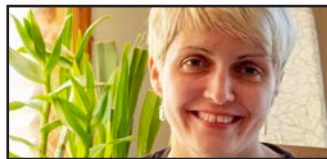


Manicurist adds artistic touch to fingertips, Page 8



Wrangell, Alaska
April 26, 2023

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New cost estimate for wastewater disinfection more than double

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

The borough has been preparing to make costly updates to its wastewater treatment plant, but recent estimates suggest that the multimillion-dollar project could be over twice as expensive as anticipated.

Late last year, borough officials placed the project in the \$3 million to \$5 million range; the new price tag is over \$12.5 million.

"This is considerably more than what we were planning on," said Borough Manager Jeff Good. Construction costs are rising nationwide and the borough has had to adjust estimates on many major projects accordingly, but he still "wasn't expecting that amount."

The \$12.5 million is "a very, very initial, rough cost

estimate," said Public Works Director Tom Wetor, still subject to change as engineers nail down the details. "We haven't actually had (the engineering company) here on the ground. They basically reviewed our plans and looked at what's happening in the industry."

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state Department of Environmental Conservation are requiring municipalities throughout Southeast Alaska to bring the wastewater that they discharge into the ocean into compliance with current environmental standards.

In the past, Wrangell and eight other Alaska communities had waivers that allowed them to discharge wastewater without disinfecting it — the rationale was that in marine environments, the waste can be diluted quickly.

But federal and state agencies are now revisiting these

waivers. Wrangell will need to add a disinfection process to wastewater before discharging it into Zimovia Strait.

Disinfection options include ultraviolet light and chlorine. "Chlorine seems to be the leading method right now," explained Wetor, because it removes ammonia, whereas ultraviolet light does not. The recent cost estimate is for chlorine disinfection.

However, these agencies don't provide funding to carry out these mandated improvements, so the borough will have to figure out a way to cover the project.

Good hopes to get funding through the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture or the Army Corps of Engineers. However, these

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Fish-eat-fish world



PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Standing in the front row, from left, Cyrus Yoder, Kara Heller, Adlee Chelette and Tegan Kuntz watch as teacher Brian Merritt pulls a rockfish from the stomach of a lingcod on April 18. Merritt used the fish to show students how the food chain works in nature.

Students learn first-hand about ocean food chain

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

If there's one thing fourth graders can count on each year, it's that they will see a dead animal inside and out.

Teacher Brian Merritt uses various animals to teach about science, whether biology, environment or, in the case of this year, the food chain.

On April 18, Merritt brought his class outside to show them the food chain of the animal kingdom in action, if only slight-

ly after the fact.

"Whoa!"

"That's huge!"

"Wow!"

The students reacted with astonishment at the unveiling of the enormous fish.

That morning, the teacher and commercial fisherman, got a lingcod from fellow fisherman Brennan Eagle. The lingcod had swallowed a rockfish.

Eagle was fishing with gray cod bait. A rockfish gulped the bait, only to be itself gulped

up by a larger predator.

"About 24 hours ago, this fish was about 15 miles offshore out toward Craig, swimming around," Merritt told his class before eviscerating the lingcod. "Brennan caught it, brought it in about midnight, now it's here. This fish has had quite a journey."

Before surgery began, children were asked what they knew about the lingcod species.

"It's known for its spots all

Continued on page 5

Governor tells legislators he will introduce state sales tax

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Gov. Mike Dunleavy told legislators in a pair of closed-door meetings last week that he will introduce a state sales tax as a component of a budget-balancing, long-term fiscal plan.

But with just three weeks left in the legislative session, with no details about the governor's tax bill as of Monday, and with strong opposition from lawmakers who represent communities with a local sales tax, the odds of passage this year are extremely low.

If the governor goes ahead with a sales tax bill, it would join more than a dozen proposals offered by House and Senate members this year to address Alaska's long-term revenue shortfall. Those proposals include a sales tax, income tax, an increase in oil production taxes and higher property taxes on oil and gas companies.

The state has lived off declining savings much of the past 30 years to cover the budget, and could face years more of deficits if it pays out a large Permanent Fund dividend to Alaskans.

While the governor told lawmakers last week he favored a sales tax, opponents contend it would disproportionately hurt lower-income Alaskans who spend a larger share of their income on essential goods and services that could be subject to the tax.

Sales tax opponents gener-

ally favor a personal income tax to help balance the state budget, contending that a progressive tax table would put more of the burden on wealthier Alaskans, though there is strong political opposition to an income tax.

Then there is the middle ground against either tax.

"There doesn't appear to be a need for a broad-based tax if we have a reasonable PFD," said Sen. Bert Stedman, co-chair of the Senate Finance Committee, now in his 21st year in the Legislature.

The senator said he opposes any tax if the purpose is to raise more money for a larger PFD.

The budget approved earlier this month by the Republican-led House includes a \$2,700 PFD for this year, about double the average of the past 10 years other than the record-setting 2022 election-year dividend of \$3,284.

However, without new revenues or significant cuts to public services, neither of which the House has adopted, next year's budget is in the red by an estimated \$600 million — even more if the state increases its support for public schools.

The Senate majority, comprised of a mix of Republicans and Democrats, supports a \$1,300 PFD as part of a balanced budget.

"I think the governor recognizes the fiscal reality" that without new revenues the state cannot afford a large PFD, while also meeting the needs

Continued on page 4

Villarma closes the book on library career after 34 years

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

The Irene Ingle Public Library has undergone countless changes in the past three decades, from the digitization of its catalog to major building renovations to the advent of e-books. Library Director Margaret Villarma has guided the facility through it all, offering support to elders and fostering a love of reading in generations of Wrangell youth. Now, after 34 years, she is ready to retire.

"I'm just grateful for the job I had here," she said. "I really am. I enjoyed it. I couldn't have asked for a better career path to take. It was perfect for me. And the community is just so supportive of the library and everything that we do."

Alongside Assistant Librarian Sarah Scambler, she keeps the library up to date by culling books

that don't get checked out and ensuring that the next big thing is in stock, whether that's "Harry Potter," the "Twilight Saga," or the community's current craze — graphic novels. "It just depends on what's popular right now," Villarma explained.

Under her leadership, the library started its summer reading program, which is famous among the island's school children for providing truly epic prizes. She has already begun to accumulate Lego sets, laser tag kits and skateboard decks for this summer's round of readers.

Not only does the program prevent "backsliding" — the learning loss that can occur during summer vacation — it has allowed Villarma to forge deeper connections with the young people of Wrangell. "It's fun to see all these kids go through the reading

Continued on page 5



PHOTO BY CAROLEINE JAMES/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Margaret Villarma, who will retire after 34 years from the Irene Ingle Public Library, said she will miss a lot about the job, particularly "the interaction with the community and helping people, because we are here to serve."

Birthdays & Anniversaries

The Sentinel extends its best wishes to everyone listed in the chamber of commerce community birthday calendar.

Wednesday, April 26: Alex Rooney.

Thursday, April 27: Emily Cummings, Tyson Messmer.

Friday, April 28: Blake Stough.

Saturday, April 29: None.

Sunday, April 30: James McCloskey.

Monday, May 1: Jonna Kautz; Anniversary: Austin and Diane O'Brien.

Tuesday, May 2: William Helgeson, Dena McChargue.

Wrangell Roundup: Special Events

NOLAN CENTER THEATER "The Super Mario Bros. Movie" rated PG, at 7 p.m. Friday, April 28, and Saturday, April 29, and 4 p.m. Sunday, April 30. The animated adventure comedy runs 1 hour and 32 minutes; tickets are \$7 for adults, \$5 for children under age 12. Children under 12 must be accompanied by an adult.

FAMILY GAME NIGHT, 5 to 7 p.m. Friday, April 28, at The Salvation Army. Free food, board games, video games. All are welcome. Call for more information, 907-874-3753.

PAINTING WITH MIXED MEDIA, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., Saturday, April 29, at The Salvation Army. Art class for ages 10-16. Food provided. Call for more information, 907-874-3753.

COMMUNITY CLEANUP from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 29, hosted by the WCA IGAP. Meet at the Evergreen Elementary School multi-purpose room. Bags and gloves will be provided. Free lunch and ticket drawings for cash prizes will start at noon. Call for more information, Paula Rak at 907-305-0309 or IGAP tech Kim Wickman 907-874-4304.

STORY TIME AT THE LIBRARY, 10 to 11 a.m. Fridays until April 28. Enjoy the stories, crafts and snacks at the Irene Ingle Public Library. Call 907-874-3535.

LET'S TALK ABOUT GRIEF presentation from 1 to 2:30 p.m., Saturday, April 29, at the Episcopal Parish Hall. Presented by certified grief educator Rev. Julie Platson, from Sitka. Open to all. Sponsored by St. Philip's Church and Hospice of Wrangell.

MUSKEG MEADOWS will hold the Angerman's nine-hole best-ball golf tournament Saturday and Sunday, April 29 and 30, starting at 10 a.m. Register by 9:30 a.m.

LITTLE LEAGUE VOLUNTEERS needed for coaching, umpiring, scorekeeping, concessions, pitching machine runners, field upkeep and more. Volunteer applications can be picked up at the chamber of commerce or filled out online at <https://bit.ly/3KO1ivZ>.

HEAD START is accepting applications for preschoolers. Apply online at cchita-nsn.gov or get a paper application at the school behind the old hospital building. Call 907-874-2455 with questions.

KINDERGARTEN enrollment is now open for the 2023-2024 school year to any child that will be 5 years old by Sept. 1. Call Kendra at 907-874-2321 or stop by the Evergreen Elementary School office.

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

- **ARTHRITIS CLASS** with Kim Covlat 9 to 10 a.m. on Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the community center multi-purpose room until April 28. Free. Open to adults, 18 years and older. Bring gym shoes and flexible clothing that allows for movement.
- **FAMILY PICKLEBALL**, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Saturdays at the community center until April 29. Open to 14 years and older. \$5 drop-in fee. Bring gym shoes and wear athletic clothing.
- **YOGA CLASS**, 8 to 9 a.m. Saturdays at the community center multi-purpose room until May 27. Open to adults, 18 years and older. \$5 drop-in fee. Bring a yoga mat and wear athletic clothing that bends and flexes. For more information and to register online visit www.wrangellrec.com or call 907-874-2444.
- **JIU JITSU**, 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Monday and Wednesday and 10 to 11 a.m. Saturdays at the community center multi-purpose room. Open to 16 years and older. \$5 drop-in fee. Bring gym shoes, wear athletic clothing and keep nails trimmed.

Want more attendance at your meeting or event? Send information for Roundup to wrgsent@gmail.com or call 907-874-2301.

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

April 26, 1923
The Wrangell Commercial Club recently undertook to offer better advantages to fishermen, and arrangements have been made for keeping on hand a constant supply of bait and ice on the dock. Glacial ice is being brought in by Harry Coulter, who at the instance of the club is undertaking to keep a supply of ice on the dock that will be adequate to the needs of all fishermen who may come to this port. An ice room is furnished by the McCormack Dock Co. C.C. Mundy is handling the bait. During the few days since the ice and bait have been on hand, numerous fishermen have availed themselves of the advantages offered, and there is every indication that the demand will be greatly increased as soon as it is generally known among the fishermen that Wrangell proposes to keep on hand a permanent supply of ice and bait.

April 26, 1948
Over 300 spectators watched the Stikine Stampede basketball team defeat the Wrangell All-Stars of 1922 in an 8-5 victory last Fri-

day night in the school gym. As a last resort, in the final quarter All-Stars manager Harry Coulter threw in seven men against the rugged "gold rushers" five, but the All-Stars failed to score. Elton Engstrom, who flew down from Juneau to play with the team he had been a member of in high school 26 years ago, scored a beautiful long shot for the team's first basket and Laurie Broad later sank another ball. Marion Goodrich connected with a foul shot to bring the score to five. This game will probably go down in history as the only game in which one referee, Bill Grant, called a foul on the other referee, Lou Dvorak "for playing on the wrong side."

April 27, 1973
The U.S. Forest Service has selected Sitka and Petersburg as the sites for area headquarters for the North Tongass National Forest when the forest is separated into two administrative areas. Both Wrangell and Petersburg had conducted campaigns to win the designation of area headquarters for the southern part of the divided national forest. An estimated

25 to 30 employees will staff each area headquarters. Alaska Regional Forester Charles Yates said the primary objective of reorganizing the North Tongass National Forest was to develop a more dynamic organization that will meet public demands for quality resource management and public service.

April 23, 1998
Last Thursday afternoon small groups of community members gathered in shifts at the Wrangell airport to meet the owner of Taquan Air Service as he introduced his company's newest plane, the Jetstream 32 EP. Jerry Scudero, owner of the airline, flew into Wrangell with two of his pilots to take groups on short flights across the Stikine delta and the mouth of LeConte Bay, and to answer questions concerning the new turbo jet. The Jetstream 32 twin turboprop, which seats 19 passengers, has plenty of head room and is designed for the feeling of an airliner. According to Scudero, the plane can cruise at 306 mph, at altitudes of up to 25,000 feet and is IFR (instrument flight rules) capable.

Senior Center Menu

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

Thursday, April 27

Sloppy joes, Texas coleslaw, potato salad

Friday, April 28

Chicken a la king, rice, broccoli, danish salad

Monday, May 1

Tuna salad sandwich, summer garden soup, cottage cheese with tomato slices, fruit cup

Tuesday, May 2

Stuffed beef roll, brussels sprouts, apricot salad, rice

Wednesday, May 3

Chicken enchiladas, black beans, tossed salad, Spanish rice

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

Sunday, April 30
Columbia, 5:45 p.m.
Sunday, May 7
Columbia, 12:15 p.m.
Sunday, May 14
Columbia, 5 p.m.
Sunday, May 21
Columbia, 3:45 p.m.

Southbound

Wednesday, May 3
Columbia, 5 a.m.
Wednesday, May 10
Columbia, 4 a.m.
Wednesday, May 17
Columbia, 4:45 a.m.
Wednesday, May 24
Columbia, 7:30 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	
	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft
April 26	05:09	13.5	06:53	11.1	11:54	2.2	11:53	6.8
April 27	06:11	12.4	08:17	11.1	12:59	3.0
April 28	07:43	11.7	09:26	11.9	01:17	7.1	02:15	3.4
April 29	09:10	12.0	10:17	12.9	02:54	6.6	03:27	3.2
April 30	10:15	12.7	10:58	14.1	04:11	5.3	04:24	2.7
May 1	11:07	13.6	11:34	15.2	05:03	3.7	05:08	2.2
May 2	11:52	14.3	05:43	2.2	05:46	1.8

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WEEKLY FARE SALES



FREIGHT FOR LESS

Polynesian paddlers plan to pay visit to Wrangell in June

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

It is a voyage of 43,000 miles encompassing the Pacific Ocean, and it begins in Southeast.

The Hawaiian canoe Hōkūle‘a and its crew will set sail from Juneau in June to circumnavigate the vast, blue body of water over the course of four years. On its way south, it will stop in Wrangell for a few days.

The double-hulled plywood, fiberglass and resin canoe, which was built in 1975 and made its first voyage the following year, was lifted out of the waters of Honolulu Harbor and was scheduled to be delivered to Tacoma, Washington, last Friday. From there, it will be transported to Seattle and then taken to Juneau to be placed back in the water on June 10.

After a week in Juneau for cultural and educational exchanges, the Hōkūle‘a will travel through Southeast, making a stop in Wrangell on June 25-28, tentatively, for more cultural and educational exchange.

“We’re still in the planning process of what that’s going to look like,” Esther Aaltséen Reese, Wrangell

Cooperative Association tribal administrator, told the school board on April 17. Reese is a member of the school board. “It’s more than likely going to be a traditional welcome where we meet them in our canoes, and they bring their canoe. It most likely will be at Chief Shakes House with a request to be on the land, then give them an opportunity to a cultural share and exchange.”

The Hōkūle‘a is crewed by 12 members of the Polynesian Voyaging Society. It will be joined by the canoe Hikianalia. The vessels will visit “36 countries and archipelagoes, nearly 100 indigenous territories and 345 ports,” according to the society’s website.

From Southeast, the canoes will travel south through British Columbia and into Seattle in September. From September until November, they will sail down the U.S. West Coast.

From the beginning of 2024 they will make their way through Central and South America, over to Rapa Nui, about 2,400 miles of the coast of Chile; Taputapuatea, near French Polynesia in the South Pacific; and Aotearoa (the Indigenous name for New Zealand); visiting multiple islands along the way. The plan is to head north to land in Japan

in September of 2026. The vessels will be shipped back to Los Angeles, and will sail back home to Hawai‘i from there.

A third canoe, the Wa‘a Honua (Canoe for the Earth), is being added. However, this canoe is big enough to take anybody along for the journey — it’s a virtual vessel with an educational purpose.

According to the hokulea.com website, “This virtual global hub will be powered by storytelling and education: videos, blogging, educational resources and virtual reality, connecting people around Indigenous values and shared humanity. PVS (Polynesian Voyaging Society) educational partners are developing learning modules and lessons that will be targeted to specific teachers and students of various ages and grade levels. The goal is for Wa‘a Honua to reach and inspire learners of all ages from every part of the globe to become future navigators for the earth.”

Originally, the Hōkūle‘a was supposed to be in Wrangell over the July 4 holiday, Reese said. There were canoe races that had been considered, which could still be a possibility during the June visit.

“The canoe races would be phenomenal with them,” she said.

Shooter drills not active part of Wrangell schools safety protocol

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

Active shooter drills have become as commonplace in schools across the country as fire drills. However, that is not the case in Wrangell just yet.

At the school board meeting on April 17, Devyn Johnson, a parent with two children enrolled at Evergreen Elementary School and one in Head Start, asked that the schools implement some kind of drill.

“Wrangell has high access to firearms. Mental illness is high. Depression rates are high. And substance abuse is high,” Johnson said to the board during public comments. “In my opinion, these are all the perfect storm for a tragedy to occur. Wrangell is a really wonderful town with wonderful people, but we would be foolish to pretend we’d be exempt from an active shooter to walk into our schools.”

In a later phone interview, Johnson said she has spoken with several parents and school staff members who thanked her for bringing up the concern at the board meeting.

According to a report by the National Center for Education Statistics, 96% of public schools in the U.S. have procedures in place for active shooter drills. Some schools refer to drills as lockdown drills. Wrangell is not included in those percentages, but the school district is working on a drill.

“We are in the process of defining a lockdown drill that would be used in case of a school intruder situation,” said Josh Blatchley, director of maintenance at the school district. “The lockdown drill will consist of students returning to classrooms and the doors

secured. As we work through the process, the drill will include an evacuation portion and gathering locations.”

In a meeting last summer, the borough assembly and school board met to discuss steps that could be taken to “harden” schools in the case of an active shooter. Patty Gilbert, then an assembly member and now mayor, remarked in that meeting that when she was a teacher, in-service training provided by the police department helped identify strengths and weaknesses in classrooms. After those trainings, she said drills would be held with the kids.

That meeting last summer spurred the district to look at things like locking certain doors and installing camera systems, buzzers or keycards, Blatchley said.

Schools Superintendent Bill Burr said training for teachers was held as recently as last year.

“Staff have received training over the years on ALICE (alert, lockdown, inform, counter, evacuate) or similar training of what to do if there is an active shooter,” he said. “This is a page in the crisis plan and a short-form card in each classroom with the lockdown plans. The crisis plan is reviewed each year at the beginning of the year at the district and the school level.”

Burr said a search to find a trainer for teachers was unsuccessful this school year, and the district has reached out to a national organization on what it would cost for training but has yet to get a response.

Johnson said a conversation with her 9-year-old son prompted her concern over safety drills. Her son told her he wouldn’t know what to do

if he heard “a popping noise because guns don’t always sound like guns.”

Like many households in Wrangell, Johnson and her husband own firearms. Their children are also taught firearm safety. “Unfortunately, it’s just where we’re at (as a society). I’m sure there are families not having (the drill) conversation.”

Semi-retired psychologist John DeRuyter said in an interview the drills are good idea, but he added that prevention has been shown to be quite effective.

“From a safety perspective, I think putting together a well-thought-through shooter drill that’s well-informed by law enforcement is a good idea,” he said. “What’s more important, from my perspective, is when we as a community witness — when we are aware of families that are struggling — rather than make them pariahs, we step in and help. We step in and support. ‘What do you need? How can we help? What’s important here?’”

Community support, DeRuyter said, has been shown to “make those shooting drills irrelevant.” He said there is a large amount of research that shows children who have supportive adults in their lives have better outcomes than those that grow up in emotionally impoverished households. Burr said changes school staff watches for are unknown or unexpected people in the hallways, and staff or students who “mention, write or discuss anything dealing with an unsafe situation.”

He said the statement heard and posted in airports, “If you see something, say something,” is very true in public education. If someone is un-

comfortable or sees something unusual or not proper procedure, such as checking in at the office and getting a visitor pass, then we need to be aware and conscious of what is happening.”

There has been debate over what active shooter drills should look like, whether they include the sounds of screaming and gunfire or more subdued approaches to minimize stress.

Washington state last year approved a new law that prohibits school drills from including “live simulations of or reenactments of active shooter scenarios that are not trauma-informed and age and developmentally appropriate.”

“You can prepare your kids for a house fire by telling them where to meet and how to climb out of their windows, but you don’t have to burn

the house down to show them how to escape a house fire safely,” Washington state Rep. Amy Walen said in a committee hearing on her bill.

Burr said anything that disrupts the school environment is of concern.

“There are many cases where trauma was caused by the training itself,” he said. “This is a concern that we have to be aware of. We want the staff and/or students to be aware of the situations that have become much more prevalent but not at the cost of making students and parents scared to send students to school.”

He added that’s why training has been done only with teachers in the past. “We are reviewing how to make the best drill with the least amount of stress on the student population.”

Connie Bunes
passed away on April 14 in Anchorage.
Services are pending and planned
for later this summer.

Obituary to follow at a later time.

KSTK
Spring On-Air Fundraiser
April 24 – 28th

Your donation makes local news, information, emergency announcements and more possible for Wrangell.

Donate anytime at kstk.org or call
907-874-2345
during the on-air drive.

All contributors are invited for burgers at KSTK Friday evening, April 28th. Stop by for some grillin’ and chillin’ as a thank you for your donation!

KSTK FM 101.7
Stikine River Radio
CoastAlaska, Inc.



Corrections

The Sentinel on April 19 incorrectly reported the name of the state agency that Sweet Tides Bakery is waiting on for its food service permit to open the business; it is the food safety and sanitation program at the Department of Environmental Conservation.

The new logo for Sweet Tides was designed by Grace Wintermyer. The Sentinel on April 19 incorrectly reported the logo designer.

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FROM THE PUBLISHER

Governor's sales tax doesn't make sense

By LARRY PERSILY
Publisher

Alaska is 30 years into state budget deficits, borrowing billions from savings to pay the bills.

Gov. Mike Dunleavy is five years into the job, still pledging mega Permanent Fund dividends even if the money isn't there.

Three months ago, Dunleavy in his State of the State address couldn't even manage to acknowledge the need for a long-term fiscal plan, despite the budget math that adds up otherwise.

Then the governor had an epiphany last week. Not a religious one, a fiscal one.

He said the word "taxes."

Only he didn't say it in public. That would have been a bridge much too far for Dunleavy, who has long maintained that taxes are bad and that he would never support any such thing without a vote of the people.

He said the T word during closed-door meetings with legislators, with no mention of putting the question on a statewide ballot, as if he were embarrassed to tell the public the truth about state finances. Or maybe he was sticking his toe into the political waters before sticking out his neck to take questions at a public microphone.

The governor told lawmakers he would introduce legislation for a state sales tax, though he provided no details on the rate, exemptions, how to meld a state tax on top of local sales taxes in 100-plus cities and boroughs, or how much it might raise.

And still no sight of an actual bill as of Monday, six days after he told legislators it was on its way.

He met with members of the House and Senate as lawmakers are struggling for the umpteenth year to find consensus for an overall fiscal plan to balance state revenues with spending. Even before the governor woke up to the need for taxes,

legislators already had put multiple sales tax and income tax proposals on the table, though none appear to be moving anywhere this year.

Even if Dunleavy is serious about seeing the need for taxes to help pay for public services and the beloved dividend, he waited too long to change the batteries in his political calculator — the legislative session started three months ago.

The governor awoke with just a few weeks left before the Legislature's adjournment deadline of May 17. That's more than tardy, it's unrealistic and shows a reluctance to lead. Maybe showing up late is better than not showing up at all, but just barely.

Meanwhile, it's unconscionable that he continues to support paying out a PFD this fall that would exceed available funds.

Meanwhile, it's unconscionable that he continues to support paying out a PFD this fall that would exceed available funds. It's as if one hand says the state needs money to pay its bills while the other hand says here, take the check.

This is the same governor who last year vetoed a tax of pennies per puff on e-cigarette and vape products, saying "a tax increase on the people of Alaska is not something I can support." It's quite the change from opposing a whisp of a tax on vape sticks to supporting a sales tax on everything that moves off the shelf.

The conflicting positions are not limited to the governor. So-called fiscal conservatives in the House this year support a \$2,700 PFD so much that they are willing to run up a \$600 million budget deficit. Some who strongly opposed a measly eight-cent-a-gallon increase in the state motor fuel tax last year as an undue burden on consumers — the first increase in more than 50 years — didn't put the same brakes on the governor's sales tax talk.

Admittedly, it's good that more legislators, and the governor, are willing to at least talk about taxes. It's too bad they can't admit that an oversized PFD is part of the problem.

EDITORIAL

Do it for those who live here and for visitors, too

Residents will have two opportunities in the next couple of weeks to pitch in, bend down, pick up, lift and carry in a collective effort to make the community cleaner and greener for the summer.

The annual community events are a source of pride for residents who see the streets and sidewalks every day, and a chance to put Wrangell's best flowers, benches and footpaths forward for visitors. The town could see an estimated 33,000 tourists this summer — the most since 2005. It'd be smart to showcase a cleaned-up community, sending all those visitors home with bright, colorful memories to spread the word for future travelers.

Whatever the motivation, there is always room for more volunteers. Think of it as a civic responsibility, like voting, but rather than waiting for the polls to close at night and election workers to tally the votes to determine the winners, the cleanup rewards are instant that afternoon.

And the refreshments are free.

The community cleanup starts at 8:30 a.m. Saturday at Evergreen Elementary School's multipurpose room, where organizers will hand out trash bags and gloves for volunteers to spread out around town to clean up along streets, roads and parks. Bring the bags back to the school for dumping in the dumpsters by noon and enjoy a free lunch and prize drawings.

The event, which has been around since the 1980s, drew about 170 volunteers last year, despite miserable weather. The forecast for Saturday looks much better, another reason to take a walk for a cleaner community.

Then, two weeks later, the focus will be on downtown with the Parks and Recreation Department-led Community Collaboration in its third year. Volunteers are invited to come to the downtown pavilion starting at 9 a.m. Friday, May 12, where they can log in, get their assignments and go to work refreshing garden beds, washing benches and trash cans, cutting grass, weeding along the sidewalks and picking up debris.

Refreshments will be served, and tools will be available or bring your own if you have a favorite rake that never misses a spot and never causes a blister.

Whatever tool you choose, check your schedule and try to find time to help out at one or both of the events.

— Wrangell Sentinel

Dunleavy tax proposal

Continued from page 1

of schools and deferred maintenance at public facilities across Alaska, Ketchikan Rep. Dan Ortiz said a day after legislators met with the governor. The state "can't do all those things without new sources of revenue," said Ortiz, a member of the House Finance Committee.

That doesn't mean the representative supports a state sales tax added on top of local taxes. "I'm pretty much inclined to vote against any sales tax," he said, noting that it would be hard on communities that already depend on a local sales tax for their own budgets.

Stedman is of the same opinion: A state sales tax would drive up the cost of living even higher for residents in municipalities that collect a local sales tax.

The senator's Southeast colleague, Juneau Sen. Jesse Kiehl, agrees that residents in communities with their own sales tax could see the biggest hit to their

economy. Residents in more than 100 cities and boroughs pay a sales tax, ranging from 1.5% to 7.85%.

"Alaska needs a broad-based tax" to establish a connection between economic activity, businesses and workers in the state and the revenues to pay for public services, Kiehl said. "But, man, a sales tax is a crummy choice."

Dunleavy's announcement in the two private meetings with House and Senate members of his pending sales tax legislation appears to be a departure from his past statements that he would oppose any new taxes without a statewide vote.

"He said that everything is open for discussion," House Minority Leader Calvin Schrage, of Anchorage, said of the meeting on April 18. "And I can say that he did not mention the need for a statewide referendum."

Senate President Gary Stevens said it's "great" that Dunleavy intends to introduce legislation. But it's "a little late in

the game," the Kodiak Republican added.

Several other lawmakers confirmed that the governor told them that he would introduce a sales tax bill, though he shared few details at the meetings with legislators.

Jeff Turner, the governor's deputy communications director and spokesman, said in a text to an Alaska Beacon reporter that the governor did not talk with legislators about an advisory vote. He added in an email, "Governor Dunleavy will not support an income tax bill."

Alaska had a personal income tax as a territory and for the first 20 years as a state, 1949-1979. Legislators abolished the tax as North Slope oil revenues filled the treasury. Alaska has never had a state sales tax.

"Given the need to reduce the state's reliance on volatile oil prices, a broad range of ideas have been proposed as

the House and Senate work on a comprehensive fiscal plan," Turner wrote in an email.

"I know certainly Alaskans don't want to pay a tax to get their dividend," Speaker of the House Cathy Tilton, a Wasilla Republican, told the Anchorage Daily News.

"I think the idea of a revenue measure (sales tax) is a stabilizing measure, because of the fact that our oil revenues are so in flux all the time, that we have to have some kind of stabilizing piece that we can count on," Tilton said.

"Each member has their own ideas of what they prefer and I would say, at this point in time, it's kind of a mixed bag," she said of legislative interest in raising new revenues to balance the budget.

Tilton acknowledged that passing any revenue measures is "a really heavy lift."

This news story includes reporting by the Anchorage Daily News and Alaska Beacon.

Wastewater disinfection

Continued from page 1

federal agencies operate on a two-year budget cycle, meaning it will be a long time before the borough could receive money from them.

And the disinfection project can't wait long. Wrangell has five years to get the wastewater plant updated and operational under the new standards.

Congressional directed spending, also known as "ear-

marks," could provide a funding source while the borough waits on a federal grant. Earmarks are funds provided by Congress for certain local projects, though they can be controversial and hard to get.

"We're pursuing both avenues," Good said of directed spending and grants.

Sen. Lisa Murkowski directed \$13 million to Anchorage for a wastewater disposal project for

the fiscal year 2023, and last year directed \$2 million to Wrangell to help pay for a new pipeline at the community reservoir.

Good has already reached out to the state's congressional delegation to ask for support. Borough officials won't know until Oct. 1 at the earliest, the start of the federal fiscal year, whether the project will receive directed funds.

"We're going to need some

grant funding to be able to afford it," said Good. "Even at a very low interest rate, a loan to be able to do that, that's going to be a heavy burden on our ratepayer."

Wrangell ratepayers have already been hit with steep increases. The borough raised sewage rates 21% in the summer of 2022 after seven years without adjusting them. Rates will increase an additional 15%

starting July 1.

"If we did receive additional ... grant funding, we would like to keep the rates where they're at," said Good. "That's our goal."

Wetor agrees that improving water quality is a worthwhile goal, "but this is a huge expense, especially with everything that's happened over the last few years, for us to absorb," he said.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF U.S. FOREST SERVICE

U.S. Forest Service crew Nick Docken (left) and Austin O'Brien help assemble the Motus tower on Kadin Island. The tower's five antennae will be used to track shorebirds during their seasonal migrations. Joe Delabruue, Kevin Kocarek and Elizabeth Wirt also assisted with the assembly.

International bird-tracking project alights in Wrangell

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Wrangell may not be on the road system, but that doesn't mean it's not connected to the rest of the world. Last week, a U.S. Forest Service project put Wrangell on the map — the Motus map.

The Motus Wildlife Tracking System is an international collaborative research network that uses radio telemetry technology to study the migratory patterns of birds and other animals. After scientists put a nanotag on a bird, its movements can be tracked by hundreds of Motus antennae all over the world. These tags can weigh less than a gram.

The program's results, which are publicly available for scientists and laypeople alike, are used for research and conservation purposes.

On April 19, the Forest Service installed a Motus tower on nearby Kadin Island. This tower is focused specifically on the upcoming shorebird migration.

"The cool thing about this is that it's a huge citizen science project and everyone's working together," said Forest Service wildlife biologist Joe Delabruue, who led the effort to put up an antenna near Wrangell. Anybody can view an international map of Motus towers, plus the data that the towers are collecting, on motus.org.

The project started in Canada in 2012. Since then, it has grown to more than 1,500 stations in 34 countries across four continents.

The program has been used to identify areas of land that are important for conservation purposes, so that land management officials know what to prioritize. By tracking Swainson's thrushes using nanotags and Motus towers, researchers at McGill University in Montreal found that the city's Grand Parc

de L'Ouest is a significant stop on these birds' migratory route.

Bird conservation has become increasingly important in recent years, Delabruue explained. "Some of these populations are only half of what they used to be 50 years ago," he said. The rate of decline is "scary fast."

Though some nanotags can get small enough to record the movements of butterflies, the Kadin Island tower is focused specifically on tracking shorebirds, since it stands near the Stikine River flats — a popular feeding site for these species. "Any (tagged) bird that passes by within 15 kilometers of the antennas, it will detect it and the data is transferred to the Motus server," explained Delabruue.

As of Monday, the tower hadn't recorded any birds, but "it's a little early yet," he added. "They should be migrating soon."

The tags Motus tracks are a higher-tech version of the colored leg tags that Juneau-based Forest Service bird bander Gwen Baluss will be attaching to songbirds during the upcoming Stikine River Birding Fest. Colored leg tags are only identifiable by sight — Motus does not track them.

Wrangell's tower was funded by the Forest Service branch of international programs. Delabruue organized the effort and helped get the antenna installed, along with four other workers.

The tower has five antennae, powered by solar panels and a lithium battery.

Delabruue hopes the community will keep an eye on the tower for him, since it's a delicate scientific instrument standing out in the open. "It's OK to look at it, but don't touch it," he said. "And if you see anything that's wrong with it, you can report it back to me. That would be great."

Food chain

Continued from page 1

over its body," said Malachi Harrison, 9, who focused raptly on the lesson.

"That's a real common coloration here," Merritt responded to Malachi's observation. "This is a very aggressive predator on the bottom. They're very opportunistic and they'll eat just about anything that they can get in their mouth."

The lingcod will eat other fish, crab, shrimp and "any kind of bait you put on the bottom," he taught the class. Despite having a mouthful of sharp teeth, the predator swallowed the rockfish without chewing it.

Kids were instructed to get their iPads ready to start taking photos. Later in the day, they would use the photos in combination with a writing assignment to show what they had learned that morning.

Merritt sliced into the fish, reminding the students that he had to be mindful of the hook in the rockfish's mouth and the spikes on its back, emphasizing safety throughout the lesson. Opening the fish up, he pointed out that the lingcod was a female, showing the class the egg sack.

"There are, I don't know, 5,000 or 10,000 lingcod eggs there, but I'm trying to get to the stomach," he said. The anatomy lesson continued as he worked, pointing out that the fish was really fresh, which could be seen by the clear, blue color of its eyes. Merritt said the foggier the eyes, the less fresh the fish is.

Within moments, the head of the rockfish, hook and all, was exposed as he pulled it from the belly of the beast.

"This rockfish, if you notice, (hardly has) any wounds to the outside of the body," he said. "When the lingcod grabbed it, it just swallowed it whole and alive, by the way. Then this thing died down in its stomach. Lingcod don't chew their food the way we do. They don't chew it 32 times like you're supposed to."

The lesson then turned from biology to math, with Merritt asking his students to take a guess at the length of the bigger fish.

"Twenty-four inches," called out the first stu-



PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Fourth grade teacher Brian Merritt pulls a rockfish from the stomach of a lingcod on April 18.

dent. Others followed with 25, 18, 64, a yard, and finally, "Forty-five!"

Merritt pulled out a yardstick, which was shorter than the fish. He took two separate measurements, asked a student to do the math, and the total came to 45 inches. It weighed between 40 and 50 pounds, he said, with an additional three or four pounds added with the rockfish.

"They can hold a lot in their stomach," he told the children. "They are the pigs of the sea."

As the flesh of the fish was filleted for future use as bait, Merritt wrapped up the lesson. Kids were invited to touch the carcass, which many of the boys were happy to do.

Malachi, who plans to be a doctor like his father, said he learned a lot about the various parts of a fish.

"I think it's actually a good learning experience and pretty cool," he said. "Mr. Merritt has been doing a lot of fun and humorous things for us over this school year."

The lesson was a continuation of life in Southeast for Cyrus Yoder, 10, who thought it was fun.

"I love fishing with my dad and doing outdoor stuff," he said. "I think this was an awesome time to have fun with my classmates and learn more. ... I knew they ate their food whole, but not alive. ... Mr. Merritt's a great teacher."

Villarma retiring

Continued from page 1

program," she said. "And now I see their children in the same reading program that they went through. ... So now, I'm looking at them as adults and they're bringing their children in. It's kind of nice."

Not only kids benefit from the services Villarma has provided during her tenure. Adults, particularly elders, take advantage of the technological support the library provides, like helping people set up their iPads, create email accounts or access e-books.

She's also aided community members in historical and genealogical research by poring over microfilms of archival newspapers, searching for evidence of a death date or try-

ing to corroborate an anecdote from back in the day.

When she took the job in 1989, it seemed like a great way to ease back into the workforce while caring for her young family. Since then, as her family grew, the job "grew with my family," she said. "It was the perfect fit for me at that time."

Though Villarma looks forward to the freedom retirement will bring, "there's a lot of things I'll miss," she said. "Most of it is just the interaction with the community and helping people, because we are here to serve."

The borough is working to recruit and hire her successor before her official last day arrives on June 30. Villarma will be involved in this process, but

Borough Manager Jeff Good will have the final word in hiring decisions.

Villarma is sure that whoever becomes the new library director will "be just fine," she said. "I'm looking forward to seeing what they do, because they'll bring new, fresh ideas."

She plans to spend her retirement traveling, visiting her grandchildren, cooking tasty meals and working on the projects she postponed while she was employed.

Despite this busy schedule, she's "still an old-fashioned book person" and has no intention of leaving the library behind. In the coming years, she'll get to enjoy the library's offerings without the pressure of running the show.

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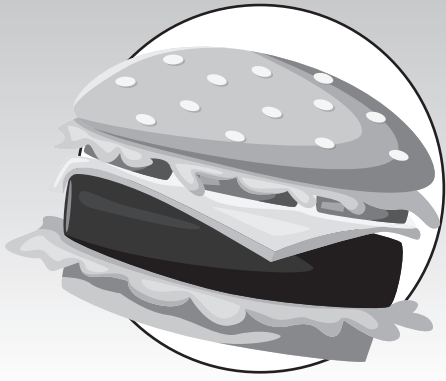
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Last year's Southeast salmon harvest totaled 69% of 10-year average

State predicts weak pink harvest this year at half 10-year average

By ANNA LAFFREY
Ketchikan Daily News

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game announced this month that commercial salmon fishermen across all gear groups caught a total 31.7 million salmon in Southeast Alaska during 2022.

Last year's all-species harvest was low, Fish and Game reported. The 2022 catch amounts to 69% of the average harvest over the past 10 years of 46.1 million salmon.

The Southeast salmon harvest has been erratic in the past few years. The 2022 catch of 31.7 million was about half of the 2021 catch of 58.9 million and about double the 2020 catch of 14.6 million salmon.

Fish and Game attributes some of the change in overall salmon harvest to the fluctuating pink salmon catch. The 18.3 million pink salmon caught in 2022 accounted for 58% of the overall Southeast salmon catch last year, according to Fish and Game.

With its 2022 catch report, Fish and Game released predictions for the 2023 pink harvest in Southeast. The department predicts fishermen will harvest 19 million pinks this year, about a 4% increase from last year.

According to Fish and Game, 19 million would still make for a "weak" harvest or about half the average harvest over the past 10 years of 33 million pinks.

Pink salmon are known to spawn after exactly two years. The pink harvest is typically higher in Southeast during odd years as stronger populations return to their spawning grounds.

A forecast of 19 million pink salmon for 2023 would be a significant drop from the previous odd-year harvest in 2021 of 48.5 million fish and is only 39% of the average harvest over the past 10 odd-numbered years, according to the department's April report.

Fish and Game said that it

builds its pink salmon harvest estimates for Southeast Alaska from National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration trawl surveys that count juvenile pink salmon in Chatham and Icy straits in June and July. NOAA's Southeast Alaska Coastal Monitoring surveys also track water temperatures and the "effects of climate and nearshore ocean conditions on year-class strength of salmon and ecologically related species," according to Fish and Game.

Statewide, the department predicts a 2023 commercial salmon harvest of 189 million salmon across Alaska waters, including 122 million pinks, 48 million sockeye, 16 million chum salmon and 3 million coho.

The all-species salmon harvest across Alaska in 2022 was approximately 163.2 million fish, Fish and Game reported this month.

Statewide, the 2022 harvest included 69.5 million pink, 75.5 million sockeye, 16 million chum, 1.9 million coho and 319,000 chinook, Fish and Game reported. Southeast fishermen harvested 18.3 million pink, 10.5 million chum, 1.5 million coho, 1.2 million sockeye and 265,601 chinook salmon in 2022.

According to Fish and Game, purse seine fishermen in all areas of Southeast caught a total of 19 million salmon last year: 14.7 million pinks, 3.5 million chum, 629,000 sockeye, 162,000 coho and 27,000 chinook.

Southeast Alaska trollers caught 2.2 million salmon across all fishery areas and openings last year. Hand troll fishermen caught 32,000 salmon, while power troll fishermen caught 2.1 million salmon. Altogether, trollers caught 1.05 million chum, 854,000 coho, 197,000 chinook, 79,000 pinks and 2,000 sockeye.

The total Southeast drift gillnet salmon catch for 2022 topped 3.6 million, according to Fish and Game. Drift gillnetters took 2.39 million chum, 633,000 pinks and 480,000 sockeye.

Borough to spruce up downtown in volunteer 'community collaboration'

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

It's spring cleaning season, and while individual households may wash their baseboards and dust their blinds, it isn't just private residences that benefit from a thorough seasonal cleanse — Wrangell's public spaces need love too.

Next month, Parks and Recreation is hosting a "Community Collaboration" event, where all borough departments will work alongside residents to clean and beautify the downtown area.

The event will kick off on May 12 at the downtown pavilion at 9 a.m., though volunteers are welcome to drop in and out until it ends at 3 p.m. The pavilion will serve as a "command center," where people can check in, log their hours, sign up for tasks and enjoy refreshments.

Tracking hours helps the Parks and Recreation Department understand how much time and how many volunteers it takes to complete the project.

During the first borough cleanup in 2021, roughly 60 volunteers worked a combined 127 hours on Saturday and 244 hours on Friday; in 2022 the effort was smaller but more focused, with around 20 volunteers working on garden beds for 62 hours.

Workers can choose from a variety of jobs, like refreshing garden beds, washing benches and trash cans, cutting grass, weeding along the sidewalks, picking up debris and waste and "getting (the area) looking pretty for the springtime and summertime activities," said Parks and Recreation Director Lucy Robinson.

In past years, she's seen the community "working incredibly hard, asking questions, really caring about what they were doing and the work they were putting in. It just made me really proud of our community."

It's easy to criticize overgrown bushes or trash on the sidewalks, but it's far more rewarding to take action to make beautify the community, she

added. "We can all work together to do it. Truly, it's not the responsibility of any one person or any one department. It's all of our responsibilities of how our community looks."

The borough will provide tools, but residents are welcome to bring their own rakes, shovels, gardening gloves and other items just in case.

The event is not to be confused with the upcoming April 29 community cleanup, which starts at Evergreen Elementary at 8:30 a.m. That cleanup focuses on trash removal — volunteers will roam all over the island filling their bags.

The May 12 effort involves a wider variety of tasks, starts at the downtown pavilion and focuses on enhancing the downtown area specifically, rather than the whole island. The April 29 event has been going on annually since the 1980s; the May 12 borough-sponsored event is a more recent development.

Parks and Recreation is leading the effort, but all borough departments are helping out, particularly Public Works.

But just because there are two community cleanup days doesn't mean residents have to pick one or the other. Both perform different yet essential roles in keeping Wrangell in peak condition. It is "so fantastic to see the people of Wrangell coming together for the common good of just sprucing up our town," said Robinson. "For me, I love seeing action-oriented, solution-focused activity in a group setting."

And if you can't make either of the group cleanup times, Parks and Recreation is holding a "love our parks" challenge from April 23 to May 11. During that time, community members are invited to take pictures of themselves cleaning parks and public spaces, then either post them to the challenge's Facebook page or send them to recreation@wrangell.com.

For more information, contact Parks and Recreation at 907-874-2444.

Diamonds shine



Delilah Roane, 11, sweeps a dugout last Saturday as part of the volunteer effort to clean up the baseball diamonds at Volunteer Park. The batting cages were weeded and raked, while the fields were dragged to pick up as much debris as possible. An exhibition alumni softball game last Sunday took advantage of the freshened-up fields and Little League opening ceremonies begin this Saturday.

PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/
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New business brings colorful art to customers' fingertips

By CAROLEINE JAMES
Sentinel reporter

Whether you prefer dainty French tips or long metallic claws, dayglo colors or classy neutrals, Wrangell's newest nail technician is ready to help you manifest your wildest manicure dreams.

Recently certified Luba Lofftus is offering manicures from her home studio and will soon be sharing space with the Stone Cold Fox hair salon downtown.

I visited Lofftus in her home to learn more about Happy Girl Nails — her forthcoming business — and to watch her expertise in action.

Lofftus does nails at a specially designed table, surrounded by potted orchids and two large windows. A steady stream of R&B hits plays in the background.

After sanitizing my hands, she got to work on my cuticles with a pair of electronic, whirring files — one pointy and one round. Though these implements looked vaguely threatening, they were pain-free, and buffed my cuticles until they were as smooth and even as a doll's.

Then, she applied several coats of black polish, which she cured to a hard, glossy finish using an ultraviolet lamp. When the look was complete, I was one step closer to embodying the aesthetic of my personal style icon, Lydia Deetz from "Beetlejuice."

Lofftus passed her certification exam in Anchorage earlier

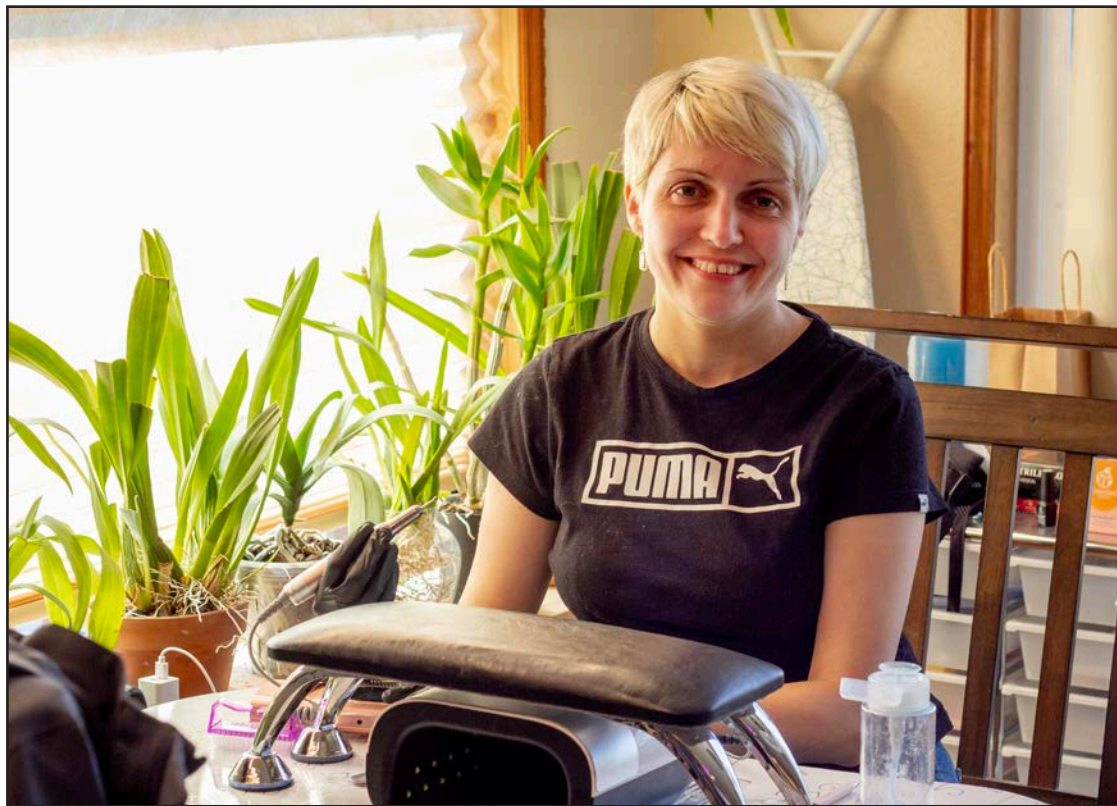


PHOTO BY CAROLEINE JAMES/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Luba Lofftus will soon be sharing space with the Stone Cold Fox hair salon downtown. Even before opening Happy Girl Nails, Lofftus enjoyed creating art — she is a painter and makes custom dolls.

this month and is waiting for her official license to arrive. To prepare for the exam, she took an online course and completed hours of practical training to ensure that her manicures are both beautiful and safe for clients.

Nail art can be a risky business if you put your hands in the hands of anyone other than a trained professional. Much of the instruction Lofftus received focused on preventing infections and communicable skin

diseases. The photos that accompanied these lessons were gruesome enough to scare any up-and-coming nail tech into a strict sterilization regimen.

Lofftus wears gloves and sanitizes her tools and hands. "It's really important for me to keep people safe," she said.

Even before becoming a nail tech, Lofftus — a self-identified perfectionist — enjoyed creating art. In addition to manicuring, she is a painter and makes

custom dolls. "I'm quite an arty person," she said.

After spending about seven years caring for her children, she was looking for a new career path. "I realized that I want to do something with my hands, that's going to make me feel good ... that's going to be joyful for me," she said. Nail art was the perfect solution, fulfilling both Lofftus' desire for a creative outlet and Wrangell's need for a manicurist.

The response from her clients so far has been overwhelmingly positive. Seeing people's reactions to her work is one of her favorite parts of the job, "especially when people are so excited, they're going to let you know like 50 times," she said.

Since she started working toward her license in January, she's given practice manicures to countless customers. Some opt for gel polish like mine, which maintains the original shape of the nail but is less chip-prone than do-it-yourself color. Others opt for the artificial nail, a hybrid between gel and acrylic that is "like armor" for your fingertips. This manicure, which can extend nails beyond their actual length, is more along the lines of something you'd find on Cardi B's or Selena Gomez's Instagram.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, she can also just shape, trim and beautify people's natural nails without adding any colors or designs.

Lofftus has big plans for the future of Happy Girl Nails. After she moves into the brick-and-mortar Front Street location, she'll continue gaining new skills and certifications and learning new techniques. She also hopes to invest in more luxurious chairs for herself and her clients, plus eventually, a footbath and other supplies for pedicures.

But anyone dreaming of showing off their perfectly polished toenails will likely have to wait until next flip-flop season. "Right now, I just want to focus on hands," Lofftus said.

Stikine River Birding Festival

2023 Schedule of Events



Friday – April 28

6:30 p.m. – John Marzluff: Think Like a Raven
THINK LIKE A RAVEN is a culmination of Marzluff's collaborative work detailing the intertwined lives of ravens, wolves, pumas, and the people that visit and live around Yellowstone.

The talk's arc follows the seasons of Yellowstone and the scientific journey he undertook to decode the mysteries of raven life.
Location: Evergreen Elementary School Gym

Saturday – April 29

7-9 a.m. City Park Bird Banding
Bird bander Gwen Baluss will mistnet and place bands on songbirds to track their migratory flight. Stop by at any time to watch!
Location: City Park

8:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Wrangell Community Clean-Up
Help clean up our local community for the benefit of people and wildlife. Lunch at noon. Sponsored by WCA IGAP & Paula Rak.
Location: Evergreen Elementary School Gym

10 a.m. Angerman's Inc. Golf Tournament
Sign up by 9:30 a.m. Cost: \$25 cash entry fee
Location: Muskeg Meadows Golf Course

2 p.m. International Biologists Presentations
Biologists from Chile & Mexico will share their experiences with shorebird conservation from their respective countries.
Location: Nolan Center Classroom

3-5 p.m. Traditional Indigenous Plant Walk
Join Meda DeWitt in exploring the beautiful and diverse ecosystem by the nature trail while learning about traditional Indigenous plants in the area. You'll discover how to identify plants in the region, their uses and traditional healing concepts.
Location: Volunteer Park Nature Trail

6 p.m. Ducks Unlimited Fundraiser Banquet at the Stikine Inn
Join DU for Raffles, Auction & Dinner. Contact Denny (907-660-7171) or Keene (907-874-3877) for tickets. \$50 per person.
Location: Stikine Inn Restaurant

Sunday – April 30

10 a.m.-noon Salve Making Workshop
After learning about medicinal plants on Saturday's walk, join Meda DeWitt for a workshop making botanical salves.
Location: Middle School Home Ec. Room/Kitchen

10 a.m. Angerman's Inc. Golf Tournament
Sign up by 9:30 a.m. Cost: \$25 cash entry fee
Location: Muskeg Meadows Golf Course

4 p.m. Youth Dance Recital
Watch ballet students perform.
Location: Evergreen Elementary School Gym

Friday – May 5

Story Trail Scavenger Hunt
Go for a walk on the nature trail short loop and read a bird themed book along the way. Keep an eye out for prizes on the trail which you can keep. Will be set up by 10 am Friday, May 5th. Story trail will remain up through the weekend.
Location: Volunteer Park Nature Trail

Saturday – May 6

7 a.m. Early Birds Walk

Join Bonnie Demerjian on a morning bird walk to identify birds by sight & sound. All ages welcome!
Location: Muskeg Meadows Golf Course

10 a.m.-1 p.m. Wrangell Community Market
Vendors offer their homemade crafts, food, and more!
Location: Nolan Center

10-11 a.m. Critter Craft: Bird House Building
Stop by and make your very own bird house during the Community Market! Remember to bring your own hammer.
Sponsored by Angerman's Inc.
Location: Outside of Nolan Center



Tour operator sets up shop indoors



PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Mia Wiederspohn, left, makes a purchase at Breakaway Adventures last Friday at the grand opening of the tour company's brick-and-mortar location, while Jaynee Fritzing works behind the counter. The shop will be open 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday year-round, said owner Spenser Stavee. The storefront will sometimes be open on Sundays, depending on cruise ship schedules. Along with clothing, food and souvenirs, shoppers can rent an electric bike or book jet boat tours.

Sweet Tides to reopen Thursday after delay

Sentinel staff

After being delayed one week and one day to reopen, Sweet Tides will again welcome customers on Thursday.

The bakery has been closed since early March to expand its storefront and offer specialty coffees in a café atmosphere.

Due to a backlog in permitting through the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, it was unknown how long the business would be delayed in reopening.

Owner Shawna Bunes posted on Facebook last week that the permits were approved the day after a Sentinel story reported she didn't know if it would take a week or month to get the permits.

"This letter serves as approval of your plan review of the expansion. You should receive your new FN-1 permit in the

mail shortly, but until then, this letter serves as your approval to operate," the April 20 letter from the DEC reads.

Sweet Tides will open at 6 a.m. on Thursday and remain open until 2 p.m. Regular business hours after that will be from 6 a.m. to noon.

"For the first week, we will only be serving pastries and coffee, but we will also have breads and such in the bread case," Bunes said. "We will continue expanding the menu and hours as we get more staff."

The bakery's coffee flavors and offerings will be limited, she said, as the focus is still on the bakery side of things.

"We are very excited to be back open and serving Wrangell," Bunes said. "We have missed seeing everyone's smiling faces."

State budget battle comes down to school funding and dividend

BY SEAN MAGUIRE
Anchorage Daily News

The budget battle between the Alaska House of Representatives, the Senate and the governor is shaping up as a fight between the size of the Permanent Fund dividend and a proposed increase to public school spending after years of flat funding.

Dozens of education advocates rallied on the Alaska State Capitol steps last Thursday evening in support of a substantial increase to the state's per-student funding formula. The formula has not been significantly increased since 2017, and school administrators have reported struggling to balance their budgets with rising costs and inflation.

The bipartisan Senate majority caucus named increasing public school funding as one of its top priorities at the start of the legislative session in January.

A bill making its way through the Senate would increase the formula by \$1,000 this year, about 17% — at a cost of \$257 million — and by an additional \$348 next year. Supporters of that figure say it would cover the costs of inflation since 2017, and provide a significant investment in Alaska's public schools.

The House has advanced a budget that would increase the formula by \$680, about 11%, at a cost of \$175 million, with nothing additional the next year.

Senate President Gary Stevens, a Kodiak Republican, said not all members of the 17-member bipartisan majority support the \$1,000 figure included in Senate Bill 52. But he said that the Senate majority would continue advocating for a school funding increase

before the session ends, scheduled for May 17.

Without a permanent increase to the school formula, the increase could become a one-time boost just for the fiscal year that starts July 1.

"We're going to do the very best we can to get the most we can for education — within reason — and in the foundation formula, if we can," Stevens said Thursday.

School administrators from across Alaska testified before the Senate Finance Committee last week in support of raising the funding formula. The Yupiit School District, which has 450 students across three schools in remote communities near Bethel, has struggled to balance its budget and improve outcomes with a 40% to 50% increase in fuel costs.

The Kenai Peninsula Borough School District is projected to show a \$13 million budget deficit next year, which has resulted in layoffs for district support staff, said Superintendent Clayton Holland. He said that if school funding was not increased, the equivalent of 78 educators would be sacked.

The Republican-led House majority caucus has expressed skepticism about approving a permanent school-funding increase this year. Some conservative members of the caucus want to further study the state's school funding formula, and have expressed doubts that more spending will necessarily lead to better outcomes for Alaska's students, who have regularly tested in the bottom of the nation in standardized tests.

Palmer Republican DeLena Johnson, who manages the operating budget in the House Finance Committee, said she thinks it's unlikely that a permanent increase would pass

through the Legislature this year. Instead, the House majority approved the one-time \$175 million school funding boost. But the money would be paid from state savings, which presents a political problem.

Drawing from the \$2 billion Constitutional Budget Reserve — the state's main savings account — requires a three-quarters approval vote by lawmakers in both legislative chambers. That vote failed to get enough support from the Democrat-dominated House minority caucus, which wants to see a permanent increase, not a one-year boost.

There could be another vote if the draw from savings is included in the final budget bill negotiated between the House and Senate.

Education advocates have long said that one-time school funding increases are not predictable and do not easily allow for long-term investment.

Paying more for education

and covering the annual PFD are in competition for limited state dollars.

The House budget includes a \$2,700 Permanent Fund dividend, following the 50-50 model that shares Permanent Fund earnings 50-50 between the dividend and public services. The House PFD would cost more than \$1.7 billion and create a more than \$600 million deficit in the state budget, depending on oil prices.

House Speaker Cathy Tilton, a Wasilla Republican, said a \$1,700 PFD is "a big leap" for her and some members of her caucus who had supported an even larger dividend. Most members of the Republican-led caucus are OK with drawing on savings to cover spending.

The Senate has indicated support for a \$1,300 dividend and a spending plan that does not require drawing from savings. But members of Senate leadership acknowledged that there will likely need to be com-

promise with the House during final budget negotiations.

"It seems right now that the big issue is between funding education and the PFD and how that balances out," Stevens said April 18. "They are interrelated in our budget, and if we have a very high PFD, there's no money left for education."

Gov. Mike Dunleavy could also be a factor in the level of additional education spending and the size of the dividend in the final budget.

"The governor acknowledges an increase in education funding is needed to reduce the impact of inflation. Discussions are underway with lawmakers on the amount of any ... increase," said Shannon Mason, a spokesperson for the governor's office, in a prepared statement Thursday.

Multiple lawmakers said that Dunleavy has called for the Legislature to approve the House's \$2,700 dividend during closed-door meetings.

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Legislator wants to limit interest rate on high-cost payday loans

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Alaskans who need cash quickly can go to a payday lender for a short-term loan of up to \$500, handing over a check or access to their bank account to cover the entire loan repayment just as soon as they get paid at work or their pension arrives.

But it will cost them plenty for that fast cash, as much as 15% interest on the debt every two weeks.

A freshman Republican legislator from Anchorage wants to put an end to what he calls “these predatory loans.” Payday lenders “take advantage of the dire situations of individuals,” said Rep. Stanley Wright.

“A lot of folks fall into this trap” as they struggle to pay rent and utilities, buy food or get their vehicle repaired — all necessities in life — the lawmaker said.

State law allows up to two renewals of a payday loan, with the 15% interest charge added on at each renewal.

“In Alaska, the average payday loan is \$440, with a 421% annual percentage interest rate,” according to the Alaska Public Interest Research Group. “The

high cost of these short-term loans leaves many families trapped in a cycle of chronic debt and poverty.”

Wright’s legislation, House Bill 145, would limit payday lenders to the same maximum annual interest charge of 36% allowed under state law for most other small loans in Alaska.

An average of 15,000 Alaskans a year take out a payday loan, almost one in 50 residents. On average, each borrower takes out more than five such loans a year, according to AKPIRG, an almost 50-year-old nonprofit committed to protecting consumers.

An estimated 12 million Americans a year take out a payday loan, according to a report from the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Federal law limits the annual interest rate to 36% on loans to active-duty military and their families and bans the use of preauthorized draws against a military member’s paycheck to cover a loan.

As of January, 18 states and the District of Columbia have enacted an annual interest rate cap of 36% or less on payday loans, according to the Center for Responsible Lending, a nationwide nonprofit.

The problem of high-interest, small-dollar cash loans is particularly acute around military bases, said Wright, a U.S. Navy combat veteran 2009-2015. His House district borders the largest military installation in Alaska, Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

“If you go to any base, you have pawn shops, liquor stores and payday lenders,” he said in an interview last week.

The House Labor and Commerce Committee has held two hearings on the bill, with more work and possible amendments expected this week or next. The schedule presents a likely insurmountable hurdle for the legislation to make it through several committees in the House and Senate and reach the floor for a vote before the adjournment deadline of May 17.

The bill would remain in play for possible action in 2023 in the second half of the two-year legislative session.

Alan Budahl, executive director of Lutheran Social Services of Alaska, spoke in support of the bill at last Friday’s hearing before the House Labor and Commerce Committee, calling it “a pressing issue” for vulnerable members of the community.

The social services agency receives a lot of calls from people trying to cope with the high-interest loans, Budahl said, noting that the costly borrowing disproportionately hurts low-income Alaskans who may lack other options for borrowing to pay their bills.

Limiting the interest rate is not a good solution, Noel Lowe, an owner of Alaska Fast Cash, told committee members. Lenders need to charge a high rate to protect their businesses from the high-risk loans, he said, noting that more than 25% of payday borrowers default on their loan.

Imposing a lower rate under state law would constrain lending and “take this product away from people in Alaska who need it,” said Lowe, who told the committee that his operation is one of the largest payday lenders in the state.

The problem of any predatory lending is not coming from local pawn shops and payday lenders, but rather online lenders based out of state or even outside the country, he added.

“We need to carefully consider the testimony from Mr. Lowe,” North Pole Republican Rep. Mike Prax said toward the end of the committee hearing.

E-cigarette use by young Alaskans more than tripled between 2016-2021

The Alaska Beacon
and Wrangell Sentinel

Alaska posted the nation’s highest rate of increase in electronic cigarette use by young adults from 2016 to 2021, according to a report tracking patterns in all 50 states.

The rate of e-cigarette use by Alaskans in that age group more than tripled, from 4.8% in 2019 — the lowest rate in the nation at the time — to 15.8% in 2021, according to the report.

The sponsor of a bill in the Alaska Legislature to impose a tax on e-cigarettes, vape sticks and other electronic smoking devices has said the tax is intended to deter young people from vaping, same as the state tax on tobacco cigarettes is intended to deter smokers.

The recent report on e-cigarette use was compiled by HealthAdvisor, a company owned by insurance marketer Tranzact. The report uses data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.

Nationally, e-cigarette use, also known as vaping, has increased dramatically for young adults, according to the report. In 2016, 9.6% of Americans between 18 and 24 years old used e-cigarettes; that jumped to 19.8% in 2021, roughly doubling.

The HealthAdvisor report has findings similar to those in the 2022 Alaska Tobacco Facts update released in December by the Alaska Department of Health. That report, which focused on a younger age group, said that about a quarter

of Alaska high school students regularly used e-cigarettes in 2019 and nearly half had tried vaping at least once.

Senate Bill 89 would raise the legal age for purchase of e-cigarette products in Alaska from the current 19 to 21, matching federal law. It also would impose Alaska’s first state tax on e-cigarette and vape products at 25% of the retail price. Although several municipalities around the state impose taxes on e-cigarette products, the state has not changed its tobacco tax since 2006, a time before vaping products became widely used.

The bill is sponsored by Senate President Gary Stevens. It moved from the Senate Labor and Commerce Committee last Friday to the Senate Finance Committee, still facing a lot of steps to win legislative passage before the adjournment deadline of May 17.

Under the legislation, the fine for underage possession of a vape product would be a maximum of \$150. The Labor and Commerce Committee added a provision so that a judge could offer a defendant, in lieu of paying a fine, the option of participating in a “tobacco educational program.”

Lawmakers last year passed a similar bill that was also sponsored by Stevens, but Gov. Mike Dunleavy vetoed it, citing opposition to the tax provision.

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

Legislators amend bill, making it easier for schools to teach financial literacy

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Rather than requiring a specific course in financial literacy for high school graduation, lawmakers have amended the legislation so that school districts could incorporate the same information into one or more classes as long as the material is covered.

The amended Senate bill would require school districts to teach students how to open and manage an account at a financial institution, prepare a budget and manage debt and credit cards. It also would require districts teach students about loans, insurance, taxes, financial fraud, retirement accounts, scholarships and other financial aid, and the financial implications of holding shares in an Alaska Native corporation.

But instead of rolling it all into one course, schools could cover the subjects in other classes, as long as the program’s hours of instruction are “equivalent to a

one-half-credit-hour course.”

The bill’s sponsor, Anchorage Sen. Bill Wielechowski, said he understands the burden of requiring a new, dedicated course, particularly in rural school districts.

“As long as the concepts are taught,” the senator said, the amended version of Senate Bill 99 still meets the intent of his original legislation.

Wrangell High School already incorporates some aspects of financial literacy in its career planning and job-skills classes, and seniors also take economics, according to the school district.

The Senate Education Committee amended Wielechowski’s bill on April 19, sending it to the Finance Committee. From there, the next stop would be a vote in the full Senate before going to the House for its consideration. Bills that do not pass both the House and Senate by the May 19 adjournment deadline will come back next year for a second shot at winning approval.

The requirement that districts teach financial literacy would take effect in the 2025-2026 school year, and students would be required to pass the classes to earn a high school diploma starting in 2026.

In introducing the bill, Wielechowski said it is important to teach students “to avoid common financial pitfalls and manage their money successfully.”

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WRANGELL SENTINEL

Senators move legislation to help low-income Alaskans with legal services

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Legislation that could boost state funding to assist more low-income Alaskans needing help with civil law issues has advanced through its second state Senate committee and is waiting for a vote by the full chamber.

The measure would more than double a source of state funding that could be directed each year to the Alaska Legal Services Corp., a 56-year-old nonprofit legal aid organization that helps several thousand Alaskans a year with domestic violence, family law, housing, elder advocacy and other cases.

"They provide absolutely critical legal services," the bill's sponsor, Anchorage freshman Sen. Forrest Dunbar, told members of the Senate Finance Committee on April 12.

Senate Bill 104 passed through the Finance Commit-

tee without opposition on April 18.

"We have to turn away hundreds of families every year," due to lack of staff and funding, Nikole Nelson, executive director of Alaska Legal Services, told committee members April 12.

"To me, it's a travesty that these people are not being served," responded Fairbanks Sen. Click Bishop, who signed on as a co-sponsor of the legislation.

"We are facing an enormous crisis" among Alaskans who lack any assistance in handling civil issues, Nelson said, listing domestic violence victims, grandparents trying to enroll children in school or for medical care, and veterans waiting on their benefits among the issues the nonprofit helps with.

"For all these problems, there is a legal solution," she said.

Dunbar's measure would direct that 25% of filing fees paid to the court system each year go into a civil legal

services fund which the Legislature could appropriate to the aid organization. Current law directs 10% of filing fees to the fund.

At the higher rate, about \$750,000 a year would be available as a grant to Alaska Legal Services instead of the current level of about \$300,000. Annual appropriation of the money would be subject to legislative approval, and Dunbar acknowledges that winning support among his colleagues for including the additional spending in the state budget could be harder than gaining approval for the legislation.

Alaska Legal Services, with offices in a dozen communities, including Juneau, Ketchikan and Sitka, serves about 7,000 people a year. Its 2021 budget was about \$6.5 million, with federal funds comprising the single-largest revenue source.

The agency doesn't help with criminal cases, only civil.

Bill would amend state corporate taxes to capture more from digital businesses

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

The state should change its tax code to increase corporate income tax collections from out-of-state businesses that sell goods or services to Alaskans, particularly digitized services, according to a legislator promoting the revisions.

"The world has changed," said Anchorage Sen. Bill Wielechowski. "We're no longer bricks and mortar." His legislation would amend Alaska's income tax code to ensure that online and digital sales are included in calculating how much of a company's U.S. profit was made in Alaska and should be subject to corporate tax.

A Department of Revenue official testified last week that the legislation could generate between \$25 million and \$65 million a year for the state.

The bill received its first hearing in the Senate Finance Committee on April

17. No other hearings were scheduled as of early this week.

Under current law, a multistate business calculates its income and taxes owed in Alaska based on the percentage of its sales, property and payroll in the state. If, for example, 20% of its three factors are in Alaska, it would pay corporate income tax to the state on 20% of its U.S. profits.

Wielechowski's Senate Bill 122 would change state statute to ensure that all sales into Alaska would count toward the tax-calculation formula, even if the company has no presence in the state. The legislation would declare the point of sale as the delivery or use of the goods or services in Alaska, not the location where the out-of-state business is located.

"Why shouldn't we (Alaska) capture a portion" of the income for taxes, he said in an interview last week.

The state adopted the three-factor tax apportionment formula in 1970, when no one could have known the growth and volume of online and digital sales, the senator said. "We're losing revenue."

Most states already have amended their tax codes to include income from online and digital sales in calculating a corporation's tax liability, Wielechowski said.

In addition, for highly digitized businesses, their corporate income tax liability would be determined solely on the basis of their sales, dropping payroll and property from the formula.

"Through the internet, companies can offer goods and services for sale in Alaska without maintaining any property or employees in the state," Wielechowski said. Taxing predominantly digital businesses based on their sales and excluding the other two factors

would allow Alaska to collect taxes it otherwise would not receive.

The legislation deals only with calculating a corporation's income and profit earned from sales of goods or services into Alaska — it does not touch sales tax on deliveries into the state, which is up to municipalities.

Wrangell is among almost four dozen cities and boroughs that have joined a cooperative effort managed by the Alaska Municipal League to collect sales taxes on online orders delivered into their communities. The program has been around since 2019, and has grown to now collect about \$20 million a year for municipalities, municipal league executive director Nils Andreassen reported April 20.

Wrangell collected about \$200,000 in sales tax on online sales delivered into town in the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2022.

Severe staff shortage at state office delays approval of occupational licenses for months

By JAMES BROOKS
Alaska Beacon

After waiting six months for a license to operate, an Anchorage psychologist asked Senate Majority Leader Cathy Giessel for help.

But when the Anchorage Republican called the licensing office, she was greeted by voicemail. The person in charge of answering the phones had quit and wasn't replaced.

"Professional licenses are required to get people to work. That division doesn't have enough people to even answer the phone," Giessel said last month.

That person wasn't alone — last year, the state reported that 39 occupational license-examiner jobs were vacant, almost one in five people assigned to that job statewide. That's actually an improvement: In December 2021, fully a third of the state's licensing examiner jobs were vacant.

As a result, professionals licensed by the state are reporting monthslong waits for new permits or renewals, slowing businesses statewide. Some boards and commissions have voted to take emergency action, extending existing licenses longer than normally allowed by state law.

Before joining the Legislature this year, Soldotna Rep. Justin Ruffridge was chair of the state Board of Pharmacy.

That board processes renewals in June; for the past two cycles, the board had to extend expirations through September.

"I would say staffing shortages are probably the biggest hurdle to overcome," he said. "Turnover is pretty high in the department and they are working pretty hard to actually unify some of those licensing issues. At the moment, though, it still is a bit of a hurdle. I still hear a few

complaints from people about weeks of time waiting for licensing and things of that nature, but I know that I'm pretty confident that that's gonna get worked out."

To address the problem, Gov. Mike Dunleavy has proposed a major increase in the budget for the state's office of professional licensing, and lawmakers appear ready to approve that request.

In a budget with few increases in state spending, it's a notable exception.

In February, Dunleavy requested 12 new licensing positions at a cost of \$1.5 million. Legislators are in the final weeks of working on the budget before adjournment.

The state's licensing branch

has been squeezed by more than just a staffing shortfall. Over the past 10 years, state figures show the number of licenses issued by the Division of Corporations, Business and Professional Licensing has risen by 64%.

While some of that increase was caused by a growing number of workers, it's also been caused by regulatory spread.

In fiscal year 2012, the division licensed 98 professions. Ten years later, it licensed 118.

During the COVID-19 pandemic emergency, the licensing situation was so dire that the state used emergency rules to suspend many kinds of health care licenses, an act that allowed out-of-state

workers to arrive and treat Alaskans.

The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that just under 23% of full-time workers in the United States work under some kind of occupational license or certificate. Alaska falls on the lower end of the regulatory scale among the 50 states.

Alaska licenses funeral directors but not building inspectors, manicurists but not private investigators.

Lawmakers are proposing additional occupations come under state approval, potentially adding to the workload of state licensing officials. This year, legislators have introduced legislation that would regulate associate counselors,

naturopaths and interior designers.

Some state licenses are mandated by the federal government, Ruffridge noted. As online pharmacies grew in popularity, Congress passed legislation that mandates oversight.

"Not everything's local anymore. Before it was like, 'I'm your pharmacist, I'm in your town. My pharmacy is licensed, and I'm licensed, and I'm just here,'" he said. "And now a pharmacy in Florida is offering services in Alaska, and it's gotten very big."

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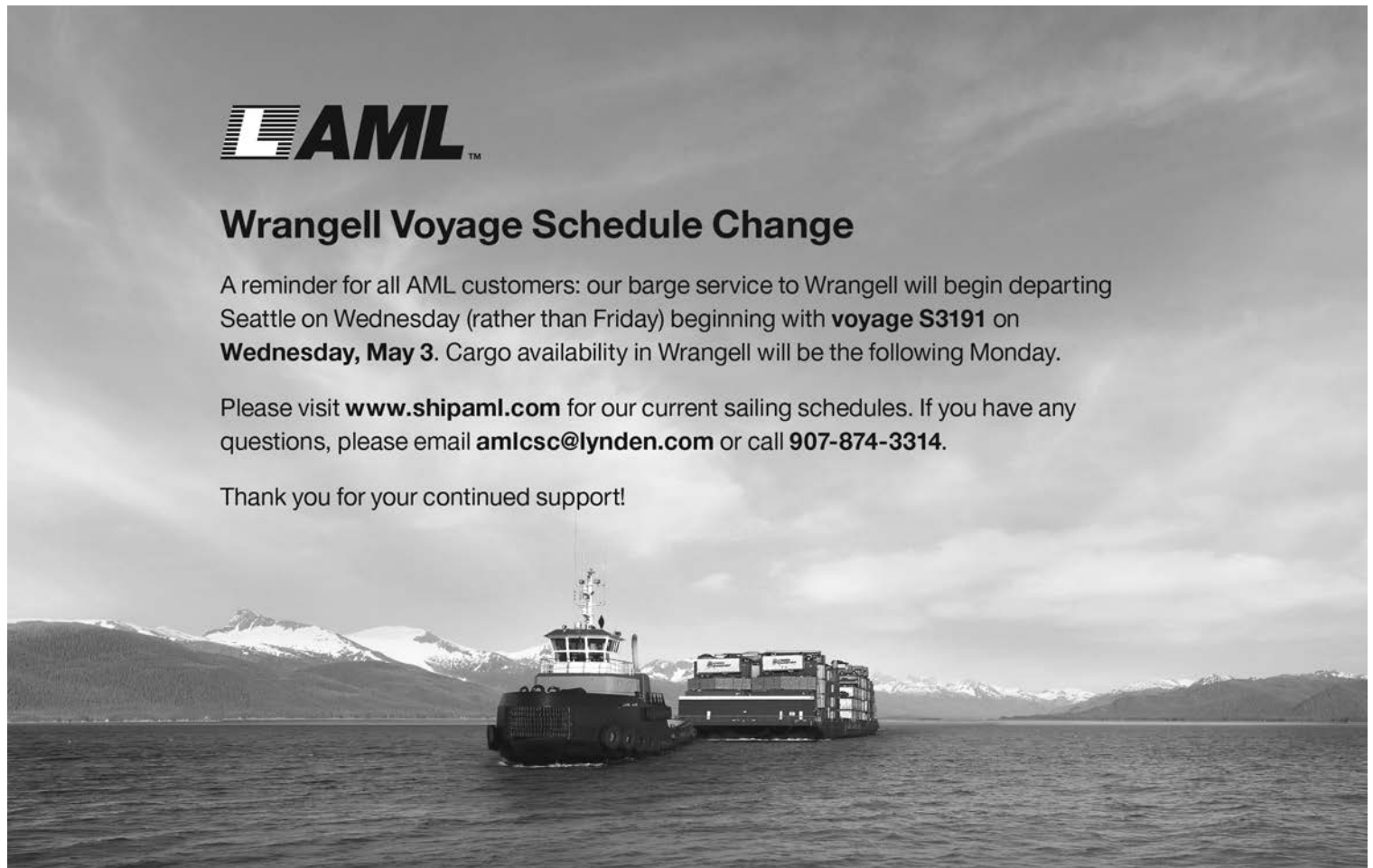


Wrangell Voyage Schedule Change

A reminder for all AML customers: our barge service to Wrangell will begin departing Seattle on Wednesday (rather than Friday) beginning with **voyage S3191** on **Wednesday, May 3**. Cargo availability in Wrangell will be the following Monday.

Please visit www.shipaml.com for our current sailing schedules. If you have any questions, please email amlcsc@lynden.com or call **907-874-3314**.

Thank you for your continued support!



Alaska Airlines will remove boarding pass kiosks at airports

Associated Press

Alaska Airlines is pushing passengers to load boarding passes on their smartphones by removing airport kiosks that can be used to print the passes.

The airline has removed kiosks at nine airports so far, and is telling customers to use Alaska's app to download boarding passes or print them at home.

Alaska executives said Thursday that their goal is to reduce crowding at check-in areas and get passengers to security checkpoints faster. They discussed the issue Thursday during a call with Wall Street analysts to go

over first-quarter financial results.

The Seattle-based airline lost \$142 million, as it was weighed down by higher fuel and labor costs during what is traditionally its weakest quarter of the year.

Getting rid of kiosks is not expected to affect Alaska's financials one way or the other, although CEO Ben Minicucci said it will help the airline grow without adding more airport space.

Chief Commercial Officer Andrew Harrison said Alaska is already seeing an increase in the number of travelers who check in for their flights and have their boarding pass before arriving at the airport.

"What you're going to see in the future are people only needing to check bags that are going to be milling around in the lobby," he said.

About half of Alaska's customers check a bag, which they can do using airline-provided iPads instead of kiosks, officials said. They also say that, in a pinch, airline agents can print boarding passes for customers who arrive without one and don't have a smartphone.

Alaska plans to remove kiosks at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport next month and at all of its locations by the end of next year.

Hawaii lawmakers consider charging visitors to use parks and trails

BY AUDREY MCAVOY
Associated Press

HONOLULU — Repairing coral reefs after boats run aground. Shielding native forest trees from a killer fungus outbreak. Patrolling waters for swimmers harassing dolphins and turtles.

Taking care of Hawaii's unique natural environment takes time, people and money. Now Hawaii wants tourists to help pay for it, especially because growing numbers are traveling to the islands to enjoy the beauty of its outdoors — including some lured by dramatic vistas they've seen on social media.

"All I want to do, honestly, is to make travelers accountable and have the capacity to help pay for the impact that they have," Gov. Josh Green said earlier this year. "We get between nine and 10 million visitors a year (but) we only have 1.4 million people living here. Those 10 million travelers should be helping us sustain our environment."

Hawaii lawmakers are considering legislation that would require tourists to pay for a yearlong license or pass to visit state parks and trails. The legislation calls it a "visitor impact fee."

The bill, currently under negotiation

between the House and Senate, would allocate the new revenue "to protect, restore, and manage natural and cultural resources impacted by visitors." Non-residents 15 years old and above "who visit a state park, beach, forest, hiking trail, or other natural area on state land ... shall first pay a visitor impact fee to obtain a license."

The governor campaigned last year on a platform of having all tourists pay a \$50 fee to enter the state. Legislators think this would violate U.S. constitutional protections for free travel and have promoted their parks and trails license approach instead. Either policy would be a first of its kind for any state.

Hawaii's leaders are following the example of other tourism hotspots that have imposed similar fees or taxes like Venice, Italy, and Ecuador's Galapagos Islands. The Pacific island nation of Palau, for example, charges arriving international passengers \$100 to help it manage a sprawling marine sanctuary and promote ecotourism.

State Rep. Sean Quinlan, who chairs Hawaii's House Tourism Committee, said changing traveler patterns are one reason behind the push. He said golf rounds per visitor per day have declined

30% over the past decade while hiking has increased 50%. People are also seeking out once-obscure sites that they've seen someone post on social media. The state doesn't have the money to manage all these places, he said.

"It's not like it was 20 years ago when you bring your family and you hit maybe one or two famous beaches and you go see Pearl Harbor. And that's the extent of it," Quinlan said. "These days it's like, well, you know, 'I saw this post on Instagram and there's this beautiful rope swing, a coconut tree.'"

"All these places that didn't have visitors now have visitors," he said.

Most state parks and trails are currently free. Some of the most popular ones already charge, like Diamond Head State Monument, which features a trail leading from the floor of a 300,000-year-old volcanic crater up to its summit. It gets a million visitors each year and costs \$5 for each traveler.

Under the proposed legislation, violators would pay a civil fine, though penalties wouldn't be imposed during a five-year education and transition period.

Residents with a Hawaii driver's license or other state identification would be exempt.

Dawn Chang, chair of the state Board of Land and Natural Resources, told the committee that Hawaii's beaches are open to the public, so people probably wouldn't be cited there — and such details still need to be worked out.

Hawaii's conservation needs are great. Invasive pests are attacking the state's forests, including a fungal disease that is killing ohia, a tree unique to Hawaii that makes up the largest portion of the canopy in native wet forests.

Some conservation work directly responds to tourism. The harassment of wildlife like dolphins, turtles and Hawaiian monk seals is a recurring problem. Hikers can unknowingly bring invasive species into the forest on their boots. Snorkelers and boats trample on coral, adding stress to reefs already struggling with invasive algae and coral bleaching.

A 2019 report by Conservation International, a nonprofit environmental organization, estimated that total federal, state, county and private spending on conservation in Hawaii amounted to \$535 million but the need was \$886 million.

The legislation says proceeds would go into a "visitor impact fee special fund" managed by the state Department of Land and Natural Resources.

Alaska Supreme Court rules political gerrymandering of election districts unconstitutional

BY SEAN MAGUIRE
Anchorage Daily News

In a landmark decision, the Alaska Supreme Court ruled last Friday that partisan gerrymandering is unconstitutional under the Alaska Constitution's equal protection doctrine.

The decision follows a contentious reapportionment cycle after the 2020 census: The Alaska Redistricting Board was twice found by the state's highest court of having unconstitutionally gerrymandered the state's political maps by attempting to give solidly Republican Eagle

River more political representation with two Senate seats in the 20-member body.

Following a court order, the board approved an interim map last year for the November general election that kept Eagle River intact in one Senate district.

The court ruled Friday that the redistricting board would have 90 days to appear before a Superior Court judge and show cause why the interim political map should not be used until the 2032 general election, which will come after the next census has prompted a redrawing of legislative and congressional

districts nationwide.

A board meeting hasn't been scheduled yet to discuss the court's decision, but that could happen as soon as this week.

John Binkley, chair of the Alaska Redistricting Board, said that the five-member board would need to carefully consider the court's ruling, and that members would likely hear public testimony before deciding how to proceed. Binkley said he was personally satisfied with the interim political map, and the process he oversaw to redraw Alaska's political boundaries.

Alaska Federation of Natives

attorney Nicole Borromeo, who was in the minority of board members opposed to giving Eagle River two Senate seats, warned at the time that a court would likely rule that was partisan gerrymandering.

The court's 144-page opinion explained in detail why the five justices believed board members engaged in unconstitutional partisan gerrymandering. The opinion — written by retired Chief Justice Daniel Winfree — described "secretive procedures" behind closed doors used to draw two Eagle River Senate districts to

benefit Republicans, which the justices said was a violation of the state constitution's equal protection doctrine.

"We expressly recognize that partisan gerrymandering is unconstitutional under the Alaska Constitution," the court's opinion says on page 91.

"This is an incredibly important case," said Scott Kendall, an attorney and former chief of staff to independent Gov. Bill Walker. "For the first time the Alaska Supreme Court has interpreted the equal protection doctrine to prohibit gerrymandering for partisan purposes. This decision will put vital sideboards on the redistricting process to prevent political abuse of the process in the future."

At a federal level, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a 2019 case that partisan redistricting was a political matter and beyond the reach of federal courts. The Alaska Supreme Court cited that decision, but said state constitutional convention delegates made clear that partisan gerrymandering was intended to be unconstitutional from the outset.

Former Anchorage Democratic Sen. Tom Begich, who has long been involved in state redistricting cycles, was elated by Friday's decision. He said the clear prohibition on partisan gerrymandering was a surprise. "As soon as I read that, I actually said to my wife, 'Oh my God, they've made it explicit.'"

The state redistricting board has five members who are appointed to serve until a final map has been approved. Two members are appointed by the governor, and one each are appointed by the House speaker, the Senate president and the chief justice of the Alaska Supreme Court.

DON'T BE SHY!

Tell Sentinel readers what you think about anything and everything.

Letters to the editor are free. Just a few rules:

- No more than 400 words
- No obscenities or personal attacks
- Letters must include the writer's name
- And give us your phone number, in case we have questions

Email letters to
wrgsent@gmail.com
or drop your letter off
at the Sentinel office.



Ceremony dedicates new Totem Pole Trail along downtown Juneau waterfront

By CLARISE LARSON
Juneau Empire

Hundreds celebrated at a dedication ceremony Saturday the first dozen of 30 new totem poles along the Juneau waterfront that will comprise Kootéeyaa Deiyí, Totem Pole Trail.

Over the past week, the poles carved by Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian artists were raised along the downtown waterfront, each depicting the crests of their respective clans and tribes. Most of the artists spent more than six months creating the poles after being commissioned by Sealaska Heritage Institute, which launched the Kootéeyaa Deiyí initiative in 2021 through a \$2.9 million grant from the Mellon Foundation.

The 12 poles soon will be joined by 18 more.

During Saturday's event, Heritage Plaza was overflowing as dozens of students from the Tlingit culture, language and literacy program at Harborview Elementary led a procession. The event featured speeches from renowned Alaska Native artists and leaders from across Southeast.

The ceremony also celebrated the unveiling of "Faces of Alaska," a new installation of five, 4-foot bronze masks that represent the diversity of Alaska Native cultures including the Inupiat, Yup'ik, Alutiiq and Athabaskan peoples, and a combined mask for the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian peoples, according to the Sealaska Heritage Institute.

Sealaska Heritage President Rosita Worl said the poles will further the goal of the institute and the city and borough of Juneau of making the com-



PHOTO BY CLARISE LARSON/JUNEAU EMPIRE

Students from the Tlingit culture, language and literacy program at Harborview Elementary School dance during the procession of the dedication ceremony of the Kootéeyaa Deiyí, Totem Pole Trail, held Saturday in Juneau.

munity the Northwest Coast art capital of the world.

"Gunalchéesh to clans and tribes whose crests and masks are represented here, and to the master artists who created these iconic works that will stand among the greatest art collections of the world," she said.

Fran Houston, cultural leader of the A'akw Kwáan tribe, said the poles will serve to bring unity and positivity to Ju-

neau and the Alaska Native community.

"We need to come together, and that's what we're doing. We see these beautiful, beautiful totem poles out here, I've taken the walk through the walkway to the (Gastineau) channel — it's beautiful," she said. "All of this will bring us together, support each other, love one another."

Renowned Haida master artist Robert Davidson congratulated the artists for

taking on the challenge of creating a totem pole and thanked them for what the poles will mean for the future of Alaska Native art in Juneau and Southeast.

"These totem poles mark this time in our history, the strength we are gaining in reclaiming our rightful place in the world," he said. "Art is our official language throughout our history, to help keep our spirit alive, now arts help us reconnect with our history and ceremonies."

Through the grant, Sealaska Heritage hired 10 Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian artists, including TJ and Joe Young of Hydaburg, Jon Rowan of Klawock, David R. Boxley of Metlakatla, Nathan and Stephen Jackson of Saxman, Nicholas Galanin and Tommy Joseph of Sitka, Robert Mills of Kake and Mick Beasley of Juneau. Haida artist Warren Peele was also hired to make a totem pole for the project in 2022 through a separate grant from the Denali Commission.

The Mellon grant also funded apprentices to mentor alongside each of the artists.

"We discovered through this process that there aren't a lot of master artist Northwest Coast totem pole carvers," Worl said in a prepared statement before Saturday's event. "Sealaska Heritage Institute's Native Artist Committee considers a person a master artist totem pole carver if he/she has carved at least five totem poles. With the limited number of master totem pole carvers, the mentor-apprentice arrangement became a vital component of the project."

Each totem pole will feature a corresponding story board that identifies the clan, crests and information related to the artwork.

New research shows inbreeding shortening lifespan of southern resident orcas

By GENE JOHNSON
Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — People have taken many steps in recent decades to help the Pacific Northwest's endangered killer whales, which have long suffered from starvation, pollution and the legacy of having many of their number captured for display in marine parks.

They've breached dikes and removed dams to create wetland habitat for chinook salmon, the orcas' most important food. They've limited commercial fishing to try to ensure prey for the whales. They've made boats slow down and keep farther away from the animals to reduce their stress and to quiet the waters so they can better hunt.

So far, those efforts have had limited success, and research published March 20 in the journal *Nature Ecology and Evolution* suggests why: The whales are so inbred that they are dying younger and their population is not recovering. Female killer whales take about 20 years to reach peak fertility, and the females may not be living long enough to ensure the growth of their population.

While that news sounds grim for the revered orcas — known as the southern resident killer whales — it also underscores the urgency of conservation efforts, said Kim Parsons, a geneticist with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's

NOAA Fisheries who co-authored the study. The population is not necessarily doomed, she said.

"It's not often inbreeding itself that will result in a shortened lifespan or kill an individual," Parsons said. "It's really that inbreeding makes these individuals more vulnerable to disease or environmental factors. We can support the population by supporting the environment and giving them the best chance possible."

The struggles of the charismatic population of orcas that frequent the waters between Washington state and the Canadian province of British Columbia have been well documented — including in 2018, when one grieving mother carried her stillborn calf for 17 days in an apparent effort to mourn or revive it.

The southern resident population comprises three clans of whales known as the J, K and L pods. They are socially distinct and even communicate differently from other orca populations, including the nearby northern residents, which are listed as threatened and which primarily range from Vancouver Island up to Southeast Alaska.

While the southern residents' range overlaps with other populations of killer whales, they haven't regularly interbred in 30 generations, the researchers said.

In the 1960s and 1970s, dozens of Pacific Northwest whales were caught for display in marine theme parks. The whale-capture industry argued that there were many orcas in the sea, and that some could be sustainably caught.

At least 13 orcas died in the roundups, and 45 were delivered to theme parks around the world — reducing the southern resident population by about 40%. The brutality of the captures began to draw public outcry and a lawsuit to stop them in Washington state.

Today, only 73 southern residents remain, according to the Center for Whale Research on Washington state's San Juan Island. That's just two more than in 1971. Of those captured, only one — 56-year-old Lolita, at the Miami Seaquarium — survives. The Seaquarium announced last year it would no longer feature Lolita in shows.

Prior studies have suggested that inbreeding was a problem, including a 2018 study that found just two males had fathered more than half the calves born to the southern residents since 1990.

For the new research, NOAA geneticist Marty Kardos, Parsons and other colleagues sequenced the genomes of 100 living and dead southern residents, including 90% of those alive now. Those whales had lower levels of genetic diversity and higher levels of inbreeding

than other populations of killer whales in the North Pacific, they found.

The capture of the whales decades ago, as well as the geographic or social isolation of the animals, likely explains the inbreeding, the researchers said.

Meanwhile, conservation efforts have helped other North Pacific orca populations thrive. The northern resident killer whales have increased from about 122 animals in 1974 to more than 300 by 2018. Like the southern residents, they only eat fish, primarily salmon — unlike many other killer whales, which eat mammals such as seals.

The Alaska resident killer whale population is estimated to have doubled from 1984 to 2010. According to the researchers, the southern residents would likely be on a similar trajectory if not for their

elevated levels of inbreeding.

Inbreeding has also afflicted other populations of isolated or endangered animals, such as mountain lions in California, gorillas in Africa and bottlenose dolphins off western Australia. In some cases, scientists may be able to improve the gene pool in one population by capturing and introducing animals from another.

That's not the case for orcas, which are massive and free-swimming. Further, the southern residents already have opportunities to interbreed — they just haven't done so, Parsons said.

"We really have to leave it to those whales to mate with whom they choose and support the population in other ways," Parsons said.

Southeast group taking annual business survey

Sentinel staff

The Southeast Conference is conducting its annual survey of business owners and managers, looking to gauge the economic outlook and priorities for the region.

Last year's business climate survey collected 440 responses, including 26 from Wrangell. Nearly two-thirds of survey respondents had a positive view of the Southeast business climate, and half expected that business would be better than the past year as tourists returned to Alaska and travelers put COVID-19 behind them.

Business leaders last year reported that the

lack of available housing is the region's biggest problem, making it difficult to recruit and retain employees.

The conference, which was established in 1958 to advocate for a ferry system and to promote Southeast, is comprised of elected officials and business leaders from throughout the area.

This year's survey takes about three minutes to complete, with just a dozen questions.

Business owners can check their email for a unique link from the Southeast Conference to complete the survey — one survey per business.

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WRANGELL SENTINEL

Police report

Monday, April 17
Agency assist: Ambulance.

Tuesday, April 18
Abandoned vehicles.

Wednesday, April 19
Deer complaint.
Civil issue.
Citizen assist: Unlock vehicle.
Agency assist: Petersburg Police Department.

Thursday, April 20
Agency assist: U.S. Coast Guard.
Agency assist: Fire Department.
Agency assist: Petersburg Police Department.

Friday, April 21
Citizen assist.
Agency assist: Ambulance.
Agency assist: U.S. Forest Service.
Civil standby.
Traffic complaint.

Saturday, April 22
Nothing to report.

Sunday, April 23
Traffic complaint.
During this reporting period there were four agency assists for the Hoonah Police Department.

Forest Service approves plan for Kake to run cultural healing center

By CHRIS BASINGER
Petersburg Pilot

The U.S. Forest Service has approved the Organized Village of Kake's request to operate a cultural healing center at a seldom-used building at Portage Bay, according to an announcement from the agency last month.

The village plans to establish a program centered on cultural healing that would provide counseling to people struggling with alcohol, substance abuse and other issues, and reconnect them with their cultural identity.

"We know that immersing our people in the culture helps them and we're also ... teaching them who they are, where they come from, who their clan is," Village of Kake President Joel Jackson said.

The program would be based out of the Forest Service building on the north end of Kupreanof Island. The building can house up to 16 people, and features a common area, kitchen, bathroom, laundry room, garage, workshop and more.

Jackson has been involved with an advisory board overseeing development of the program. The board is made up of Kake community members as well as representatives from the Nature Conservancy in Alaska, a non-profit organization focused on conservation.

The conservancy has helped the board plan their next steps and also organized a cultural exchange, which saw some members travel to Hawaii to meet and take inspiration from

organizations hosting cultural healing programs there.

Jackson reported that he has been in talks with multiple organizations in an effort to find partners willing to help run the program.

They are currently working toward completing a feasibility study for the program and are pursuing funding opportunities with interested foundations.

There are still some tasks related to the building that need to be completed before they can start using it. The Forest Service approval letter states that use of the facility is dependent on resolving existing maintenance issues including repairing the electrical service, upgrading the water treatment system and repairing the heating system.

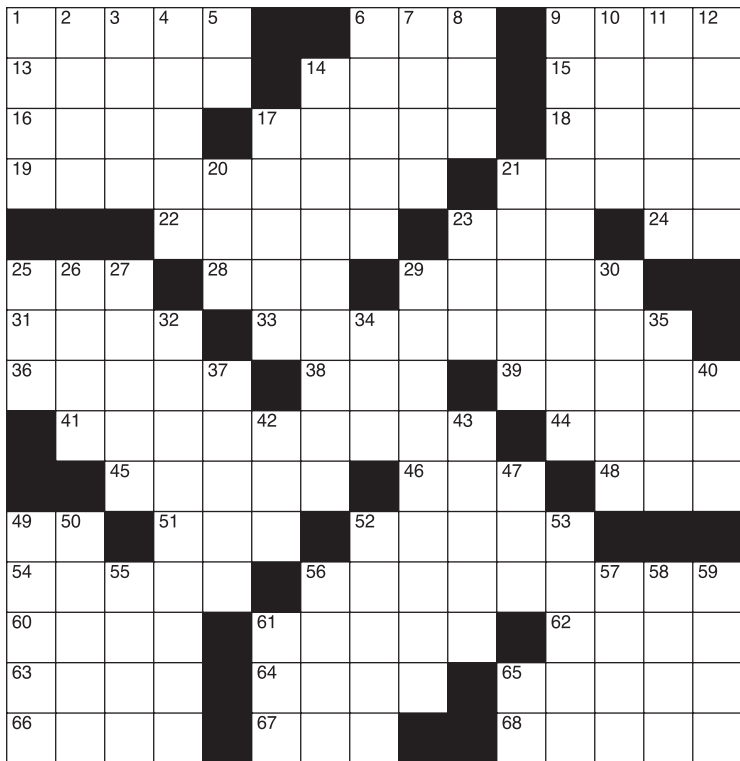
The village of Kake will also be responsible for maintenance of the facility while using it, and at least one bedroom with four bunks will be reserved for Forest Service use. The facility had been used as a field camp for Forest Service employees who worked on the Portage Bay road system.

The Forest Service's special-use permit also includes a clause clarifying that the area around the facility will be non-exclusive, meaning that access to the area will not change for other forest users.

Jackson said he plans to take a crew out to the building soon to see what shape it is in and also said they will possibly hold a ceremony with community members and guests to have elders bless the facility.

Crossword

Answers on Page 16



CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Dull and flat
- 6. Baking measurement (abbr.)
- 9. Education-based groups
- 13. Not behind
- 14. Runners run them
- 15. Japanese ankle sock
- 16. Grave
- 17. Japanese industrial city
- 18. People of southern Ghana
- 19. Particular designs
- 21. Device fitted to something
- 22. Infections
- 23. Pirates' preferred alcohol
- 24. Expression of sympathy
- 25. Rock guitarist's tool
- 28. Neither
- 29. Ancient city of Egypt
- 31. You _ what you sow
- 33. Ruined
- 36. Narrations
- 38. Body art (slang)
- 39. Fencing sword
- 41. Apartment buildings
- 44. Type of missile
- 45. Fathers
- 46. Extremely high frequency
- 48. Type of school
- 49. Incorrect letters
- 51. Two-year-old sheep
- 52. Nasty manner
- 54. One who accepts a bet
- 56. Indian prince
- 60. Asian country
- 61. Rhythmic patterns in Indian music
- 62. "Uncle Buck" actress Hoffmann
- 63. Detailed criteria
- 64. Son of Shem
- 65. Talked wildly
- 66. Discount
- 67. Not good
- 68. Growing out

CLUES DOWN

- 1. Actor Damon
- 2. A call used to greet someone
- 3. Part-time employee
- 4. Emaciation
- 5. "Westworld" actor Harris
- 6. Gains possession of
- 7. Relaxing spaces
- 8. 23rd star in a constellation
- 9. Northern grouse
- 10. Monetary unit of Bangladesh
- 11. Manila hemp
- 12. Unites muscle to bone
- 14. Makes deep cuts in
- 17. 18-year period between eclipses
- 20. Member of a people inhabiting southern Benin
- 21. Synthetic rubbers
- 23. Unwelcome rodent
- 25. Expression of creative skill
- 26. Some is red
- 27. Seems less in impressive
- 29. Harry Kane's team
- 30. Gland secretion
- 32. Action of feeling sorrow
- 34. Disallow
- 35. Deceptive movement
- 37. More dried-up
- 40. Crimson
- 42. Actress Ryan
- 43. Adherents of a main branch of Islam
- 47. Accomplished American president
- 49. Side of a landform facing an advancing glacier
- 50. Sheep breeder
- 52. Appetizer
- 53. Broadway actress Daisy
- 55. Influential film critic
- 56. NY Giants ownership family
- 57. Type of script
- 58. Assist
- 59. London park
- 61. Bar bill
- 65. In reply indicator

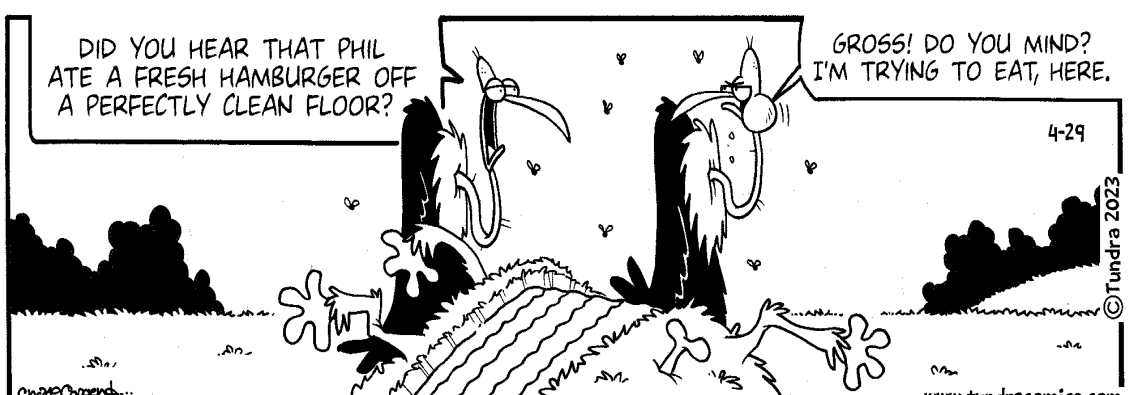
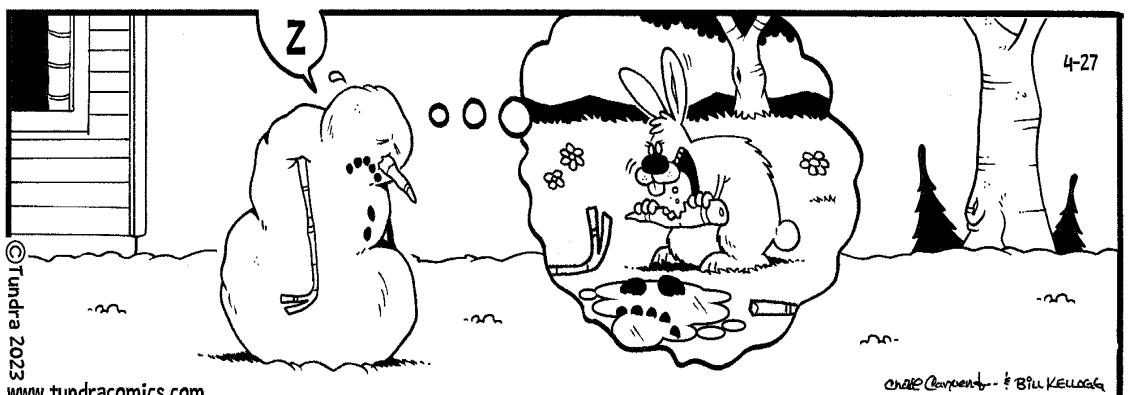
Ritter's River

by Marc Lutz



Tundra

by Chad Carpenter



Seaweed farming supporters envision economic and environmental benefits

BY YERETH ROSEN
Alaska Beacon

To optimists, the plants that grow in the sea promise to diversify Alaska's economy, revitalize small coastal towns struggling with undependable fisheries and help communities adapt to climate change — and even mitigate it by absorbing atmospheric carbon.

Cultivation of seaweed, largely varieties of kelp, promises to buffer against ocean acidification and coastal pollution, promoters say. Seaweed farms can produce ultra-nutritious crops to boost food security in Alaska and combat hunger everywhere, and not just for human beings.

"Kelp is good for everybody. It's good for people. It's good for animals," Kirk Sparks, with Pacific Northwest Organics, a California company that sells agricultural products, said in a panel discussion at a mariculture conference held in February in Juneau, sponsored by the Alaska Sea Grant program.

But before it achieves these broad benefits, Alaska's mariculture industry must first address significant practical issues, including an American consumer market that has yet to broadly embrace seaweed.

Seaweed farming is part of an expanding mariculture industry in Alaska that, until recently, was almost exclusively about oyster farming. Commercial seaweed production in the state has grown in volume from virtually zero in 2016 to about 650,000 wet pounds in 2022, according to the Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation.

Ambitions for seaweed cultivation and other forms of mariculture are high.

A task force established by Gov. Bill Walker and continued by Gov. Dunleavy set a goal for an Alaska industry generating \$100 million a year in revenue. In contrast, the Alaska industry was worth only about \$1.5 million as of last year, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Along with the lofty ambitions, there are high levels of new investment. Through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, the U.S. Department of Commerce last year awarded \$49 million to a "mariculture cluster" of Southeast Alaska organizations for projects that include seaweed farming.

The Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Trustee Council, the federal-state panel that administers money paid by Exxon to settle government claims over the massive 1989 oil spill, has devoted nearly \$32 million to mariculture research and development, focusing on the spill-affected Prince William Sound.

Other investments range from \$500,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture for a mariculture incubator and processing facility to several million dollars appropriated by the state Legisla-

ture to the University of Alaska for mariculture research and training.

Alaska is currently a long way from being the world's seaweed-producing capital. The global commercial industry, with an estimated value of \$14 billion in 2020, is heavily dominated by Asian countries. Harvested seaweed from Asia goes into a variety of products — for industrial and agricultural use as well as well as for food.

Within the United States, producers in Maine dominate the seaweed-cultivation industry, holding 80% of the market, according to Liz MacDonald, of Maine-based Atlantic Sea Farms, who spoke at the Juneau conference.

Products coming from Maine include kelp flakes, kelp seasoning and kelp burgers. A Maine company called Rootless sells bite-sized kelp squares made in five fruity or nutty flavors and marketed as nutrient-packed superfood snacks.

While Alaska seaweed farmers are looking to Maine for practical lessons, they are also pointing to potential environmental benefits at home.

There is encouraging scientific evidence that seaweed cultivation buffers ocean acidification locally, as described in studies from various projects, including some from China, California and New York. Seaweed farming "could serve as a low-cost adaptation strategy to ocean acidification and deoxygenation and provide important refugia from ocean acidification," said the study from China, published in 2021 in the journal *Science of the Total Environment*.

But does seaweed farming result in absorption of atmospheric carbon and prevention of it streaming back into the atmosphere? The answer is complicated, according to scientists. It depends on what happens to the kelp. If dead and decomposing bits are on land or in shallow waters, they would likely release carbon back into the atmosphere, scientists say.

Another environmental consideration involves wild stocks of bull kelp, one of the prime commercial species.

Stocks are so depleted in U.S. West Coast waters that an environmental group, the Center for Biological Diversity, has petitioned for an Endangered Species Act listing, which would be a first for any marine plant.

Abundance trends for wild bull kelp vary a lot by location, with numerous problems documented in California, but Alaska's Aleutian Islands region is another trouble spot for wild bull kelp. There, a population crash among sea otters is linked to the kelp decline. Sea otters normally eat sea urchins, and without being held in check by otters, the kelp-eating urchins have been mowing down the underwater forests, according to several scientists.

While climate change, pollution and other problems are considered bigger threats, overharvesting also puts wild kelp at risk, according to the listing petition, currently under review by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service.

Kelp farming, however, might help restore wild populations, according to some experts. A project

Continued on page 16

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HELP WANTED

Johnson's Building Supply is hiring for a yardman/customer service position. Responsibilities include retail sales, computer knowledge, receiving freight, stocking inventory, truck loading/unloading, deliveries and friendly customer service. Work schedule is Tuesday-Saturday. Must have a valid Alaska driver's license, forklift experience is beneficial (will train), some heavy lifting, prior construction knowledge is favorable, pay DOE. Pick up an application at Johnson's Building Supply.

NOTICE

A U.S. Census Bureau representative will be in Wrangell through May 3 to randomly in-

terview 98 selected households for a survey. The survey results help bring in grant money to the community and the state for elders, education, infrastructure, energy costs, health care, internet, broadband and many other programs. Residents can complete the survey in person with the field representative, or by phone or online. The representative will contact each of the selected households individually.

FREE ADS

Do you have something to sell? Having a garage sale? Looking to buy something? Classified ads for individuals and community groups are free in the Sentinel. Contact Amber at 907-874-2301 or email wrgsent@gmail.com.

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE INVITING BIDS WRANGELL DOCKS AND HARBORS SURVEILLANCE CAMERA SYSTEM

Notice is hereby given that the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, will receive sealed bids for the construction of the **DOCKS AND HARBORS SURVEILLANCE CAMERA SYSTEM** project. Work consists of various quantities of mobilization, video surveillance, electrical and communication systems, constructing a city-wide surveillance network to monitor and record activities at each port, harbor and the Marine Service Center. The engineer's estimate for all work is approximately \$570,000.

Sealed bids will be received by the City and Borough of Wrangell, Post Office Box 531, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, or located at the Borough Clerk's Office, 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, until 2 p.m. prevailing time on May 11, 2023, and publicly opened and read at that time.

The Contract Documents are available in electronic format and can be downloaded from the City and Borough of Wrangell website (www.wrangell.com) under the Bids and RFPs section. Downloading Contract Documents from the City and Borough of Wrangell's website requires registration with the Borough Clerk in order to be placed on the Plan Holders List and to ensure receipt of subsequent Addenda. Failure to register may adversely affect your proposal. It is the Offeror's responsibility to ensure that they have received all Addenda affecting this Solicitation. To be registered, contact the Borough Clerk at 907-874-2381 or at clerk@wrangell.com.

The OWNER reserves the right to reject any or all Bids, to waive any informality in a Bid, or to make award as it best serves the interests of the OWNER.

Jeff Good, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish April 26 and May 3, 2023

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS REAL ESTATE BROKER SERVICES

Notice is hereby given that the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, will receive proposals for REAL ESTATE BROKER SERVICES. The purpose of this RFP is to establish an exclusive contract for the provision of Broker Services to assist in the sale of Borough-owned real property.

Sealed proposals will be received by the City and Borough of Wrangell, Post Office Box 531, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, or located at the Borough Clerk's Office, 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, until 2 p.m. prevailing time on May 12, 2023, and publicly opened and read at that time.

The Contract Documents are available in electronic format and can be downloaded from the City and Borough of Wrangell website (www.wrangell.com) under the Bids and RFPs section. Downloading Contract Documents from the City and Borough of Wrangell's website requires registration with the Borough Clerk in order to be placed on the Plan Holders List and to ensure receipt of subsequent Addenda. Failure to register may adversely affect your proposal. It is the Offeror's responsibility to ensure that they have received all Addenda affecting this Solicitation. To be registered, contact the Borough Clerk at 907-874-2381 or at clerk@wrangell.com

The OWNER reserves the right to reject any or all Bids, to waive any informality in a Bid, or to make award as it best serves the interests of the OWNER.

Jeff Good, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish April 26 and May 3, 2023

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE INVITING BIDS

Notice is hereby given that the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, will receive sealed bids for the construction of the **NOLAN CENTER STORAGE BUILDING SETTLEMENT REPAIR** project. WORK consists of installing helical piles to support the building foundation and slab. The Engineer's Estimate for all work is approximately \$100,000.

Sealed bids will be received by the City and Borough of Wrangell, Post Office Box 531, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, or located at the Borough Clerk's Office, 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, until 2 p.m. prevailing time on May 16, 2023, and publicly opened at that time. The Contract Documents are available in electronic format and can be downloaded from the City and Borough of Wrangell website (www.wrangell.com) under the Bids and RFP's section.

The OWNER reserves the right to reject any or all Bids, to waive any informality in a Bid, or to make award as it best serves the interests of the OWNER.

Jeff Good, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish April 26; May 3 and 10, 2023

CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE INVITING BIDS

Notice is hereby given that the City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska, will receive sealed bids for the construction of the **SWIMMING POOL SIDING REPLACEMENT** project. WORK consists of removing and replacing the exterior siding and column brick facade. The Engineer's Estimate for all work is approximately \$395,000.

Sealed bids will be received by the City and Borough of Wrangell, Post Office Box 531, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, or located at the Borough Clerk's Office, 205 Brueger Street, Wrangell, Alaska 99929, until 2 p.m. prevailing time on May 15, 2023, and publicly opened at that time.

The Contract Documents are available in electronic format and can be downloaded from the City and Borough of Wrangell website (www.wrangell.com) under the Bids and RFPs section.

The OWNER reserves the right to reject any or all Bids, to waive any informality in a Bid, or to make award as it best serves the interests of the OWNER.

Jeff Good, Borough Manager
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

Publish April 26; May 3 and 10, 2023

PUBLIC NOTICE

Brenda L. Schwartz-Yeager, DBA Alaska Charters and Adventures, LLC is making application for a new seasonal liquor license, per AS 04.11.180 located in Alaska waters.

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

Publish April 19, 26 and May 3, 2023

Kenai borough settles third workplace complaint against former mayor

By JAMES BROOKS
Alaska Beacon

Former Republican governor candidate and Kenai Peninsula Borough Mayor Charlie Pierce will not have to pay out of his pocket to settle a sexual harassment lawsuit brought by a former aide.

The borough assembly, meeting on April 18, said the borough will pay more than \$206,000 to the aide, Pam Wastell, and a borough-owned insurance policy will pay an additional \$31,250 owed by Pierce himself under the terms of an as-yet-unpublished settlement agreement.

This is the third settlement paid by the borough over Pierce's workplace conduct. The municipality had previously paid \$267,000 to settle two other complaints against Pierce, and this new settlement will bring the total to more than half a million dollars.

Neither Pierce nor the borough are required to admit wrongdoing in this latest settlement.

"I think we feel this was a success," said

Wastell's attorney, Caitlin Shortell, but in a two-page written statement, Wastell said her complaint against Pierce resulted in financial and emotional distress that have caused her to question whether it was worthwhile to speak out.

"I am pleased that I was able to settle my lawsuit, but there's not enough money in the world to go through what I have," Wastell said in her statement.

"I can't deny there are days I regret and think to myself, 'Why did I say anything?' Maybe I should have not reported it and kept my mouth shut. Having faced the total destruction of my career and life through this case, I now understand why women don't report sexual harassment and sexual assault. Although I wonder if I might have been better off not reporting Pierce's sexual harassment, it was intolerable and caused great damage to my mental and physical health," she said.

Pierce served as the Kenai borough's mayor between 2017 and fall 2022, when he resigned amid a borough-paid investigation into sexual harassment claims

brought by Wastell.

At the time, Pierce was also a Republican candidate for governor.

Wastell filed a civil suit in October 2022 against Pierce and the borough. Pierce made few campaign appearances and received 4.5% of the first-ballot votes, last among the four finalists in the ranked-choice election for governor. He did better than that in Wrangell, where he received almost 8% of the votes last November.

Pierce has since sold his Kenai Peninsula home and has moved out of state, Shortell said. In a post on Facebook, Pierce's wife said they now live in Kansas.

"Mr. Pierce did not admit to any fault, nor was any fault found against him. So there's no finding or admission of liability here," said Richard Moses, Pierce's attorney.

During the April 18 assembly meeting, members of the body unanimously approved a statement declaring that the settlement came about only after extensive deliberation by its members and new borough Mayor Peter Micciche.

"Neither the assembly nor Mayor Mic-

ciche are happy with all aspects of the settlement. But we also recognize that years of litigation on this matter is not in the best interest of the borough, or the taxpayers. The protection of borough employees is paramount," the statement said.

In addition to the settlement, the borough has implemented new procedures to deal with sexual harassment complaints.

Shortell said she believes more lawsuits could be filed because other former borough employees "came out of the woodwork" to contact her and Wastell after their case was filed.

In January, a former borough firefighter filed a lawsuit against the Kenai Peninsula Borough, alleging that she was fired when she complained about sexual harassment. That case has yet to be resolved.

"I think there could very well be others," Shortell said. "I know there are other employees who are aggrieved and lost their employment."

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PUZZLE SOLUTION

Seaweed farming

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in Puget Sound is investigating that possibility.

Several potential environmental downsides to seaweed farming are described in a report published in 2021 in Scotland — another part of the world where seaweed aquaculture is seen as a promising new industry. Among them, according to the report: shading that reduces sunlight needed by other organisms within the water column, possible introduction of invasive species, underwater entanglements of marine mammals and obstructions to travel in the water.

For businesses, there are plenty of economic challenges.

One is logistics. Unless companies are manufacturing specialty

products, like the kelp-based salsas sold by Juneau's Barnacle Foods, the project has to be dried. Wet plants in bulk are too heavy and too expensive to ship from Alaska.

Kelp is "a wonderful differentiating ingredient" and "really wonderful for grabbing the attention," but not everyone is open to eating it, said Matt Kern, co-founder and co-owner of Barnacle Foods, which sells a variety of kelp sauces, condiments and other products.

"We can tell you that there's not a tidal wave of customers knocking on doors for kelp products," he said at the Juneau conference.

The Alaska Seafood Marketing Institute, the state agency that promotes Alaska fish, is unable to help, at least for now. State law prohibits it.

In Alaska Native culture, seaweed

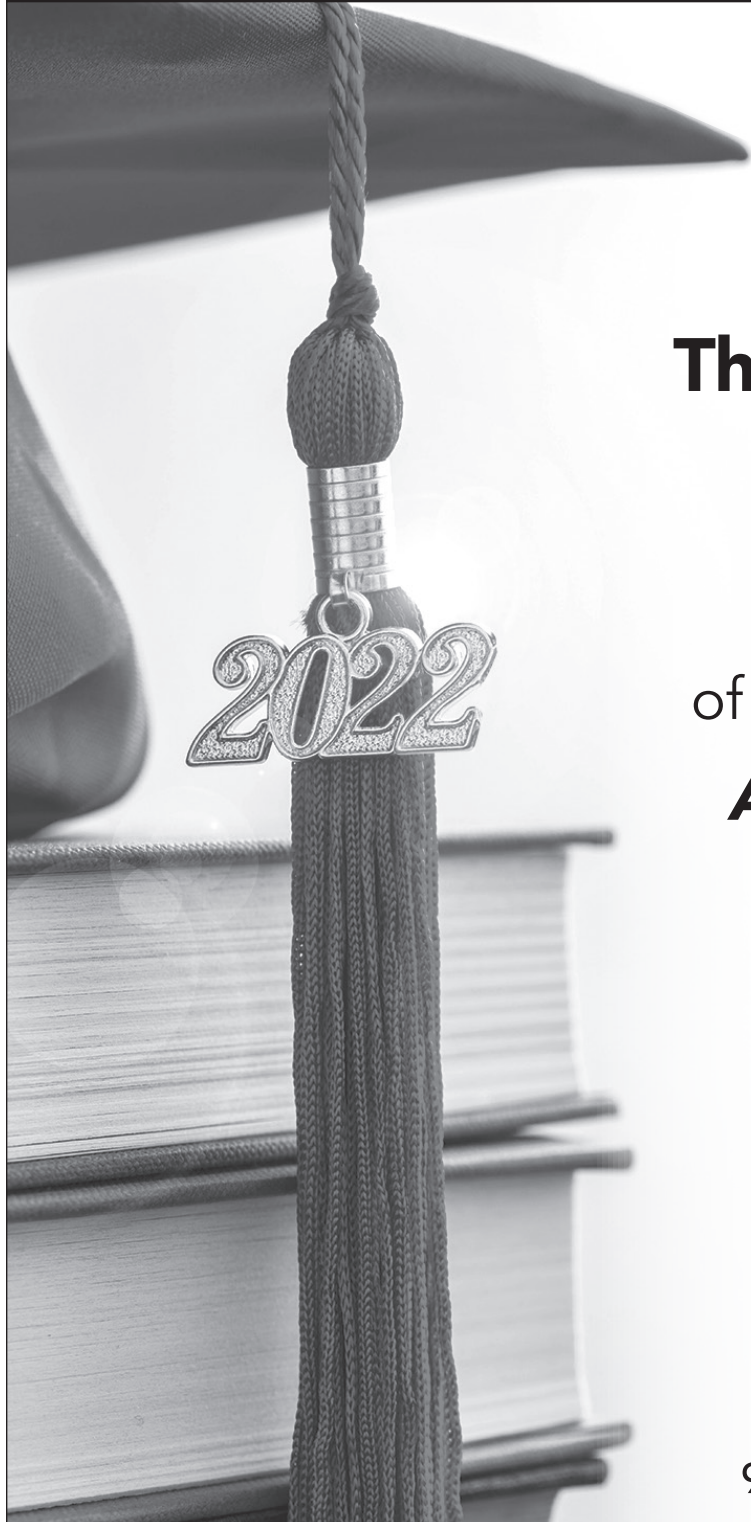
is a traditional food, with no such marketing outreach needed. That leads to some wariness in Indigenous communities about the proliferation of kelp farms.

Jim Smith, restoration manager for the Cordova-based Native Conservancy, expressed some of those concerns at last month's conference.

"Be mindful of what you're asking kelp to do for you. Be mindful of the water you're asking your permits to occupy before you ask Indigenous people to share their knowledge," he told the conference audience.

"It's a lot of pressure on kelp," he said.

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