



## Schools face next year without any more federal pandemic aid

By MARK C. ROBINSON  
*Sentinel reporter*

The Wrangell school district will have to do without federal pandemic-era grants for the next school year, creating a sizable gap in revenues and requiring spending cuts and/or pulling money out of savings to balance the budget.

At a work session Jan. 15, the school board reviewed with district business manager Kristy Andrew a draft budget for the 2024-2025 school year.

The district has been using the federal aid to cover the salaries of its two school principals, but this is the last year that money is available.

"With the exhaustion of our COVID grants, we are estimating an additional \$300,000 in principal salaries, benefits, and associated costs starting in (school year) 2024-2025," Andrews explained in an email to the Sentinel.

"We've been planning, knowing that those grants were going to go away," Schools Superintendent Bill Burr said later in the week. "By saving money over the last two years, and using our grant money carefully, we can prepare better for the loss of that grant money," he said. "If we hadn't prepared, we would have spent our entire reserve."

The beginning draft budget presented at the Jan. 15 meeting assumes no increase in state funding for the next school year, though

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## Borough plans information fair for potential subdivision bidders

By LARRY PERSILY  
*Sentinel writer*

To ensure that potential buyers know as much as possible before putting in their bids for any of the 20 lots at the Alder Top Village (Keishangita.ʼaan) subdivision, the borough is putting together an information fair for people to talk with builders, lenders and municipal officials.

"You can go around to individual booths and talk with people," said Kate Thomas, the borough's economic development director. She described it as similar to a health fair, with information booths — not a set schedule of presentations. "Come as you are, whenever you want."

The event is planned for 9 a.m. to noon Feb. 24 at the Nolan Center.

In addition to inviting lenders and contractors, borough officials will be at the event to answer questions about zoning, utilities, electrical requirements and other issues that new homeowners may have.

The goal is to provide answers for potential bidders to make them smarter consumers and better prepared for home building and ownership, Thomas explained.

Anyone interested in setting up an information booth at the event can contact Thomas at City Hall at 907-874-2381, or email kthomas@wrangell.com. There is no charge for a booth.

The borough will first sell the front 10 parcels at the subdivision in an online auction, and

then the back 10 by lottery. The borough assembly still needs to set the final terms of the land sale. The planning and zoning commission forwarded its recommendations to the assembly last month.

The tentative schedule for the land sale has been nudged back to late summer, "closer to fall," Thomas said, to ensure that bidders will have access to the parcels.

"People want to be able to inspect the lots they will be bidding on," which means survey stakes will need to be placed, she said. Potential bidders also have told borough officials they want to be able to walk the lots before the sales. That will mean waiting until road and utility construction is complete, so that people can safely access the parcels, Thomas said.

And then, winning bidders will want full access to the lots so that they can start work, she said.

The 20 lots are close to a half-acre each. The 10 front lots that will go on sale by online auction are valued at between \$53,000 and \$70,000 each. They will go to the highest bidders.

The 10 back-row lottery parcels will be sold at a fixed price of between \$45,000 and \$60,000 each.

The municipality took ownership of the property in 1996. The land had been used by the Bureau of Indian Affairs Wrangell Institute boarding school, which closed in 1975.



PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

Alaska Wildlife Trooper Chadd Yoder (center) stands with detachment commander Capt. Derek DeGraaf (left) and director Col. Bernard Chastain (right) while receiving awards at a ceremony Jan. 18 at the Sourdough Lodge in Wrangell. Yoder will transfer to Ketchikan on March 30.

## Departing wildlife trooper receives highest award and commendation

By MARK C. ROBINSON  
*Sentinel reporter*

After two and a half years in Wrangell, Alaska Wildlife Trooper Chadd Yoder is preparing to transfer to Ketchikan. But before leaving, he received an unforgettable send-off from his fellow troopers.

Wildlife troopers from the division's Southern Detachment gathered Thursday, Jan. 18, at the Sourdough Lodge to honor their brethren with pins for years of service as well as awards in various categories. Anticipating that he would receive some sort of pin and a visit to his post from command staff for a farewell celebration, Yoder arrived with

his wife Sabrina and their children Cyrus, Darius and Addy.

To his surprise, he received two additional honors: 2023 Trooper of the Year Award for the Southern Detachment, and a commendation for bravery for his actions responding to Wrangell's deadly landslide on Nov. 20.

Yoder's wife had known about her husband's awards for months. "Can I keep a secret?" she said with a laugh. "I didn't tell these kids until today, because they cannot keep secrets."

Sgt. Cody Lister said when he contacted people in town "on the down-low" to inform them of Yoder's upcoming ac-

colades, there was a growing sense of excitement and residents wanted to spread the word to join in the celebration. "Chadd seems to really mean a lot to this community."

Before the ceremony, Col. Bernard Chastain, Alaska wildlife troopers director, said that among the 37 different locations that the division has around the state, Yoder's post is one of the smaller ones. He is the only trooper in town, with no corresponding state trooper.

A sizable gathering came to the ceremony. Both Chastain and the detachment commander, Capt. Derek DeGraaf,

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## Alaska trollers gear up to fight endangered listing for king salmon

By SHANNON HAUGLAND  
*Sitka Sentinel*

Southeast salmon fishermen say they weren't surprised by the news that the nonprofit Wild Fish Conservancy has launched a fresh effort that could shut down Alaska's king salmon fisheries.

Last year, Southeast Alaska king salmon troll fisheries were threatened by a lawsuit from the Washington state-based organization in the name of protecting an important food source for Puget Sound killer whales.

The latest threat comes from the conservancy's announcement that it will seek listing of Alaska king salmon under the protection of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Alaska fishing organizations are gearing up for another battle to protect their livelihood and the economy of Southeast, said Matt

Donohoe, a Sitka troller and president of the Alaska Trollers Association.

"This could affect everything — cruise ships, trawlers, subsistence harvest in South-central — not just fishing," Donohoe said. "ESA listing has a broad effect on all kinds of things, not just harvest."

In 2020, the nonprofit Wild Fish Conservancy sued the National Marine Fisheries Service to stop the Southeast troll fishery for kings, arguing the fishing is contributing to the decline of the southern resident killer whales by depriving them of the fish that provide a major food source.

After three years of court proceedings, and the possible cancellation of the Southeast summer troll king season last year, the U.S. Court of Appeals said the fishery could open pend-

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## Senior Center Menu

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

**Thursday, Jan. 25**

Six-layer dinner, green beans, peach salad

**Friday, Jan. 26**

Porcupine meatballs over pasta, mixed vegetables, cabbage and pear and raisin salad

**Monday, Jan. 29**

Closed. Shelf-stable meal delivered on Friday, Jan. 26

**Tuesday, Jan. 30**

Hotcha baked beans, oven french fried potatoes, honey mustard coleslaw, rice

**Wednesday, Jan. 31**

Pineapple lemon chicken, steamed broccoli, fruit slaw, rice and vegetable pilaf.

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

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

## Ferry Schedule

### Northbound

**Friday, Jan. 26**

Kennicott, 9:45 p.m.

**Friday, Feb. 2**

Kennicott, 4:45 p.m.

**Friday, Feb. 9**

Kennicott, 8:45 p.m.

**Friday, Feb. 16**

Kennicott, 4:15 p.m.

### Southbound

**Monday, Jan. 29**

Kennicott, 8:30 a.m.

**Monday, Feb. 5**

Kennicott, 7:30 a.m.

**Monday, Feb. 12**

Kennicott, 8 a.m.

**Monday, Feb. 19**

Kennicott, 6 a.m.

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

## Tides

### High Tides

### Low Tides

	AM		PM		AM		PM	
	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft	Time	Ft
Jan. 24	00:17	14.0	11:53	16.9	05:46	4.3	06:31	-1.6
Jan. 25	00:58	14.5	12:34	16.9	06:26	3.9	07:05	-1.6
Jan. 26	01:34	14.8	01:12	16.8	07:02	3.6	07:35	-1.4
Jan. 27	02:06	15.0	01:46	16.4	07:35	3.4	08:03	-1.0
Jan. 28	02:36	15.0	02:18	15.8	08:08	3.2	08:31	-0.4
Jan. 29	03:04	14.9	02:50	15.0	08:41	3.2	08:59	0.4
Jan. 30	03:31	14.8	03:24	14.1	09:17	3.1	09:28	1.2



# ALASKA AIRLINES CLUB 49 COMMUNITY EVENTS CALENDAR

**NOLAN CENTER THEATER** - No movies this weekend. Next weekend: "Wonka."

**WRANGELL MARINERS' MEMORIAL** board members will be available to assist in completing applications to add names to the commemorative plaques from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday, Jan. 30 and 31, at the Nolan Center. Applications are available online at wrangellmarinersmemorial.com. Donations and memberships are also accepted online.

**STORY TIME AT THE LIBRARY**, 10 to 11 a.m. Fridays starting Feb. 2. Come enjoy the stories, crafts and snacks at the Irene Ingle Public Library. Call 907-874-3535.

**COMMUNITY MARKET** 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 3, at the Nolan Center. Check out the locally grown and handcrafted items.

**WATERCOLOR PAINTING**, 1 to 4 p.m., Saturday, Feb. 17, at St. Philip's parish hall with Michael Bania. No fees but donations are welcome for supplies. 60 spaces are available. Call Michael at 907-978-7717 to reserve a spot.

**BUSINESS TRAINING** series provided online by Tongass Federal Credit Union from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Feb. 15: Financial Planning Projections. The series is free and open to the public. Go online at: TongassFCU.com/TheCommons.

**CREATIVE WRITING CONTEST** for stories, fiction, non-fiction and poetry sponsored by the Anchorage Daily News. Submissions due Feb. 15 and open to all ages. Enter at adn.com/creativewritingcontest.

**HOMEBUYERS/BUILDERS and FINANCIAL LITERACY SYMPOSIUM**, 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, Feb. 24, at the Nolan Center, hosted by the borough. No fee to attend. Contact Kate Thomas at 907-874-2381 for more information.

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

**WRANGELL PARKS and RECREATION** is offering multiple activities to get your body moving. For more information on any of the activities and more visit [www.wrangellrec.com](http://www.wrangellrec.com) or call 907-874-2444.

- **PICKLEBALL** noon to 2 p.m. Tuesdays, 7 to 9 p.m. Fridays and 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. Sundays at the community center gym for ages 14 and up. \$5 drop-in fee. Wear athletic clothing and bring gym shoes.
- **ARTHRITIS CLASS** 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday at the community center multi-purpose room for ages 18 and up. \$5 drop-in fee.
- **WINTER WORKOUT CHALLENGE** through March 31 is built to encourage consistent movement, with a goal of completing at least 30 minutes of exercise 5 to 6 days per week. This challenge is for people of ALL fitness levels. The participant who completes the most workouts within the challenge dates will win a six-month pass to the Parks and Recreation facility; prizes donated by local businesses will be raffled off at the end of the challenge. For ages 14 and up. Registration required for this free activity.

## Continuing Events

**PARKS and RECREATION** [www.wrangellrec.com](http://www.wrangellrec.com)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Jan. 24, 1924**

A new device that is a wonderful improvement in the power trolling gurdy and which will be a boon to fishermen has been invented by Steven A. Shepherd of Wrangell. With the aid of this new line-hauling device, the fishing lines are readily drawn up by power so that it requires no effort on the part of the fisherman to haul in his lines. One of these machines is in actual operation on Mr. Shepard's gas boat, and the numerous fishermen who have seen it in operation are very enthusiastic over the machine and pronounce it a wonderful improvement in power gurdy. Mr. Shepard states an

arrangement has been entered into whereby the Wrangell Machine Shop will manufacture the machines.

**Jan. 21, 1949**

The Wrangell Elks Lodge will present a set of filmstrips entitled "Our American Heritage" to the Wrangell school system as a part of the Elks' program to "Make Democracy Work," A. V. Ritchie, exalted ruler of the local Elks announced today. Ceremonies for the formal presentation will be arranged later, he said. "Our American Heritage" dramatizes the development of our democratic freedoms from the Magna Carta through colonial times and the early struggles of

the republic down to the problems that challenge the preservation of democracy today. "Our American Heritage" was produced by the Reader's Digest at the request of the National Education Association.

**Jan. 23, 1974**

Wrangell voters waded through rising snow last Thursday to register heavy approval of the hospital bond issue. The proposal authorizing the sale of up to \$200,000 in general obligation bonds to complete a nursing home addition at the hospital won by a 148 to 33 margin, according to unofficial returns released by City Clerk Joyce Rasler. The

approval clears the way to include a basement addition to the nursing home. The basement will include offices for at least two doctors, a morgue and other spaces. Construction on the 11-bed nursing home structure, which will be a west wing to the existing building, is scheduled to begin in the spring.

**Jan. 21, 1999**

News that a proposed city harbor may be built in the bay near Cemetery Point has sparked new interest in the Native cemetery there. Local Native leaders met earlier this year to address concerns and were pleased by the city's response

that the graves will remain intact. Cemetery Point is considered a culturally significant site because it is the only intact Native cemetery left in Wrangell. According to a report submitted in 1994 by archaeologist Gerald Kary, "During historic times, Cemetery Point has been the traditional burying ground for Native peoples of the Stikine and early explorers and settlers. Russians are known to be buried near the grave of the American soldier who raised the Stars and Stripes over Fort Wrangell in 1867." Should funds ever become available to enhance Cemetery Point, it is hoped that steps will be taken to allow a historic investigation of this unique site.

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# Petroglyph Beach tour operators will have to get a permit, pay fees

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

Commercial tour operators who take customers to the Petroglyph Beach State Historic Site this summer need to get a state permit and pay a fee.

In addition to buying an annual permit in advance, commercial operators are required to pay the state \$6 per person for guided tours or \$2 per person if they simply drop off customers at the site for an unguided tour.

Operators can total up their paying customers and send in their payment after the visitor season is over, as long as they make the Dec. 31 deadline, said Preston Kroes, Southeast Region superintendent for Alaska State Parks.

Though the permit requirement has been in state law since the 1980s and has applied to the Wrangell attraction since it was designated a state historic site in 2000, Wrangell operators were never notified of the fee and it was not enforced. Late last summer, state officials realized that no one was getting a permit or paying the fee; they decided to wait until 2024 to enforce the requirement.

Permits are available on the state Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation website at [dnr.alaska.gov/parks/permit/](http://dnr.alaska.gov/parks/permit/), which includes a tutorial video to assist applicants in the process.

There is a one-time application fee of \$100 and an annual permit cost of \$350.

"Anyone conducting commercial activities within a unit of the state park system must obtain, in advance, a permit issued by the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation," according to the division's website. "Examples of commercial activities include guided activities."

The state owns the six-acre waterfront parcel on

the northwest end of Wrangell Island, about a mile north of the ferry terminal. A 1998 land-use agreement with the borough says the state is responsible for major repairs while the borough will take care of trash pickup and light maintenance.

The Division of Parks collected close to \$5 million last year statewide for personal use of cabins, campsites and parking, and payments from commercial operators. The money is not dedicated to expenses at each park site, but goes into the division's budget for spending across the state.

"Parks money stays in parks," Kroes explained last year.

Officials realized last summer that no one was getting permits for petroglyph tours after someone complained about increasing visitor traffic at the site amid concerns that it could lead to beach erosion and damage the ancient carvings.

Borough officials also were unaware of the permit requirement until the complaint prompted state and borough officials to confer.

Petroglyph Beach probably is the only state historic site where no one noticed the lack of enforcement of the permit requirement, Kroes said.

The fee applies only to commercial operations.

The petroglyphs, City Museum and Chief Shakes House are Wrangell's major land-based visitor attractions. Petroglyph Beach has the highest concentration of petroglyphs in Southeast, estimated at thousands of years old.

The beach is easily accessible from Evergreen Avenue, though a growing number of visitors are arriving aboard small boats run by tour operators, coming ashore and walking up the beach. The site includes a viewing platform and interpretive signs overlooking the beach, and steps leading down to the beach.



PHOTO COURTESY WRANGELL PARKS AND RECREATION

Kate Thomas, an enthusiastic exerciser, was one of the first to sign up for the Winter Workout Challenge.

## School budget

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the Wrangell district and others around the state have been pushing for an increase in the state's per-student funding formula — which has not changed since 2017.

The draft budget for next year shows general fund revenues of \$5.2 million — of which about 60% is from the state foundation funding formula — and expenses of \$5.79 million.

If the state does not signifi-

cantly boost its funding, the school board could pull from reserves to cover the gap or consider spending cuts.

The state sets a limit on how much money a school district can hold in reserve but granted a waiver for Alaska districts to exceed that limit through June 2025 to help cope with pandemic disruptions to their finances. "School districts who are in boroughs can only keep 10% of budget reserve, but we can use

that waiver so we can use more than 10%," Burr explained.

According to preliminary numbers, the Wrangell district could end this school year with more than \$1 million in reserves.

The school board is planning a district-wide staff meeting and a public hearing on budget plans for Feb. 26, followed by a work session with the borough assembly on Feb. 28. The board is targeting March 15 to submit its final budget to the assembly.

## Parks and Recreation challenges community to track winter exercise

By CHARLEY SOUTHERLAND  
For the Wrangell Sentinel

At this time of year, when it's dark for nearly 16 hours a day and temperatures are often below freezing, it's difficult for many to get outside and exercise.

Wrangell Parks and Recreation is trying to address that dilemma by encouraging people to exercise indoors.

The Winter Workout Challenge is a friendly competition where people self-log their exercises on a board at the community center. Those who log the most exercises will receive prizes like free entry to Parks and Recreation facilities and prizes donated by Wrangell businesses.

"The Winter Workout Challenge is ... built to encourage consistent movement with a goal of completing at least 30 minutes of exercise five to seven days a week," recreation coordinator Devyn Johnson said.

"Nothing more than a fun little competition to motivate and inspire," the department said in its social media postings.

The challenge is for people of all fitness levels, but workouts must happen inside Parks and Recreation facilities. Johnson said people can swim, stretch, do yoga or cardio, lift weights, and play racquetball or volleyball.

Participants must be at least 14 years old.

The challenge began Jan. 2 and ends Feb. 29.

The person with the most logged workouts over that period gets a six-month pass to Parks and Recreation facilities.

As of Jan. 18, 30 people had signed on for the challenge.

"Wrangell is a pretty hard place to live mentally during these dark cold months, so we're just trying to get folks in a healthy mind space and move their body," Johnson said.

Kate Thomas was one of the first to sign up. "I like competing against myself," she said. "I love the StairMaster and the new Concept2 bike."

Local businesses donated things like hats, stickers and paintings which the Parks and Recreation Department will distribute by raffle at the end of the challenge.

By completing workouts they've never tried, participants earn double points. So, if you've never lifted weights and do weight-lifting workouts, you get a double-point star sticker. Participants add stickers under their names on a big board to log their workouts.

Registration is free and available online: <https://bit.ly/WPRWWC23>. For more information, call Parks and Recreation at 907-874-2444 or go to the website [www.wrangellrec.com](http://www.wrangellrec.com)

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## FROM THE PUBLISHER

# It's smart to try on different work shoes

BY LARRY PERSILY  
Publisher

This column has little to do with actual footwear — dress shoes if you have an office job, work boots if you're a contractor, comfortable shoes if you're on your feet all day or rubber boots if you work on a fishing boat.

It's about walking in their shoes or, more specifically, walking and working in the shoes of people in other jobs. It's about elected officials and office bosses who make decisions about the jobs and lives of other people.

What better way to make good decisions than to know what your employees deal with on the job, the problems, the rewards and especially how hard the work can be.

It's not a new management practice, but it's one that is increasingly needed — especially for elected officials who pass judgment based on what they are told by one side, or what they saw on social media, or what they heard from constituents who are not always impartial or knowledgeable about the job.

The late Herb Kelleher, who co-founded Southwest Airlines more than 50 years ago, won praise from the flying public, employees and stockholders for stepping out of his comfy office shoes and working as a baggage handler, ticket agent and in other roles at the counter, on the tarmac and in the stock room. He filled those shoes at least one day every quarter, learning what it took to do the jobs.

He set a good example for making informed decisions.

Supporters of the food stamps program, now called SNAP, have long advocated for elected officials to try living off the nutrition assistance program for a week or two, to better understand how hard it can be to feed a family. The Food Stamp Challenge has been around almost 20 years, trying to win over skeptics of the benefits program, particularly members of Congress who make budget decisions.

It's a similar situation in the debate over public education funding in Alaska. Support-

ers of increased state funding work the whiteboards, letter-writing campaigns and Capitol hallways to educate legislative skeptics of the need for more money, smaller classes, more counselors, more programs and activities to better prepare students for work and life after graduation.

Last week, a mother of two children educated by the Juneau schools stood on the steps outside the Capitol to read a two-minute statement to no one in particular but for everyone to think about.

Rebecca Braun, a former journalist and policy analyst, asked what it says about Alaskans' values when the state funding formula for public schools has not budgeted since 2017. She asked why state agencies get a raise in their budget numbers every year to cover inflation, but not schools.

"We cannot afford to pretend our schools can magically survive slow strangulation," she said.

And then, probably without thinking about the former head of Southwest Airlines, Braun challenged "every legislator and policy maker in Alaska to substitute teach for one week, at any level, any school." After working in a teacher's shoes, "come back and tell us why our schools and our students don't need or deserve to be at the top of our priority list."

It's a good idea.

I learned my lesson five years ago when I taught journalism at the University of Alaska Anchorage. I prepared lesson plans, assignments, and even baked cookies to connect with students. It was the toughest job I've ever had.

I learned two things from my short stint in front of the class. Teachers, whether in kindergarten or college, work hard and are demoralized by a lack of support from elected officials.

My other lesson was remorse. I felt bad for all those years in elementary and high school when I misbehaved in class and disrespected the teacher.

They deserved better from me, and they deserve better from budget writers.

## EDITORIAL

# Entire community should pay attention to school budget

Pick your cliché: Push comes to shove; between a rock and a hard place; money is tight; living within your means; don't spend more than you can afford.

Children need a quality education to succeed in life.

Just because the cliches flow easily, don't expect the answers to be as easy.

The school district is in its last year of federal pandemic relief aid, which it has used to cover the salaries and benefits of Wrangell's two school principals. That means district officials and the school board will have to absorb those expenses into an already tight general fund budget, at a cost of about \$300,000 for the 2024-2025 school year.

The district also faces the uncertainty that the Legislature may or may not approve an increase in the state funding formula for K-12 public education — which has been stagnant since 2017 — and whether the resistant governor will go along with an increase or veto it like he did last year.

Also factor in the reality that enrollment, while now stable, is down about 40 students from the pre-pandemic count, further cutting into how much money the state sends to Wrangell. The state provides about 60% of the district's operating funds, based on a per-student formula, and that money is key to balancing the budget and providing a good education.

It's important to note that the borough this past year contributed to the district budget at the maximum amount allowed under state law.

All in all, school officials, staff and students and parents should be concerned about next year's budget.

It's no surprise that the federal money is running out; the district has been planning ahead, knowing the day would come. It has been holding down spending to maintain its reserves to help fill in for revenue shortages.

Those reserves will not last forever if they become an annual funding source.

The district will have to juggle preserving healthy reserves and providing the courses, academic programs, activities and support that students need to succeed — while at the same time waiting to see if the Legislature, and particularly the governor, fulfill the state's responsibility to public education.

There is a lot at stake as the school board works the next two months on the budget. The community should pay attention and support public education.

— Wrangell Sentinel

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Every day can be a good day to create better world for all

One of my daughters sent me an article about World Religion Day that appeared on her company intranet on Jan. 12. It occurred to me that this was a topic worth exploring, and I decided to investigate it further online.

The event was first celebrated in 1947 in Portland, Maine, under the title, World Peace Through World Religion. Gradually, more communities began setting aside the third Sunday in January to observe it as World Religion Day. The purpose is to foster harmony between people of all faiths, including Indigenous values and cultures with deeply held wisdom.

Interfaith activities are often organized to bring people together from mixed backgrounds. Forums are arranged where people can "step out of their bubbles" to connect with the views and experiences of newfound friends who may have a different framework of thinking.

Everyone's story is unique and worth the time for dialogue, both in listening and expressing one's ideas. It's plain to see that many conflicts and wars have been based on religious disputes and yet, using the worldwide web, it has become easier to find common ground and see similarities between religious paths.

The new website of the Wrangell Baha'i community was completed on Jan. 12 and develops these themes further. It's at [www.bahaisofwrangell.org](http://www.bahaisofwrangell.org). As

the opening post says, "We desire to join hands with our neighbors in a community-building process that cultivates friendship and transforms it into spiritual and material progress."

Some really great things are already happening in Wrangell as faith communities openly engage with one another — the shared study of sacred verses, devotional gatherings, meaningful conversations on a multitude of subjects, children's virtues classes open to all, junior youth and youth exchanges, various social and economic activities.

Any day is a good day to get together to share insights and perspectives that will help create a more united and better world right here and now.

Kay Larson

### Nature Trail upkeep much appreciated by so many in town

For those of us who choose to walk the Volunteer Park (ballpark) Nature Trail on an almost daily basis, I would like to express our gratitude for the work that our city crew and volunteers have done to keep this accessible to us.

The plowing of the trail by Todd White in the past and the city crew this year has been noticed. Walking on unplowed snowpack causes knee and ankle twisting and pain for some of us.

We've also noticed there is enough snow for skiers to still use the trail as well.

Meeting up with friends to walk and catch up or even

using the walk time to listen to podcasts or music are how I've seen the trail used. To be able to safely walk dogs off-leash as well has been a true benefit to the dog lovers of Wrangell.

It is amazing that with the two trails and the ability to access them multiple ways, one can walk the trails and never see others that we know are out on the trail by seeing their vehicles in the parking lot.

I also love that the sledding hill is made available and our children are encouraged to pursue outdoor recreation safely. I'm not sure where the lights for the area came from, but kudos to the provider.

Whether walking, skiing or sledding, I would encourage Wrangell to get outside.

Diana Nore

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# Governor wants to take over appointment of entire ferry system board

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

Unless the Legislature decides otherwise by mid-March, Gov. Mike Dunleavy will take over appointment of the entire nine-member Alaska Marine Highway Operations Board.

State law reserves four of the seats for appointment by legislative leaders, but Dunleavy on

the first day of the legislative session Jan. 16 introduced an executive order that changes the law so that the governor would control all of the appointments.

The change will take effect 60 days after the order was issued — unless a majority of the 60 legislators vote in a joint session to reject the executive order.

The governor's office said

there is no particular reason for the change in the appointment process for the ferry system advisory board, other than Dunleavy's priority "to make state government as efficient and effective as possible."

The Legislature created the advisory board in 2021 in an effort to bring more public input to management decisions and diminish political interference in ferry system operations.

"It's a big concern," Ketchikan Rep. Dan Ortiz said of the governor's order. "Creating that board was a first step" in trying to give more autonomy to the ferry system.

Changing the law so that governors get to appoint the entire board "pulls things back and puts the board under more control" of the administration, said Ortiz, who also represents Wrangell.

Kodiak Rep. Louise Stutes, who served as House speaker in 2021 when the first legislative

appointments were named to the new board, said she will push hard for the House Transportation Committee to hold a hearing on the governor's executive order.

Stutes opposes removing the Legislature's ability to name four of the nine seats. "It's politics at its best," she said of the governor's move to take over all of the appointment authority.

Stutes, who has served in the Legislature since 2015, the same as Ortiz, fought hard in 2021 to ensure that the legislation creating the advisory board included public members appointed by the House speaker and Senate president.

The bill amending the structure and membership of the advisory board passed without any "no" votes in the House and Senate in 2021.

If Dunleavy's executive order goes into effect, as of July 1 he would be able to remove any current members of the board —

even if they have time remaining on their terms — to make room for new appointees. Or he could reappoint the current members.

Juneau Sen. Jesse Kiehl questioned the reasons for the order. "I think it's a functional board today and I'm not sure why there's a need for change," he told the Juneau Empire last week.

"I'm really concerned about it," Senate President Gary Stevens told the Empire. "I like the Legislature having input into that board. It's very important for me in Kodiak, it's important to a lot of people in Southeast Alaska as well. Who knows how it's going to turn out, but I think we're unlikely to give up our authority to appoint people to boards."

The executive order was among 12 issued by Dunleavy last week, all dealing with state boards and commissions.

## Summer ferry schedule starts with no service first two weeks of May

By LARRY PERSILY  
Sentinel writer

The state ferry schedule is available for bookings for the summer season, May 1 through Sept. 30, though it opens with no stops in Wrangell until May 12 due to crew changeover between vessels.

The overall schedule is the same as recent years: A weekly northbound stop in town Sunday afternoon or early evening, and a southbound port call every Wednesday morning.

The Alaska Marine Highway System will operate the Columbia, the largest ship in the fleet, on the weekly run between Bellingham, Washington, and through Southeast Alaska up into Lynn Canal.

The Kennicott is serving that route during the winter season. The state will pull the Kennicott out of service for the summer due to a crew shortage.

The early-May gap in service on the ferry system's mainline route is to allow time to move crew from the Kennicott to staff up the idle Columbia, Sam Dapevich, Alaska Department of Transportation spokesman, said Friday, Jan. 19.

The Columbia has not operated since late November, when it was pulled from service for annual maintenance.

The Kennicott will stop working on May 1 and the Columbia is scheduled to leave Ketchikan after the crew changeover on May 8 for Bellingham, returning northbound and resuming service to Wrangell as it passes through on its way to Petersburg.

The schedule leaves Wrangell without ferry service between the southbound Kennicott on April 29 and the northbound Columbia on May 12.

The ferry system website shows summer fares similar to winter rates. For example, an adult driver with a vehicle will cost \$1,374 for travel between Bellingham and Wrangell this summer.

With the ferry system unable to put the Kennicott to work this summer, the schedule does not include any service to Prince Rupert, British Columbia, a popular connection point to the North American highway system. Alaska ferries called on Rupert for decades until crew shortages, budget cuts and new U.S. and Canadian border rules brought an end to the stops almost five years ago.

State officials talk about wanting to resume service to Prince Rupert and have resolved the border security and port issues but it remains elusive, particularly with the tie-up of the Kennicott, the only operational vessel in the fleet sanctioned to call on the foreign port.

The most heavily traveled route in the system — between Juneau, Haines and Skagway — will see a ferry just about every day this summer.

## Trooper award

Continued from page 1

were on hand to preside over the event.

After presenting several pins for years of service and awards to other troopers from neighboring communities, Yoder was called to stand with Chastain and DeGraaf, whereupon they presented him with his award for trooper of the year as the most outstanding in his detachment. Chastain apologized to Yoder for the delay. "We've tried to get down here, I swear, multiple times," he said to the laughter of the audience. "Sorry that it's 2024."

Chastain spoke of Yoder's great working relationship with the town and surrounding areas, how he brought out the best in his fellow troopers, that his list of responsibilities was endless, and he excelled at each facet of the job.

"Being the sole trooper means that he is responsible for everything associated with the operation on the post, ranging from taking out post garbage, maintaining evidence, patrol activities, maintaining vessels, filing charges, representing the state in complex court cases, and it goes on and on," he said.

After receiving the award, Yoder prepared to return to his seat when Chastain called him back to present him with a commendation for his reaction and service after the landslide in November, providing vital assistance despite dangerous conditions.

"Throughout the 10-plus-day natural disaster response, Trooper Yoder worked tirelessly, not only as a dedicated trooper, but also as a member of this close-knit community," Chastain said.

DeGraaf then presented Yoder with one final

tribute: a going-away plaque. "This is the bitter-sweet part for us," he said, although he was glad that the trooper would remain in Southeast. "Ketchikan's getting another good trooper."

In his acceptance speech, Yoder said, "I remember when we first came to Wrangell in April 2021. Our household goods hadn't arrived yet. We didn't have beds. We had just basic, basic items. By the end of the day, we all had beds to sleep in. We had cooking utensils to cook with. My kids had toys to play with. And they came from neighbors, volunteer firefighters, the community, and it just really brought a sense of welcoming ... and you really set our time here in Wrangell up for success, and I really appreciate that. It's a bittersweet moment to move on. ... We've completely enjoyed our time here and thank you for your support tonight."

After the ceremony, Yoder admitted that the awards were a complete surprise but very welcome, and it meant a lot to him that his superior officers traveled from Anchorage to present him with the honor. "I knew there was probably like a send-off of sorts," he said, "but I certainly did not expect what I received there."

Yoder reports to his new position in Ketchikan on March 30. It's estimated that it will be a month before his replacement, Trooper Alisha Seward, currently based in Juneau, arrives in May, but others will fill in until her arrival. "There'll be troopers coming and going out of here," said Chastain, noting that two troopers are stationed in Petersburg.

## Southeast trollers respond

Continued from page 1

ing the outcome of the case.

The conservancy claims wild chinook stocks are declining and need protection from the Canadian border north to the Aleutian Islands, including watersheds of Southeast, Cook Inlet and Southcentral Alaska.

Donohoe said the claims are inaccurate on several fronts but particularly as they relate to Southeast king salmon stocks.

"It's an absurd concept but we have to take it seriously because we thought the original lawsuit was absurd and they nearly shut us down," he said. "There's no issue with extinction of king salmon anywhere in Southeast. I can't speak to the Yukon and Kenai rivers,

but they have problems."

He said the trollers association is preparing an action of its own, starting with informing members about the petition seeking an endangered listing and meeting with attorneys on the best way to respond. "We need to find out how seriously to take this," Donohoe said.

Alaska Department of Fish and Game officials said they are reviewing the petition and will work with the National Marine Fisheries Service to ensure the federal agency has the best information to make a decision. NMFS has up to 90 days to accept or reject the petition for an endangered species listing.

If the agency accepts the pe-

tion, it will have a year to review data and decide whether king salmon merit listing as threatened or endangered.

Jeff Farvour, a longtime Sitka troller, said he, too, wasn't surprised by the conservancy's latest action.

"They're obsessed with shutting down our troll fishery," he said. "They don't seem interested in working with other groups, fishermen, communities. So, in that way, it doesn't surprise me, but it's surprising that they're so myopic: things like weaponizing the ESA and exploiting an animal in peril like the southern resident killer whale. They should surprise somebody, but they don't surprise me anymore."

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# Mural painting provides student a colorful way to explore Tlingit culture

By MARK C. ROBINSON  
Sentinel reporter

Throughout her high school years, senior Mia Wiederspohn has been very invested in “everything Tlingit,” learning Indigenous studies and its history in Wrangell.

She worked with mentor and teacher Xwaanlein Virginia Oliver to learn the language, then assisted Oliver to create the radio show “The Application of Learning Tlingit Language,” 41 three- to five-minute episodes teaching words and phrases.

She also created and hosted her own five-episode radio program called “Mia’s Gift,” sharing her experiences with the language, traditional stories and the history of the Wrangell Institute, the Alaska Natives federal boarding school that closed in 1975.

For her senior project, Wiederspohn took on another medium to explore Tlingit culture, painting a formline design mural of two ravens, each roughly three feet wide and six feet tall, on the corner of B.B. Brock’s, a Native-themed retail shop owned by elder Lovey Brock near the City Dock. “You know, red and black are the Tlingit colors, and so I did two black ravens facing each other with a red background.”

She painted the mural last summer to complete her senior project ahead of time. “I just wanted to get it out of the way early,” she said. “I didn’t want to have to deal with doing it now, because I have college classes and a bunch of scholarships to do, and pretty hard classes in high school this year as well. So I got it out of the way early, which I wish more kids knew to do, because it took a lot of stress off of my plate.”

The inspiration came during a high school art workshop hosted by Tlingit artist Doug Chilton. “We made wooden paddles for canoeing,” Wiederspohn said. “Then we painted them, and Lovey Brock was in the workshop, and she kind of has a shaky hand, so she asked me politely to paint her paddle because she liked how mine looked.”

Brock watched Wiederspohn closely as she worked on the elder’s paddle, admiring her skill in painting traditional formline design. “She said, ‘You should paint my shop,’ and I said, ‘Well, that might be a good senior project.’”

After getting the necessary supplies, Wiederspohn had to find the right design for the mural. “I went into Virginia Oliver’s archives and I went through and I looked at all of her artwork that she has saved in her filing cabinets. And I found one that was really beautiful, and I sent a picture to Lovey and she just loved it.”

“It’s taught me how much people appreciate the reflection of Tlingit culture in Wrangell.”

— MIA WIEDERSPOHN

One challenge involved preparing the exterior wall surface. “The wood on her shop is a little bit worn and torn, so I had to go and scrape off a bunch of paint and sand down her windowsills in the beginning. And that actually was pretty tedious,” she said. “But it turned out really great. ... I sealed them with this resin. ... I think it’ll stay pretty well.”

“She did a great job,” said Brock. “She painted the ravens because I’m Raven.”

The most enjoyable part of the experience was spending time with friends while painting the mural on a warm, summer day. “I just had them go down there and sit with me. The sun was setting, and it was just so sunny and beautiful, and I was just painting and we’re



PHOTO BY MARK C. ROBINSON / WRANGELL SENTINEL

High school senior Mia Wiederspohn poses in front of her senior project — a formline design mural of two ravens she painted on the retail shop B.B. Brock’s near the City Dock.

listening to music and chatting. It was just fun to be outside and doing something,” Wiederspohn said.

She also learned from painting the mural the importance of culture and history. “It’s taught me how much people appreciate the reflection of Tlingit culture in Wrangell,” she said. “A bunch of people came up to me saying, ‘This is so important that we show how proud we are of our culture,’ and downtown there’s not a lot going on showing our Tlingit culture and our history here. ... I think it’s important to have that reflected all around town, not just Totem Park or Chief Shakes, but all around town you should be able to see who lived here historically. It’s important to keep your roots.”

As much as she’s enjoyed her time at high school, she’s ready to move on. “You know, it’s so much fun to be around so many kids at once and have so many friends, but a lot of my friends

are graduated and I’m honestly ready to go start my life. I think what I’ll miss the most is my family more than anything. But I am excited to be uprooted and just go to college and get things rolling.”

Wiederspohn plans to attend the University of Anchorage Alaska to study to become a dental hygienist. Eventually, she plans to return home but wants to explore other places first. “I think it’s really important that I try living somewhere else, which will be Anchorage for a little while and, I don’t know, maybe somewhere else too, but my heart’s in Wrangell. I really can only imagine myself coming back and having a family here in the future.”

An important aspect of creating her senior project involved leaving her own imprint on the town. “That’s going to be there for a while,” she said of the mural. “It’s cool to leave my own tracks on Wrangell.”

# Irene Ingle library building will turn 50 this summer

By MARK C. ROBINSON  
Sentinel reporter

Wrangell’s public library has two birthdays: It celebrated its 100th birthday with an open house in 2021, and this year the current building will turn 50 years old.

Originally opened in October 1921 by the Wrangell Civic Improvement Club in their club room, then moving a decade later to share space in the old City Hall, the city sold \$157,000 in bonds to help construct a building specifically designed as a library in 1974.

The construction had its beginnings in 1959 when a building fund was created — the occasion was marked by showing of the film “The Old Man and the Sea,” starring Spencer Tracy — but it would take 15 years for it to become a reality as town officials actively sought public support for the project, resulting in local and state funding.

By late summer of 1974, the new library opened at its current location, next door to its former

location in the old City Hall, later known as the Museum and Arts Center, in a gala event.

The move involved hauling 12,000 books plus hundreds of pounds of periodicals, phonograph records and shelving from the old library to the new quarters.

For librarian Irene Ingle, the new building provided amenities that many would take for granted. When officials announced that improvements had been made at the old City Hall and the heat was now on in the building, Ingle remarked, “Can’t feel it, but if they say so!”

She used to regularly bring containers of water from her home a block and half away to clean the space at the old City Hall. Ingle commented at the time of the new library’s opening: “I’ve never had hot water to mop floors with.”

At its new home, the library had the use of a popcorn machine purchased in 1971, which was put to work Saturday mornings and on other occasions, in-

cluding the Christmas holidays, when the staff held free viewings of movies or cartoons for audiences, often children. Lori Bauer, who now works at the library, said those viewings provided good memories for her daughter when she was growing up.

“I had a bag of popcorn every day when I worked here,” Bauer said. “I miss it.”

The popcorn machine went away after the library was renovated to provide more space in 1993. “It doesn’t really go (together) ... the books and popcorn,” Bauer added.

Throughout the years, volunteers played a major role in the library and its continued progress, donating time, money and effort to keep it running smoothly.

In 1980, it was renamed the Irene Ingle Public Library in honor of the town’s librarian, who had retired after 33 years. She died in 2002 at age 86.

The first sign with the library’s new name was carved by former residents Louanna and Arthur “Bugs” Nelson Jr. The

sign, as well as a plaque and photo of Ingle, continue to hold places of honor on the library walls.

Thanks to head librarian Sarah Scambler and library assistant Kaitlin Wilson for access to the library’s records archive.

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WRANGELL SENTINEL



# Legislature fails to restore vetoed school funding

By JAMES BROOKS  
Alaska Beacon

The Alaska Legislature failed on Jan. 18 to override Gov. Mike Dunleavy's veto of \$87 million in one-time additional state funding for the 2024-2025 school year.

The vote was 33-26 and did not fall along party or political caucus lines. Forty-five votes were needed to override.

The failed override capped days of legislative maneuvering and months of unsuccessful lobbying by public-education advocates. Attention now switches to a bill that would permanently increase the state's funding formula for public schools.

Unable to agree last year on a permanent boost in the funding formula, the Legislature appropriated \$175 million as

a one-time boost for school district operating budgets this year. The governor vetoed that amount in half.

The Wrangell school district was allocated about \$210,000 under the vetoed amount but would have received twice that number if lawmakers had overridden the governor's action. State funding covers about 60% of the district's operating budget.

Rep. Mike Cronk, a Tok Republican, is a former teacher and voted against the override.

"I'm not interested in one-time (funding) again," he said. "In all of our conversations, we hear that we need a permanent increase. So as a teacher and a former school board member, I want to make sure that we have a permanent in-

crease."

Twenty-one House Republican voted against the override, sealing its defeat.

Rep. Stanley Wright, an Anchorage Republican, represents a district where the school board is considering closing schools to save money. He was among the "no" votes, and also said a permanent increase, not temporary funding, is needed.

"I think we need to stop putting a Band-Aid on education. It's time for some meaningful action," he said.

House Democrats and independents, including Ketchikan Rep. Dan Ortiz, who also represents Wrangell, voted in favor of the veto override.

Several of those voting "yes" said the temporary increase would have been a helpful addition to any permanent in-

crease later approved by the Legislature.

Sen. Bill Wielechowski, an Anchorage Democrat and a "yes" vote, said he hoped there would be enough votes for an override, "but we knew it was gonna be tough. It's a very high threshold. It's the highest threshold in the United States for a veto override."

Partly because of that threshold, Alaska's state Legislature hasn't successfully overridden a veto on an appropriations bill since 2009, and that involved special federal economic stimulus money. An ordinary budget veto hasn't been overridden since 1987.

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

# Legislators look for answers to continued working-age population loss

By JAMES BROOKS  
Alaska Beacon

As the Alaska Legislature gets back to work in Juneau, the state population is on the minds of lawmakers.

For the 11th consecutive year, more people moved out of

Alaska than moved into it, according to new estimates published last week by the Alaska Department of Labor.

Though new births over the past year counterbalanced the losses, the state's population growth was a meager 0.04%, de-

mographers estimate. The state's new estimated population, 736,812, is below what it was in 2012.

While the trend has been building for more than a decade, the number of lawmakers calling for swift and major action

has grown, and a variety of proposals are now circulating in the Capitol.

"It's just interesting this year how, regardless of whether it's cost of living, energy costs, schools, everybody's bringing up that population loss," said

Fairbanks Rep. Will Stapp.

"I think it's been finally recognized," said Senate Majority Leader Cathy Giessel, of Anchorage. "You know the old analogy: 'How do you boil a frog?' You turn up the heat slowly. And then finally, the frog realizes, 'Oh, no, I'm cooked.' I think that's kind of what's happened."

Speaker of the House Cathy Tilton, from Wasilla, said, "The No. 1 priority here for our caucus will be to figure out how we reduce the cost of energy all across Alaska."

Senate President Gary Stevens, from Kodiak, said increased education funding is the No. 1 priority of the Senate's bipartisan majority. More funding will result in better schools, he and others suggested. "We have put education at the very top," he said.

Members of the predominantly Democratic minority in the House have also called education funding part of the answer. "This is a crisis, an absolute crisis," said House Minority Leader Calvin Schrage, of Anchorage.

Giessel said the lack of a pension program for state employees is deterring people from moving to the state to take state jobs, and the revival of the pension is the majority's No. 2 priority.

She and others said they're particularly alarmed by the decline in the state's working-age population, the number of residents between 18 and 64 years old. That's fallen from more than 480,000 in 2013 to about 450,000 today.

"If we have aspirations ... we need to have qualified workforce here," Giessel said. "These are the folks that are leaving, that are being recruited to other states."

Stapp, a member of the House majority, said that with so many ideas floating around, there's a big unanswered question.

"Everyone kind of agrees on the issue: We're seeing outmigration in our state. We're even going to agree on a lot of the reasons why that's happening. So the problem is, when it comes to it, what are you going to do about it?"

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OBITUARIES

# Longtime Wrangell resident Doreen ‘Stretch’ Gale Keso dies at 84

Longtime Wrangell resident Doreen “Stretch” Gale Keso (Ellingson), 84, passed away on Jan. 7, 2024, in Anchorage, where she had resided since February 2021. Stretch was an Alaska pioneer, living in Wrangell for more than 60 years.

A celebration of life will be held this summer in Wrangell. The date, time and place will be announced at a later date. Honoring her wishes, burial will be at the Masonic Cemetery in Coquille, Oregon, at the family plot.

She was born in Coquille, Oregon, to Ira Denton and Florence Laverne Ellingson on Nov. 29, 1939. She graduated from Coquille High School in 1957 and attended modeling school in Los Angeles after-



Doreen “Stretch” Gale Keso, in a photo from the 1950s or 1960s.

ward.

In 1960, she accompanied her parents on a trip to Wrangell and fell in love with

the friendly town. Deciding to stay, she worked many jobs during her lifetime. Driving cab for Lon Powers and Bob Burrill for 16 years, she came to know many people. Afterward, she worked at the sawmill in the mid to late 1970s and later the city Public Works Department.

In 1996, she attended the Heartwood Institute Healing Academy, where she became certified in acupressure and shiatsu massage — working her craft in Wrangell. She also landscaped for many businesses and residents.

“She enjoyed music, roller skating, dancing, waterskiing, boating and, of course, the hot tub parties and camping on the Stikine River with her friends,” her family wrote.

She had two daughters, Monica and Jennifer Keso, with her then-husband Miles “Mike” West Keso.

Stretch is preceded in death by her parents and her brother Dale Denton Ellingson.

She is survived by her two daughters Monica Lynn Carlstrom, of Eagle River, and Jennifer Anne Ditcharo, of Anchorage; grandsons Alexander Thomas Ditcharo of Juneau, and Antonio Miles Ditcharo of Kent, Washington; great-grandchildren Lily Ditcharo, Les Nelson, Ocean Ditcharo, Allan Balter-Lane, Jaxton Ditcharo, Aela Ditcharo,

Alexander Jr. Ditcharo and Onyx Ditcharo.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests charitable donations be made to Alzheimer’s Association of Alaska Chapter at [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org) or 1-800-272-3900. You may also donate to your favorite charity in her memory.

Cards and letters may be sent to her daughters at: Monica Carlstrom, 8906 Meadow Park Circle, Eagle River, AK 99577; and Jennifer Ditcharo, 2806 Barbara St., No. 11, Anchorage, AK 99501.

## Former resident Peter Engwall dies in Michigan

Peter Engwall, a former Wrangell resident and a member of the Big Rapids High School Class of 1969 in Big Rapids, Michigan, died Feb. 17, 2023, in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

After graduation, Peter eventually made his home in Wrangell, where among other occupations he worked for many years as a salvage diver. He was well known in the community and often led the annual Fourth of July parade through town.

“Peter will be remembered as a lifelong traveler and seeker of unusual adventures that included a canoe trip down the Yukon River, a year spent seeking treasure off the coast of Belize, and an around-the-world trip carrying only the tiniest of knapsacks,” his friends wrote.

He was preceded in death by his mother, Cynthia Engwall, a longtime Big Rapids teacher.

“He is survived by a number of good friends who remember him fondly and with great admiration.”

Peter’s ashes will be laid to rest later this year in Highlandview Cemetery in Big Rapids, Michigan.

## SEARHC conducts survey to assess Southeast health needs

By GEORGE KOSINSKI

For the Wrangell Sentinel

The SouthEast Alaska Regional Health Consortium is offering people the chance to win Alaska Airlines miles for responding to a community health needs assessment survey.

The survey is aimed at gathering information about the overall well-being of communities and individuals across Southeast.

“Share your thoughts with us on daily living, nutrition, exercise habits and health care access,” the regional health care provider said in its Facebook postings. “The Community Wellness Health Needs Assessment was developed to evaluate the health status, needs, disparities and assets of Southeast Alaska communities.”

The survey, at [searhc.org/survey](http://searhc.org/survey), is 61 questions long and divided into sections that cover demographics, insurance status, medical history, quality of life, chronic conditions, alcohol and tobacco use, food security, diet and physical activity.

No studies or data prompted the assessment, explained Lyndsey Schaefer, marketing and communications director at SEARHC in Juneau. The health care provider is conducting the study to fulfill a grant stipulation to address community health, she said.

This is the first time the consortium has conducted an assessment of such size and reach. Schaefer said SEARHC would use the survey to “better identify each community’s specific needs.”

Data from the survey will help address particular issues and needs with targeted educational and outreach programs and policy changes, she

said.

Schaefer indicated the assessment would also be used to “evaluate community awareness and knowledge” of programs SEARHC offers, such as Wisewoman (a heart disease and stroke prevention program) and WIC (the Women, Infants and Children program, a federally funded effort to provide additional nutrition assistance for women and young children).

The Southeast-wide health care provider, with locations from Haines to Metlakatla, is hoping to encourage people to fill out the survey by offering five prizes of 20,000 Alaska Airlines miles each.

The survey will remain open until March 31, and the coalition hopes to analyze the response data to produce a report on community health across Southeast by August.



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# Basketball teams suffer multiple defeats at Metlakatla

BY MARK C. ROBINSON  
Sentinel reporter

The Wrangell boys and girls varsity basketball teams had a tough weekend Jan. 19-20 at Metlakatla, both enduring two losses.

The Wolves were soundly defeated by the Chiefs on Friday, 83-53, while Metlakatla won Saturday's rematch 56-50. The Lady Wolves were dealt a blowout from the MissChiefs on Friday, 80-20, then lost by a smaller margin on Saturday, 54-34.

The junior varsity boys fared better on Friday, defeating Metlakatla 47-23, but the junior varsity girls lost 42-22.

Head boys coach Cody Angerman admitted his players didn't play well. "We came into it slow and kind of sluggish (Friday), and we pointed out basically three things that we needed to focus on at the beginning of the game," he said. "Rebounding, no turnovers and stopping the middle, and all three of those things we failed on. And (the Chiefs) played a great game. ...



PHOTO COURTESY JEANNIE LINDSEY

Lady Wolves Christina Johnson (front) and Della Churchill wait for the ball amid Metlakatla defenders in action during Saturday's game.

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Alaska Department of  
Transportation & Public Facilities  
Southcoast Region

### PUBLIC NOTICE: SEASONAL VEHICLE WEIGHT RESTRICTIONS

Issue Date: January 2024

This notice is to remind the public and the trucking industry that seasonal weight/load restrictions will be imposed soon by the Department on its highway system for all vehicles over 10,000# GVW. These annual weight restrictions are intended to reduce roadway damage caused by heavy vehicles traveling on highways weakened during spring thawing conditions. The weight restrictions are stated as a percentage of legal allowable weight and shall be applied to the maximum axle loading in accordance with 17 AAC 25.013(e).

These annual restrictions are very dependent upon weather, local soil conditions, and frost depth, but usually occur between late February and May each year for Southeast Alaska, Kodiak Island, and the Alaska Peninsula. Since these limitations may reduce the allowable gross vehicle weight by as much as 50%, it would be advisable to transport as much freight as possible prior to the above dates. All State routes may be subject to seasonal weight restrictions.

When imposed, or modified, these restrictions will be posted on the DOT&PF Division of Measurement Standards and Commercial Vehicle Enforcement webpage.

This can be found at: <http://www.dot.state.ak.us/mscve/main.cfm>

- Under Commercial Vehicle tab at the top of the page, click Weight Restrictions.
- Choose the latest Southcoast Region listing to view the current version of our posted seasonal weight restriction notices.

The Department of Public Safety and MSCVE officers will be enforcing these restrictions.

Issued by:  
Marcus Zimmerman, Chief of Maintenance & Operations  
Email: [marcus.zimmerman@alaska.gov](mailto:marcus.zimmerman@alaska.gov)  
Phone: (907) 465-4655  
Fax: (907) 465-2021

If you or someone you represent requires special accommodations in order to respond to this public notice, please call or email the project coordinator listed above, or call Alaska Relay at 711, or call

(800) 770-8973 for TTY (800) 770-8255 for voice  
(800) 770-3919 for ASCII (866) 355-6198 for STS

Ask the communications assistant to call the project coordinator listed above so arrangements can be made to assist you.

They didn't miss many shots."

For Saturday's game, Angerman said their game plan consisted mostly of staying focused on rebounding and not turning the ball over. "We did a pretty good job for the most part."

Junior Daniel Harrison was by far the team's top scorer both nights, getting 33 points on Friday and 31 on Saturday.

However, Angerman believes it is important to build up other players so they aren't dependent on one team member. "We need to refocus and figure out who's going to be that second, even third option for getting (more points)," he said. "You can't have (only) one guy scoring 25, 30 points. ... You're not going to win games that way."

Angerman said real improvement involves going back to the basics. "We just have work to do and it's going to take just practice and playing games."

Lady Wolves head coach Christina Good knew going up against the MissChiefs would be a challenge, pointing out that their average is about 50 points a game while Wrangell's team average is 35 to 40.

"Metlakatla is the No. 1 team, and they will probably end up, in my opinion, being the only team that might stack up well against the defending state champions," she said. "They caused a lot of chaos for us, and we tried to adjust the best way we knew how."



PHOTO COURTESY JEANNIE LINDSEY

Wrangell Wolves defenders (from left) Keegan Hansen, Kyan Stead and Daniel Harrison focus on the ball as the Metlakatla player looks for a way out of the pressure in Friday's game.

The first game proved to be "a gut punch" for the team. "We were 20 to nothing before the first quarter was even over," Good said. "When you have teams that do that to you, it just completely takes you out of the game."

Nevertheless, Good was very proud of how her players handled themselves in both games. "It's hard to go in and get beat by 60, that's not fun," she said. "And as coaches, to be honest, it hurts, but at the

same time, we look at everything as a teaching moment. ... We have a young group of girls ... and they handled it so well. And then the next day, we put up 34 points, I mean that is a big turnaround."

Freshman Hailey Cook was the Lady Wolves' top scorer Friday with 6 points, while junior Aubrey Wynne led with 9 on Saturday.

Both teams will play at Petersburg on Friday and Saturday, Jan 26-27.



# Police report

## Monday, Jan. 15

Threats.  
Agency assist: Ambulance.  
Criminal trespass.  
Disabled vehicle.  
Suspicious circumstance.

## Tuesday, Jan. 16

Agency assist: Removal of vehicles from swimming pool parking lot for snow removal.  
Traffic stop.

Hazardous play: Report of children playing on the snow pile in the police department parking lot.

Criminal trespass: Violation of condition of release.

## Wednesday, Jan. 17

Agency assist: Hoonah Police Department.

Found property.  
Agency assist: Alarm.  
Disturbance.

## Thursday, Jan. 18

Agency assist.  
Motor vehicle accident.  
Agency assist: Ambulance.

## Friday, Jan. 19

Paper service.  
Parking complaint.

## Saturday, Jan. 20

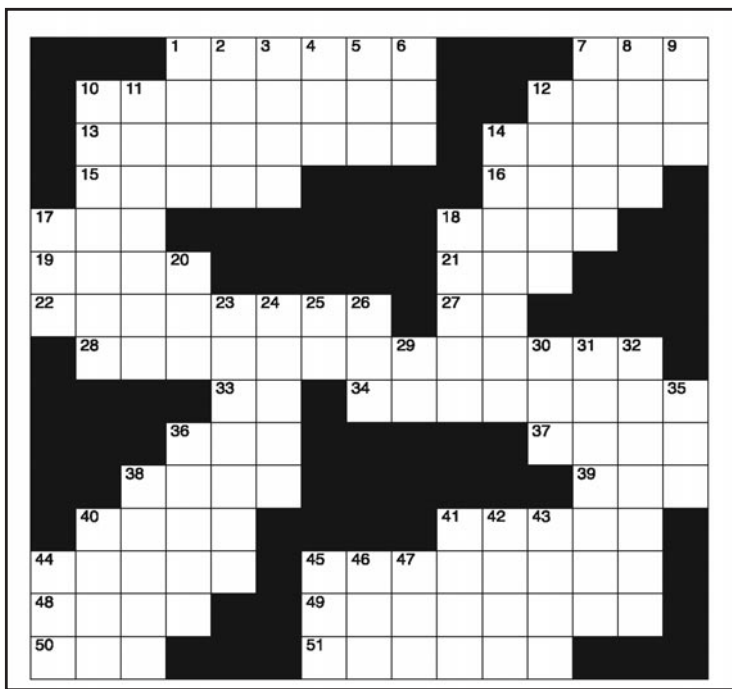
Welfare check.  
Reckless driving.

## Sunday, Jan. 21

Trespass.  
Traffic.  
Found property: Returned to owner.

# Crossword

Answers on page 12



### CLUES ACROSS

- 1. Winged nut
- 7. \_\_\_ Humbug!
- 10. One who sets apart
- 12. Circle above a saint's head
- 13. Unpleasantly loud and harsh
- 14. Expressed pleasure
- 15. Feminine given name
- 16. Company of badgers
- 17. Popular Dodge pickup truck
- 18. Witty sayings
- 19. Leader
- 21. Autonomic nervous system
- 22. Premolar
- 27. Atomic #28
- 28. Holiday decorative item
- 33. Exclamation of surprise
- 34. Rusk or cracker
- 36. Returned material authorization (abbr.)
- 37. Scottish or Irish Gaelic language
- 38. Eat
- 39. Marxist economics theory (abbr.)
- 40. Ceases to exist
- 41. Male Arabic name
- 44. Series of ridges on an organ wall
- 45. Places where bees are kept
- 48. One-time Yankees sensation Kevin
- 49. Church office
- 50. Single lens reflex
- 51. Pieces of fibrous tissue

### CLUES DOWN

- 1. Classify
- 2. Dismounted
- 3. Produced
- 4. Consumed
- 5. Director Howard
- 6. The products of human creativity
- 7. Thai monetary units
- 8. Away from wind
- 9. Builder's trough
- 10. Relating to Islam
- 11. It can sometimes ache
- 12. Small quantities (Scot.)
- 14. Poisonous plant
- 17. Laugh at
- 18. Vogul
- 20. C. European river
- 23. Type of cat
- 24. Exclamation of disgust
- 25. Stephen King novel
- 26. Without armies
- 29. Expression of sympathy
- 30. Relative biological effectiveness (abbr.)
- 31. Previously
- 32. Illegal drug
- 35. Kiloelectronvolt
- 36. Large, flightless birds
- 38. For smoking
- 40. Binary
- 41. Competition
- 42. Mark resembling an arrow
- 43. Containers
- 44. Root mean square (abbr.)
- 45. Commercials
- 46. I.M., architect
- 47. 007's creator



Zoey Grace Clark was born Jan. 7 to Jason and Michelle Clark.

## First baby of year born to Jason and Michelle Clark

BY SENTINEL STAFF

Zoey Grace Clark has the honor of being the first baby born this year to a Wrangell couple.

She was born Jan. 7 at the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage, weighing in at 7 pounds, 11 ounces and measuring 21.5 inches for the happy parents, Jason and Michelle Clark.

The dad works as a station agent at Alaska Airlines. Mom is a kindergarten teacher and has been with the school district about 10 years.

The family returned to Wrangell on Jan. 12, Jason Clark said. "We just beat the weather," he said of the snowstorm that blew into town.

Zoey is the second child for the Clarks. Their son, Oliver, is 17 months old. "He's not too sure what's going on," dad said.

Jason Clark has a daughter, Delilah, 12, from a previous relationship.

Zoey's grandparents are Mike Clark on dad's side and Deanna Horner and Jim Jenkins on mom's side.

## Ritter's River

by Marc Lutz



## Tundra

by Chad Carpenter





# Hoonah petitions to form a borough that would include Glacier Bay

BY ANDREW KITCHENMAN  
Alaska Beacon

Hoonah has submitted a petition to the Alaska Local Boundary Commission to create the state's 20th organized borough, which would include the city and some lightly populated outlying communities.

The Xunaa Borough would include Hoonah, as well as Game Creek, Elfin Cove and

Funter Bay — and most of Glacier Bay. The potential borough's name is a closer match to the Tlingit language word for the community.

"Voluntary incorporation is preferable to the potential alternative of either having a different borough government imposed upon residents by the state or leaving this entire region, except the existing City of Hoonah, un-

organized," city officials wrote in the petition.

In addition, city officials wrote, the proposed area includes "all of the Huna Tlingit's historic territory" except for lower Chilkat Peninsula land that has already been incorporated in the Haines Borough. The area includes subsistence hunting and fishing grounds.

"The ability of the Huna Tlingit to influence future decisions regarding these lands is of critical importance to the Tribe," according to the city government.

According to the 2020 census, there were 931 Hoonah residents, the vast majority of the 980 total residents of the proposed borough. It would be the state's third-smallest borough in population, after Yakutat, at 700 residents, and the Bristol Bay Borough, at about 860.

The new borough would incorporate more than 10,000

square miles of surface area, including more than 4,000 square miles of land — larger than the states of Rhode Island and Delaware combined — and more than 6,000 square miles of water, according to the petition.

Its boundaries would stretch from the Yakutat and Haines Strait to its east, Sitka to its south and the Pacific Ocean to its west.

Under the petition, Hoonah's city government would be dissolved. The new borough would have a 1% seasonal sales tax, though residents of the area of the former city of Hoonah would continue to pay the 6.5% sales tax the city currently collects, sparing those few residents in outlying communities the larger tax.

The Local Boundary Commission has the power under state law to decide whether to accept a petition after a several-

month process. If the commission votes to accept the petition, then the residents of the proposed borough would have the final say by voting in an election on whether to form a borough.

The 90-day public comment period started Dec. 1. Under a schedule posted on the commission website, staff must issue a report on the petition by Aug. 4, followed by a public meeting in Hoonah on Sept. 10. The formal written decision would be issued on Oct. 11.

If the commission votes to accept the petition, there would be an election in the proposed borough after the written decision.

If the petition is successful, Xunaa would be the first new borough since Petersburg in 2013.

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

The Southeast Alaska Power Agency (SEAPA) is seeking proposals from qualified firms to clear, trim, and cut 49.07 acres of Swan-Bailey transmission line right-of-way located on central Revillagigedo Island north of Ketchikan in Southeast Alaska. Bids are due February 28, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. AKST. For a complete set of the bid documents with additional details, please navigate to: <https://www.seapahydro.org/opportunities/bids-projects> or interested respondents may call the SEAPA office at (907) 228-2281 for a copy.



**Publish: Jan. 24, 2024**

The Southeast Alaska Power Agency (SEAPA) is seeking proposals from qualified firms to clear, trim, and cut 81.53 acres of transmission line right-of-way on SEAPA's Swan-Tyee Intertie located on Revillagigedo Island north of Ketchikan in Southeast Alaska. Bids are due February 28, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. AKST. For a complete set of the bid documents with additional details, please navigate to: <https://www.seapahydro.org/opportunities/bids-projects> or interested respondents may call the SEAPA office at (907) 228-2281 for a copy.



**Publish: Jan. 24, 2024**

## NOTICE TO CREDITORS

In the matter of the estate of Gary A. Stevens, Notice to Creditors is hereby given that Susan Stevens has been appointed personal representative of the above named estate. Pursuant to Alaska Statute Title 13.16.450, all creditors are hereby notified to present their claims within four months after the date of first publication of this notice or said claims will forever be barred. Claims must be filed with the court (Case No. 1WR-23-00015PR) or be presented to:

Estate of Gary A. Stevens  
PO Box 247  
Wrangell, AK 99929

**Publish Jan. 17, 24 and 31, 2024**

## CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL NOTICE OF JOB OPENING WRANGELL POLICE DEPARTMENT Correctional Officer/Dispatch

The City and Borough of Wrangell is accepting applications of employment for the position of **Correctional Officer/Dispatch** through Friday, Feb. 2, 2024, at 5 p.m. This is a permanent position with all City and Borough benefits.

The Dispatcher/Corrections Officer receives emergency and routine calls and assists with all aspects of Corrections. The position performs telephone investigation, preparation of call information, operation of computer terminals, operation of telephone equipment, and includes considerable contact with the general public and public service agencies. The position also assists with booking, processing and surveillance of inmates.

This is a full-time, hourly position with full benefits, paid at Grade 14. Employment is based on a successful background check and pre-employment drug screening, including additional prerequisites outlined in the job description.

Applications and job descriptions may be obtained and returned to Rob Marshall at City Hall, 205 Brueger Stree (P.O. Box 531), Wrangell, AK 99929 or via email at [rmarshall@wrangell.com](mailto:rmarshall@wrangell.com).

The City and Borough of Wrangell is an equal opportunity employer.

Mason Villarma, Interim Borough Manager  
City and Borough of Wrangell, Alaska

**Publish Jan. 24 and 31, 2024**

## Juneau schools could take out loan to help cover deficit

BY MARK SABBATINI  
Juneau Empire

The Juneau school board has approved a series of immediate cost-cutting measures including a hiring freeze, plus exploring the longer-term option of a loan to help deal with an unexpected \$9.5 million budget deficit.

Members at the Jan. 16 meeting were also presented with large-scale future cuts to consider, including school consolidations, closing the district during the summer and going to a four-day school week.

Board members, after learning earlier this month about the substantial deficit for the fiscal year ending June 30, asked Schools Superintendent Frank Hauser to present a list to consider for cuts "as distasteful as that may be."

The deficit was caused by several factors including accounting errors in the district's revenue and expense projections, plus the erosion of state funding which has remained essentially flat since 2017.

The district got a major reprieve in its timeline to resolve the situation Jan. 12 when the Alaska Department of Education agreed to a five-year repayment plan for the deficit, rather than invoking a law allowing the department to withhold money

next year if the district's budget was out of balance.

However, that doesn't resolve the need for a budget that fixes current and past deficit spending, Hauser said during his presentation at the Jan. 16 school board meeting.

"You were being squashed from the revenue side" and expenditures, he said. "It was kind of a freight train that was coming from both directions. The magnitude of this problem and these numbers, I don't believe it's possible any longer for the district to make small, targeted cuts to address these huge numbers."

Among the larger proposals presented by Hauser were moving sixth-grade glasses back to elementary schools and consolidating schools. He said the cost savings to staff would average \$668,000 for each elementary school eliminated, \$913,000 for each middle school and \$1.3 million for each high school — but that would vary widely depending on student enrollment.

Consolidation has been an ongoing discussion in recent years due to the shrinking number of students in the district. There were about 5,701 students in Juneau's schools in 1999, about 4,100 this year and about 3,000 are forecast for 2032.

## CITY and BOROUGH OF WRANGELL PUBLIC MEETING NOTICE

### Public Meeting for Wrangell Harbor Basin Floats System for RAISE Grant

There will be a Public Meeting on **Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024, starting at 6 p.m.**, in the Borough Assembly Chambers on the following:

The City and Borough of Wrangell is applying for financial assistance under the 2024 Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) program for the purpose of financing harbor transportation improvements to three facilities within the Wrangell Harbor Basin. These facilities include Inner Harbor, Reliance Harbor and Standard Oil Float. The funds will be used for engineering design, survey, environmental permitting and construction for the replacement of the Wrangell Harbor Basin Floats System.

The purpose of the meeting is to engage the community regarding the project for the Inner Harbor, Reliance Harbor and Standard Oil Float. The public meeting will provide information to the public related to the project purpose and need, and consistency with the goals of the Borough's Comprehensive Plan, project alternatives considered and design features, as well as the social, economic, environmental and other impacts of the project. Conceptual drawings of the project will be available for review and discussion with Borough staff and our engineering partner. The public is encouraged to comment on such items as:

- Social impacts
- Economic impacts
- Environmental impacts
- Service area mobility and access
- Alternatives to the project
- Other identified issues

There may be a quorum of the Borough Assembly and Port Commission present, however, there will be no action taken.

Questions concerning the project or project ideas may be submitted prior, during, or after the public meeting, and no later than Feb. 14, 2024. Please drop off project comments or ideas in writing at City Hall or by email to [smiller@wrangell.com](mailto:smiller@wrangell.com). For more information, contact Steve Miller at 907-305-0336.

**The public is encouraged to attend.**

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

**Publish Jan. 17, 24 and 31, 2024**



# Forest Service proposes new logging restrictions in Lower 48 states

BY MATTHEW BROWN  
Associated Press

The Biden administration has taken action to conserve groves of old-growth trees on national forests across the U.S. and limit logging as climate change amplifies the threats they face from wildfires, insects and disease.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the agency was adopting an “ecologically driven” approach to older forests — an arena where timber industry interests have historically predominated. That will include

the first nationwide amendment to U.S. Forest Service management plans in the agency’s 118-year history, he said in a December announcement.

The proposal follows long-standing calls from environmentalists to preserve older forests that offer crucial wildlife habitat and other environmental benefits. Timber companies have fought against logging restrictions on government-owned lands.

President Joe Biden’s administration appears to be aiming for

a middle ground: It would sharply limit commercial timber harvests in old-growth forests while allowing logging to continue in “mature forests” that have not yet reached old-growth stage.

The proposal to revise management plans for 128 national forests and national grasslands is expected to be completed by early 2025. However, it’s uncertain if the change would survive if Biden loses his 2024 re-election bid.

Under former President Donald Trump, federal officials sought to open up millions of acres of West Coast forests to potential logging.

The Dec. 19 announcement builds on the U.S. Department of Agriculture decision in early 2023 to restore restrictions that ban logging and road building across most of the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska. The state of Alaska is fighting that decision in court.

Timber industry representatives said the latest proposal for the Lower 48 states would give opponents new leverage to file legal challenges against logging projects that are intended to reduce wildfire risks for communities near forests. But environmental groups called for logging restrictions to be extended even further and include mature forests, which cover more than 100,000 square miles of forest service land, about three times the area of old growth.

Old-growth forests, such as the storied giant sequoia stands of northern California, have layer upon layer of undisturbed trees and vegetation. There’s wide consensus on the importance of preserving them — both symbolically as marvels of nature, and more practically because their trunks and branches store large amounts of carbon that can be released when forests burn, adding to climate change.

Underlining the urgency of the issue are wildfires that killed thousands of giant sequoias in recent years. The towering giants are concentrated in about 70 groves scattered along the western side of the Sierra Nevada

range. Many old-growth forests fell during the second half of the 20th century during aggressive logging on national forests. Others were cut earlier as the U.S. developed.

Logging volumes dropped sharply over the past several decades, but the demise of older trees due to fire, insects and disease accelerated. More than 5,100 square miles of old-growth and mature forests have burned since 2000.

About 350 square miles of older forests were logged on federal lands during that time, according to a recent government analysis.

There’s no simple formula to determine what’s old. Growth rates among different tree types vary greatly — and even within species, depending on their access to water and sunlight, and soil conditions.

Groves of aspen can mature within a half-century. Douglas fir stands can take 100 years. Wildfire frequency also factors in: Ponderosa pine forests are adapted to withstand blazes as often as once a decade, compared to lodgepole pine stands that might burn every few hundred years.

Chris Wood, president of Trout Unlimited and a former Forest Service policy chief who worked on the roadless rule, said the Biden administration pro-

posal was a “step in the right direction” to protect the remaining old growth.

“This is the first time the Forest Service has said its national policy will be to protect old growth,” he said.

Timber companies and some members of Congress have been skeptical about Biden’s ambitions to protect older forests. They’ve urged the administration to instead concentrate on lessening wildfire dangers by thinning stands of trees where decades of wildfire suppression allowed undergrowth to flourish, which can be a recipe for disaster when fires ignite.

“Let’s be real about who the groups asking for this are: They have always opposed commercial timber harvests on the national forest system,” said Bill Imbergamo, executive director of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition, a timber industry group. “Is that the correct emphasis right now when most of the old-growth losses are coming from insects, fire and climate change stressors working in tandem?”

Most old-growth stands are in Western states such as Idaho, California, Montana and Oregon. They’re also in New England, around the Great Lakes and in Southern states such as Arkansas, Kentucky and West Virginia, according to the Forest Service.

## Trend continues toward fewer Alaskans smoking or using e-cigs

BY YERETH ROSEN  
Alaska Beacon

Alaskans trying to quit their tobacco habits made some significant progress over the past year, according to the annual report released last week by the state’s Tobacco Prevention and Control Program.

The program, which includes the Tobacco Quit Line, helped 1,753 Alaskans stop smoking or using smokeless tobacco or electronic cigarettes in the 12 months ending June 30, the report said. The program gave support to 21 community organizations around the state.

The program also produced and distributed an anti-vaping toolkit to the state’s school districts.

Statewide, smoking alone is linked to about 600 deaths a year, the report said.

Alaska citizens’ successful use of the state’s cessation program in 2023 continues a trend tracked since the mid-1990s. Then, 28% of Alaska adults smoked, and more than a third of high school students smoked.

After the state in 1997 slapped a hefty tax increase on cigarettes and other tobacco products — making Alaska’s tobacco tax the highest in the nation at the time — smoking rates fell dramatically among high schoolers and more gradually for adults. Other new laws, regulations and policies also discouraged tobacco use, the annual report noted.

The most recent information cited in the annual report puts the adult smoking rate at 17% in 2021 and the high school smoking rate at 8% in 2019.

However, youth e-cigarette use increased dramatically in recent years. As of 2019, 26% of high school students used those products, the annual report notes.

There is currently no state tax on e-cigarette products, though many municipalities impose their own taxes. The Legislature in 2022 passed a bill that would have imposed the state’s first such tax and also upped the legal age for purchase to 21 to match federal law. Gov. Mike Dunleavy vetoed the bill.

A revised version with an alternative tax formula passed the Senate in May and is now pending in the House.

The Alaska Tobacco Prevention and Control Program’s anti-vaping work began in 2014, a few years after e-cigarette products came on the market. That work includes a “Live Vape

Free” campaign targeted to both parents and teens.

The program also targets smokeless tobacco, which is more widely used in some rural areas. While 7% of Alaska adults use those products, the rate is 21% in Southwest Alaska, according to state data. Rural concerns have prompted a special emphasis on those areas, said Christy Knight, manager of Alaska’s Tobacco Prevention and Control Program.

Funding for the Tobacco Prevention and Control Program was \$6.47 million from the state and \$1.28 million from the federal government for fiscal 2023, the annual report said.

The dollar costs imposed by tobacco use far outstrip those outlays, according to state health officials.

Smoking is linked to an estimated \$575 million in annual health care costs in Alaska, the program’s website states.

Chronic health problems, for which tobacco use is a major contributor, weigh heavily in the costs of the state’s Medicaid program, which serves lower-income patients, said the annual report. It cited an analysis that put direct Medicaid costs attributed to tobacco at over \$192 million for fiscal 2016.

*The Alaska Beacon is an independent, donor-funded news organization. [Alaskabeacon.com](http://Alaskabeacon.com).*

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PUZZLE SOLUTION

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