



Wrangell, Alaska
April 27, 2022

WRANGELL SENTINEL

Volume 120, Number 17

Oldest Continuously Published Newspaper in Alaska

12 Pages \$1.50

Unfilled positions could push schools to distance learning

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

In a two-page letter to the community, Schools Superintendent Bill Burr on Friday cautioned that ongoing staffing shortages, particularly aides and substitute teachers, could push the schools into considering a move to distance learning in lieu of in-person instruction.

"As we have had a number of unfilled positions over the last month, we need to continue looking at the need to move toward distance learning," he wrote in his letter Friday. "We have worked very hard to keep our schools open during (COVID) mitigation and adversity, but without our educational staff, it will be hard to meet the true social emotional learning and needs of our students."

His recruitment message was "You can help!"

Burr added, "We need substitute teachers in all buildings. We still have permanent positions at Evergreen Elementary School to close out the year and continue to meet the new challenges in the fall."

Distance learning "is not what we want to do," Burr said in an email Friday, "but without help, we will need to strongly look at a distance-learning move at one or both buildings so that we can staff the other building in the near future."

The chamber of commerce is trying to help, sending out a Facebook post on Friday, alerting the community that the school district "is in

desperate need of substitute teachers."

The middle and high schools had seven staff members out two weeks ago, but only two substitutes available, said Bob Davis, assistant principal for the schools. Last Friday, he was short four staff members, still with only two substitutes. Staff members were out for health reasons, student travel or other needs, Davis said.

Shortages of staff and substitutes "is way worse than it was last year," he said Friday.

"The shortage of staff and subs is not a new problem, but it is also at an all-time high in my experience," Jenn Miller-Yancey, assistant principal at Evergreen Elementary, said Friday.

"COVID has been especially rough on school this spring. A typical day starts very early (4 to 5 a.m.) or sometimes even the night before, getting word someone has popped positive for COVID, been a close contact, or is sick with the other illnesses going around," Miller-Yancey said in an email. "Then it's a mad staff shuffle to get all of the essential duties covered to be able to be open for in-person learning."

Davis, who is retiring at the end of this school year after 34 years in education and 28 years with Wrangell schools, said the lack of job applicants is distressing. In past years, he might have seen as many as 50 applicants for a full-time teaching position. But now, he still needs to hire two teachers for the fall school year, and he

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Catching the best deal



PHOTO BY MARC LUTZ/WRANGELL SENTINEL

Commercial fisherman Alan Reeves said his 10 years on the port commission helped him realize the importance to the community of the borough's share of the state fisheries tax, which is earned when the fleet's catch is processed in town.

Many factors in fishermen's processor choice

By MARC LUTZ
Sentinel editor

Some commercial fishermen prefer to sell their hauls in Wrangell. Some look for the best price, even if it's a few cents higher. Some decide where to sell based on services offered.

No matter what determines where a fisherman will sell, processors try to lure as many their way throughout the year, including buying a bevy of different species.

"What Pacific Seafood does here in Wrangell, we have our hands in a little bit of all of it," said Cody Angerman, general manager at the processor's plant at Heritage Harbor. "We start off with halibut, black cod, a little bit of rockfish. Then, as we progress, June 15 is when crab starts. The other thing going right now is troll salmon."

Angerman said his plant has traditionally been associated with just crab and salmon, but a diversified intake helps the company appeal to more sellers. "Obviously, being there for the fishermen is one of the most important things for us."

Depending on the season, Sea Level Seafoods,

a subsidiary of Oregon-based Pacific Seafood, has anywhere from six to 50 boats catching for its Wrangell operation.

Alan Reeves, a commercial fishermen based in Wrangell, tries to sell only to Sea Level to support the local economy. He fishes halibut, salmon and shrimp.

"Normally, we get a good price," Reeves said. "Two years ago, we ended up getting the lowest price. If they're going to pay me a decent price, I'll go with them. Last year, I went to Petersburg for the first time since only one other time in 1980." Reeves sold last year's halibut catch to the Iceline Seafoods plant in Petersburg.

That was the exception. His 10 years serving on Wrangell's port commission helped him realize the importance to the community of the borough's share of the state fisheries tax. The tax is shared 50-50 with municipalities where the fish are processed. Not only does the money feed back into the economy, it supports jobs in the community, he said.

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COVID cases on the rise; Alaska fourth-highest rate across nation

By LARRY PERSILY
Sentinel writer

Just as other communities, Wrangell is enduring a spring-time bloom of COVID-19 cases. As of April 20, the state health department reported 79 new cases in the community in the past 30 days.

Most of those were reported to the state in late March and early April, with new infections declining in the past week.

The spread of the highly infectious disease is of particular concern at the schools.

"We have had an increase in COVID and other illnesses during the past month and the schools have been struggling to find ways to stay open," Superintendent Bill Burr reported to the school board on April 18.

Wrangell "continues to face an outbreak of COVID in both the community and our

schools," he said in a letter to parents four days after the school board meeting. Teacher shortages and a lack of substitutes has made it hard to staff classrooms, Burr said.

The Juneau School District on Saturday returned to mandatory face masks in schools after new cases pushed the community's COVID alert level to high.

Though the 79 cases in the past 30 days is less than half of the number during Wrangell's post-holidays record surge of infections, it represents almost 15% of all cases reported in town during the two-year-long pandemic.

The state's case numbers do not include the results of at-home tests, which people are using more frequently as most publicly funded walk-up or drive-up testing sites have closed down around Alaska.

The health department COVID dashboard shows that more than 80% of the reported cases in March were the BA.2 Omicron, the latest variant.

Statewide, there were 1,526 new infections reported in the past seven days, according to the state health department on April 20, ranking Alaska at fourth highest in the nation for per-capita infections, according to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Wrangell is not alone in higher case counts this month. The Petersburg Medical Center last week reported "a significant increase" in new infections in the community, including in the schools. "The community should assume COVID-19 is spreading quickly, impacting schools, day cares and local businesses," the Petersburg hospital said.

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Borough may auction off former hospital building

By SARAH ASLAM
Sentinel reporter

The borough assembly may put the old hospital building up for online auction next month, at a starting bid of \$830,000, the value deemed by a recent commercial appraisal.

A Florida-based substance abuse treatment center that had expressed interest last year in taking over the property had told borough staff it was waiting on an appraisal, but hasn't been back in touch.

The borough assembly on Tuesday considered a resolution to put the 30,596-square-foot former Wrangell Medical Center on nearly two acres along Bennett Street up for auction on publicsurplus.com on or after May 16.

The borough has been spending almost \$100,000 a year on insurance and heat since SEARHC moved out of the building more

than two years ago and the property reverted back to the borough. The oldest portions of the building date back to 1967.

Eligible bidders would have to pay a registration fee of \$5,000, refundable to the losing bidders.

Excluded from bidding would be people or businesses delinquent in property tax, sales tax, utility payments, or those who have other financial obligations to the borough.

The property is zoned public/open space, which is primarily for governmental purposes. The successful bidder would be required to submit to the Planning and Zoning Commission a request to rezone "for the purpose they are intending for the site," according to back-up material submitted by staff to the assembly.

The property would sit on the

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Keeping Wrangell clean



Above: Craig and Rachel Dietzman pick up trash along the freight yard at the city barge landing as part of the annual community cleanup effort last Saturday. Below: The Van Slyke and Carney families pick up garbage at Volunteer Park. Despite the rain getting everything wet, including the cleanup crews, the 170 volunteers filled 136 bags of trash collected from all over town.



PHOTOS BY MARC LUTZ/
WRANGELL SENTINEL

Oregon tribe may sue to stop river water release for farmers

By GILLIAN FLACCUS
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — A Native American tribe in Oregon said April 19 it is assessing its legal options after learning the U.S. government plans to release water from a federally operated reservoir to downstream farmers along the Oregon-California border amid a historic drought.

Even limited irrigation for the farmers who use Klamath River water on about 300 square miles of crops puts two critically endangered fish species in peril of extinction because the water withdrawals come at the height of spawning season, The Klamath Tribes said.

This summer's water allocation plan, released by the Bureau of Reclamation last week, will send about 50,000 acre-feet of water to farmers in the Klamath Reclamation Project — less than 15% of what they would get in a normal year.

An acre-foot is the amount needed to cover one acre of land with water one foot deep.

It's the third year in a row that extreme drought has affected the farmers, fish and tribes that rely on the 257-mile-long Klamath River in a region where, even in a good year, there's not

enough water to satisfy competing demands. Last year, no water at all flowed through the Klamath reclamation project's main irrigation canal, and the water crisis briefly became a political flashpoint for anti-government activists.

At the same time, critically endangered sucker fish central to the Klamath Tribes culture and religion didn't have enough water to spawn and thousands of downstream juvenile salmon died without reservoir releases to support the Klamath River's health.

The Klamath Tribes said in a statement that the decision to release any water to about 1,000 farmers in the massive, federal agricultural project was "perhaps the saddest chapter yet in a long history of treaty violations" and placed the blame for the current water crisis on "120 years of ecosystem mismanagement at the hands of settler society."

The inland tribes, based in Chiloquin, Oregon, include the Klamath, Modoc and Yahooskin peoples of southern Oregon and northern California. The Klamath have fought to keep enough water in the reservoir and surrounding rivers for two distinct species of sucker fish to survive and breed, with limited success.

The fish are important to the tribes' cultural and religious practices and were once a dietary staple. The Klamath stopped fishing for the sucker fish in the 1980s as numbers dwindled. The Klamath Tribes now run a captive breeding program to ensure the species' survival and note that no juvenile sucker fish have survived in the wild in recent years.

"We have nothing left with which to 'compromise,'" the Klamath Tribes said in a statement. "Global warming is certainly a global problem, but thus far its local consequences appear to be exacerbating existing and systematic inequalities between ourselves and the larger society."

A spokeswoman from the Bureau of Reclamation declined to comment, citing the possibility of litigation.

The Klamath Tribes believe this year's plan violates a biological opinion under the Endangered Species Act, which says that the bureau must maintain the reservoir, which is called Upper Klamath Lake, at a minimum depth for the sucker fish. The opinion acknowledges that in some cases — such as this year — maintaining even that minimum depth may be impossible, but in those cases the bureau must do everything it can to comply.

"We feel like (the Bureau of) Reclamation has pushed us into a corner by making this allocation decision that is so directly contrary to the requirements of the Endangered Species Act," said Jay Weiner, a water rights attorney representing The Klamath Tribes. "For them to pull additional water out . is a risk to the very existence of the species that the tribes can't live with."

Federal regulators earlier this month released a three-day pulse of water from the reservoir down the Klamath River to bolster the health of salmon populations in northern California that have been decimated by a parasite that thrives in slow-moving, warm water.

The amount was half of what would be released in a normal year, and the Yurok Tribe, which is trying to keep the salmon populations afloat, said it was also deeply disappointed by this season's water allocations.

NOTICE OF SPECIAL PRIMARY ELECTION

Saturday, June 11, 2022

Candidate Race on Ballot

United States Representative

On Saturday, June 11, 2022 there will be a special primary election to fill the vacancy in the office of United States Representative. This election will be conducted by mail. There will be no polling places open for regular in-person voting on election day. The deadline to register to vote or update your voter registration is May 12th.

Ballots will be automatically mailed to qualified registered voters beginning April 27th. You will vote by selecting one candidate. You must sign your ballot envelope, provide an identifier and a witness signature, and return or mail your ballot by June 11th. If you will not be at your current mailing address or do not receive a ballot, you can contact the Division of Elections.

The Division of Elections' regional offices will offer early and absentee in-person voting beginning May 27th. They will be open on weekdays between 8AM and 5PM, on weekends with limited hours, and on election day between 7AM and 8PM. For the full schedule and a list of additional early and absentee in-person voting locations throughout the state, visit the Division's website at AKVoteEarly.alaska.gov.

www.elections.alaska.gov

<u>Region I Office</u>	<u>Region II Office</u>	<u>Region III Office</u>	<u>Region IV Office</u>	<u>Region V Office</u>
Juneau	Anchorage	Fairbanks	Nome	Mat-Su
(907) 465-3021	(907) 522-8683	(907) 451-2835	(907) 443-8683	(907) 373-8952
1-866-948-8683	1-866-958-8683	1-866-959-8683	1-866-953-8683	1-844-428-8952

Language Assistance 1-866-954-8683 Toll Free TTY 1-888-622-3020

The State of Alaska, Division of Elections, complies with Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you are a person with a disability who may need special assistance and/or accommodation to vote, please contact your regional Division of Elections office to make necessary arrangements.