice Department asserted that the mini-track goes nowhere and was specially built to save money and illegally create a loophole in the Jones Act.

The federal court in Alaska determined that the shipments were illegal, since seafood was not actually "transported" on the short railway, the agency said. The companies haven't used the short

railway since the court's ruling.

"This is the second largest settlement of a case brought under the Jones Act in the history of our nation," said U.S. Attorney S. Lane Tucker for the District of Alaska in a statement.

The case sends a clear signal that U.S. Customs "will use its law enforcement powers to detect and deter schemes that are designed to circumvent laws — such as the Jones Act — which are intended to protect U.S. industries," said AnnMarie R. Highsmith, executive assistant commissioner with the Office of Trade in U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

The largest Jones Act fine in history also involved an Alaska company.

State almost clear of backlogged food stamp applications

By CLAIRE STREMPLE
Alaska Beacon

As of last week, the backlog of Alaskans waiting for the state to process their food stamp applications was down to just over 500 — a big improvement over the 14,000 unresolved applications of a year ago.

The state's Division of Public Assistance is on track to be up to date by the end of the month, said Deb Etheridge, division director.

In an interview, Etheridge described how the state is balancing the need to comply with federal regulations — Alaska has been warned it's at risk of losing federal funding for failing to comply — with getting food aid to Alaskans in need.

As the division gets closer to the finish line, Etheridge has her eyes

on a future without delays for the state's most vulnerable residents. She said it is one thing to be out of the backlog, and another thing to stay out of it.

"If we want to stay out of the backlog, we'll have to make sure we get closer to processing cases within the first 10 days of application. So we are not taking our eye off the ball," she said. "We are staying strong and keeping moving forward to stay current and actually work toward more timely processing."

The division has a federal obligation to process applications within 30 days.

Etheridge said the Department of Health has responded to an advanced warning letter from the federal government that threatened the state's funding for the program if "inefficient and inef-

fective administration" continued.

As the backlog spiked last year, the state stopped conducting phone interviews, a key part of the verification process for benefits that can also be time consuming. The U.S. Department of Agriculture told the state those must resume.

Etheridge said she is not ready to open up phone interviews for applicants yet — they currently slow down the process too much. So she has pitched a plan to the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to increase training for her staff as she phases the interviews back in, with an aim to be fully compliant with federal guidelines by May.

"One of the tenets of success is that I need to be able to train my staff on how to do effective in-

terviewing, so that it's not taking that additional amount of time."

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Urchins

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flourishes in cool, nutrient-rich waters. California's coast has bull and giant kelp, the world's largest marine algae. Urchins have hurt both species, though giant kelp forests have fared better.

Some believe the only way to restore kelp is to reduce the purple urchins, which can go dormant for years only to remerge and eat new kelp growth. Chefs have started serving purple urchins to build a market.

"Sometimes it does feel weird, like you're killing this animal that's a native species, but it's for the greater good," said Morgan Murphy-Cannella of Reef Check Foundation, the kelp restoration coordinator involved in the kelp planting at Albion Bay. Its volunteers monitor kelp forests from Canada to Mexico.

Josh Russo, a former abalone fisher and founder of the Watermen's Alliance, a coalition of spearfishing clubs, helped start the urchin crushing.

The first group was mostly local divers armed with sledgehammers, Russo said. After struggling to swing them underwater, they turned to small welding and furniture hammers and icepicks.

Volunteers have cleared 80% of purple urchins from a section at Caspar's Cove, Russo said. It is one of two spots where California allows recreational licensed fishers to take an unlimited amount of purple urchins.

But scientists say nothing can replace natural predators, like the sunflower sea star. After learning to breed it in captivity, biologists are building a stock to reintroduce it. Sunflower sea stars are at four California aquariums.

There's still much to learn. Kelp has not come back in all spots cleared of urchins, and scientists don't know why. But the crushing is helping buy time to find permanent solutions.

Ferry board

Continued from page 7

marine highway system leadership ... blowing whichever way the wind blows on a given day," he said at the Feb. 20 meeting. "Making tens or hundreds of millions of dollars of decisions, sometimes in ways that have turned out to be inefficient, sometimes in ways that have turned out to be failures. Quickly achieving alignment may not be in the best interest of the system at all."

Jan Wrentmore, a 40-plus-year Skagway resident, testified at the Feb. 22 committee meeting that "the biggest enemy to the marine highway is changing political agendas." Every new governor

makes changes to the ferry system, she said, adding that a diverse board would help keep the marine highway "stable."

Dunleavy came under heavy criticism for his policies and actions related to the Alaska Marine Highway after taking office in late 2018. He proposed cutting the ferry system's budget by two-thirds and appointed a task force to consider options including privatizing it. He subsequently vetoed large amounts of funding approved by the Legislature during his initial years, and more recently he has essentially proposed flat funding each year in his budgets.

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