



BULLDOG SOCCER

Woolsey came up big in net to help get the EHS soccer team into the state tournament
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BARRIO FESTIVAL

Hundreds gathered to learn about Filipino culture at CWU on Friday
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Good afternoon
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75 cents



Hands-on education

20th-annual Getting Intimate with the Shrub-Steppe event held in Yakima River Canyon

By **KARL HOLAPPA**
staff writer

The shrub-steppe holds many surprises for those who choose to explore it, and once a year attendees can learn more about the unique ecosystem from experts in their respective fields.

The Yakima River Canyon was transformed into a veritable classroom Saturday during the 20th-annual Getting Intimate with the Shrub-Steppe. The event, sponsored by the Kittitas Environmental Educa-

tion Network was held at both Helen McCabe State Park and the Umtanum Creek Recreation Area in the canyon. The state park component hosted informational booths from local environmental organizations as well as boat rides on the pond and an obstacle course for children. Meanwhile, the Umtanum Creek location held educational field trips throughout the morning that educated attendees on subjects ranging from shrub-steppe geology to the life cycle and habits of a beaver.

KEEN board member

Thatcher Montgomery said this year's turnout at both locations was quite robust. He said yearly attendance can be affected by weather conditions.

"It's a beautiful day," he said. "I think that helps a lot."

Some events were new this year, such as the boat rides and obstacle course at the state park location. Montgomery said the event used to be held in one location as opposed to two, and that having two locations gives them the opportunity to add new activities at the state park location.

"People are really seeming to

enjoy the new events this year," he said.

Montgomery said the event was one of the first ones hosted by KEEN, and that it also kicks off the event season for the organization as summer begins.

"This is definitely our big spring event," he said.

Montgomery said the event gives people the chance to step out of their daily routine and try something new, as well as understand more about the environment that surrounds us here in Central Washington.

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Heinz Zasche peers beneath a pallet while participating in a makeshift obstacle course at Helen McCabe State Park near Ellensburg Saturday during the Getting Intimate with the Shrub Steppe event. The event featured a number of educational hikes and tents helping to expand participants' knowledge of local ecology.

JAKE GREEN / DAILY RECORD

Safe flames roll through Central Washington

Prescribed fire training program held

By **SAMIRA GEORGE**
staff writer

Some could argue the 1944 Smokey Bear campaign, the longest-running public service ad campaign in U.S. history, might have worked a little too well, effectively asserting itself as the source of education for generations of Americans about wildfires. Although it is still important to prevent wildfires at all costs, the United States Forest Service and other agencies say fire is a natural process necessary for forest health.

This mindset encouraged the creation of Prescribed Fire Training Exchanges (TRES), which helps train fire personnel in the field of wildfire management.

Washington Prescribed Fire Council, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the USDA Forest Service, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Fire Partnership Network, worked in partnership to host the Cascadia TRES program.

TRES trainees were lighting and monitoring controlled burns in the Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest near Liberty April 28 through May 10.



JAKE GREEN

Fire personnel work and monitor a controlled burn in the Okanogan Wenatchee National Forest near Liberty May 8. The burn was part of the Cascadia Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TRES), a program that aims to bring various fire agencies together to better learn and teach forest management techniques.

Forests today are a stark contrast to the patchy landscapes that existed 100 years ago. People are learning fires is multifaceted — not only does fire help to clear debris and thin trees, but also stops the spread of diseases and insect outbreaks.

In recent years, there's been a surge in wildfires and what is now becoming known as mega fires, a fire that burns more than a 100,000 acres.

Prescribed burns not only helps

with fire prevention, forest experts say, but also promote the growth of healthy ecosystems.

"The plan is to get more good fire on the ground and getting folks out to be fire practitioners," Jon Bailey, incident commander said. "Brand new firefighters, to the most seasoned firefighter are mentoring each other and learning with each other."

Fire practitioners with a variety of skill sets, experience and backgrounds learned the ins and out

of prescribe burning for 12 days during the training.

"The hope is they're coming here to get skills that aren't offered in other places, or getting more well rounded experience with fuels," Bailey said. "So that if they're doing prescribed fire back home out east they can come out west and help with wildfire or prescribed fire."

According to Bailey, spring is the best time to do these burns when things are greening up and there are high moisture levels in grasses.

Bailey said large wildfires remove canopies and kill all the trees, but the heat is also so intense that it scorches the soil.

"What it does is it takes all the nutrients out of the soil," Bailey said. "So coming in with low-intensity fire, and a managed control fashion, you can integrate training and promote healthy growth."

Bailey said TRES is an effective way to network but is also an opportunity to bring minds together, learning and growing from one another.

"It also puts folks kind of out of their comfort zone. It's a new place new people and I think that creates a strong, tight knit group learning and growing together," Bailey said. "There's bonds that will last forever while putting good fire on the ground."

State to offer first 'public option' insurance

SEATTLE (AP) — Washington is set to become the first state to enter the private health insurance market with a universally available public option.

A set of tiered public plans will cover standard services and are expected to be up to 10% cheaper than comparable private insurance, thanks in part to savings from a cap on rates paid to providers. But unlike existing government-managed plans, Washington's public plans are set to be available to all residents regardless of income by 2021.

The Legislature approved the plan last month, and Gov. Jay Inslee is scheduled to sign it into law Monday.

The move thrusts Washington into the national debate over the government's role in health care, with a hybrid model that puts the state to the left of market-only approaches but stops short of a completely public system.

Instead, the state will dictate the terms of the public option plans but hire private insurance companies to administer them, saving the state from having to create a new bureaucracy — and guaranteeing a role for the insurance industry in managing the new public option.

Lawmakers in at least eight other states including Colorado and New Mexico have proposed their own public option measures. But so far none have passed legislation implementing a public option.

Backers acknowledge the rate caps at the heart of the plan risk creating coverage gaps in rural areas. But they hope to persuade doctors to accept lower rates by bringing the state's purchasing power to bear. The savings would be used to sell the plans at a competitive price.

Inslee, who is also running for president, embraced the idea based on early work by a state legislator and later officially requested the public option bill.

Its sponsor, Seattle Sen. David Frockt, a Democrat, said the hybrid system was a compromise.

More **INSURANCE | A5**

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Sea lions cause trouble at Northwest ports

By TOM BANSE
Northwest News Network

A big rebound in the sea lion population along the West Coast in recent years has created a constant battle to wrangle the protected animals. They're smart and fun to watch from a safe distance, but also noisy, smelly and proving to be a headache for some coastal marinas.

"It's a free zoo kind of, just don't pet 'em!" observed Dennis Craig of Olympia while he watched a pier at Washington's Westport marina nearly sink under the weight of dozens of burly bulls jostling and snoozing in the sun.

"You notice when the charters come in, they'll swing wide just so people can get a closer look because, like I say, it's entertaining," Craig said.

The flip side of these flip-pered fish fiends can be seen in the mounting bill to the marina, including the cost of busted docks, broken electric stanchions and lost business.

"Nearly all of our net revenue was used to repair damage caused by sea lions this year, taking those funds away from infrastructure improvements and replacements that are critical to the marina facility and our users," said Westport Marina business manager Molly Bold in an email.

Sea lions have blocked people from mooring their boats. In other cases, commercial fishermen have had to run through a sea lion gauntlet just to get onto their vessels. The sea lions even snatched a few pet dogs right off the piers, said Westport Aquarium co-owner Marc Myrsell, who volunteers to monitor the marine mammals.

Myrsell has counted up to 200 or 300 sea lions on the docks at a time.

"If a person is walking down the dock and they have a bag in their hand, that sea lion in its mind might think that person has food and can get aggressive because some people have been feeding them — intentionally or unintentionally," Myrsell said in an interview.

The most recent population estimate for California sea lions along the West Coast is around 257,000. Robert Anderson, the marine mammal program manager at the NOAA Fisheries regional office in Portland, Oregon, pegged the population growth rate at roughly 5% per year, although the sea lions may soon reach the carrying capacity of their marine environment.

ABUNDANCE OF SEA LIONS

The current abundance of sea lions is at least seven times greater than the population recorded in the late 1960s. Before Congress passed the Marine Mammal Protection Act in 1972, fishermen and the public could take matters into their own hands and shoot pesky sea lions. In earlier decades, the beasts were also killed for hides or to make pet food.

Now, the proliferation of sea lions has created issues from Neah Bay, Washington, to Brookings, Oregon — occasionally in Puget Sound too.

And Westport, Washington, is not even the worst off. Astoria, Oregon, attracts the most sea lions by far, according to interviews with port staff and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Port of Astoria once famously deployed a fiberglass fake orca to scare the sea lions. The replica soon capsized, nearly drowning its operator. Astoria also tried out tube-shaped inflatable air dancers, beach balls, flashing lights as well as low railings with various plastic attachments.

"Nothing works for long or it costs too much," said Port of Astoria executive director Jim Knight in an interview Thursday.

He said the local sea lion census peaked at around 3,000 critters two years ago and is lower right now. The floating port docks offer a convenient resting place for California and Steller sea lions alike between hunts for fish migrating up the Columbia River.

The low rail on the finger piers in foreground worked for a while to deter sea lions at the Port of



Seals and California sea lions gather on the docks of the East End Mooring Basin in Astoria, Ore. on June 4, 2015. A big rebound in the sea lion population along the West Coast in recent years has created a constant battle to wrangle the protected animals.

Astoria's East Mooring Basin, but not anymore.

The low rail on the finger piers in foreground worked for a while to deter sea lions at the Port of Astoria's East Mooring Basin, but not anymore.

Knight said the most effective deterrent was a low-voltage electrified mat deployed on a demonstration basis by Vancouver, Washington-based manufacturer Smith-Root at both Astoria and Westport.

"It actually did work," Knight said. "But the cost of them was way more than the port could afford."

On the southern Oregon Coast, the Curry Sportfishing Association and the Port of Gold Beach have used private donations and small grants to hire civilian patrolers to scare sea lions away from people fishing on the Rogue River summer-fall salmon run. The waterborne Sea Lion Patrol is permitted to toss underwater firecrackers called "seal bombs" when sea lions get too close to recreational fishermen at the river mouth. Otherwise,

the sea lions snatch hooked salmon before sportsmen can reel in their fish.

The problems in marinas continue because sea lions are smart and will habituate to most deterrence strategies, said NOAA's Anderson.

"You've got to be pretty persistent about it," Anderson said in an interview. "Once you apply whatever deterrence method you do, if you walk away they're going to come right back."

Anderson says when port officials call him for advice on sea lions, he gives a long list of non-lethal options.

"You can definitely irritate and aggravate an animal pretty strongly," Anderson explained. "I mean, these are pretty durable animals."

But he also underscores the limits set by the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act, which boil down to: You cannot do anything that could result in serious injury or death.

In Westport, Washington, the port authority has tried using a low-flying drone, noisemakers, wa-

Education/

from A1
"I think it gets people who maybe wouldn't normally think about this stuff," he said. "And people who are interested know that its someplace where they can come and find more information."

ON THE HUNT

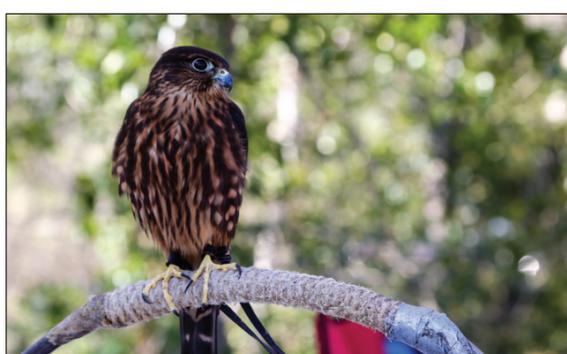
Out in the canyon, Central Washington University biology students Adrian Slade and Tyler Larsen took aspiring herpetologists on a trek to learn more about the snakes of the shrub-steppe. Once on the trail, the group encountered a pair of hikers that reported multiple rattlesnake sightings on the Umtanum Ridge trail. From there, the group split into two, with one half hiking up toward the ridge in search of the rattlers and one half taking a more leisurely hike along the creek.

Attendee Lacey Wuesthoff grew up in Kittitas County and had heard of the event for years but had never had a chance to attend until this year. She is very familiar with the shrub-steppe, taking weekly hikes in the region with her friend Jaclyn.

"This year, I just made it a point to come," she said. Before going on the snake seeking hike, Wuesthoff and her friend attended a hike that focused on insects of the shrub-steppe. She said the name of the event applies to the learning process, with people getting an opportunity to learn about the subjects in an intimate manner.

"It was really cool to be able to be kind of one-on-one with the bug expert," she said. "This one, too. It seemed like there was going to be a million people, but everyone kind of splintered off, so it's fun to be with an expert and have good conversations. We asked a lot of questions and learned a lot."

Wuesthoff said events like GISS are great for people who are new to the area, as it helps instill a sense of stewardship through learning more about the local ecology.



A Merlin sits on a stand at a falconers tent at Helen McCabe State Park near Ellensburg Saturday during the Getting Intimate with the Shrub Steppe event.

most important for those types of people," she said. "For us, we are out and active. We kind of have a sense of responsibility to take care of the areas we love, but other people don't necessarily know what's so cool about the areas we love. I think this type of event really lets other people come and see why we like, and then they feel like they want to keep it too."

ON THE TRAIL

Hike leaders Slade and Larsen have been getting intimate with the shrub-steppe since 2015, participating in the snake-seeking hikes for most years since then. Larsen said he preferred when the event was held all in the same location, as it allowed for the ability to staff a booth and host a field trip. Despite that, Slade said the turnout this year was more than average.

"This weather has really factored in a high attendance today," she said. "I think this is the most people we've ever had on the field trip."

Larsen said some of the children who come out are more engaged than others and tend to take a specific liking to herpetology.

"There's kids that we recognize who come out year after year," he said. "They do other events and then come out and see snakes. That's definitely driven by the kid."

This year's field trip turned up multiple Great Basin gopher snakes, Western yellow-bellied racers, a wandering garter snake and one Northern Pacific rattlesnake. Larsen said the rattlesnake

specimen was a good find on the trip.

"The rattle was really small, and it only had four segments, meaning it's probably like 2 years old," he said. "But it was a pretty good-sized rattlesnake."

Although children got a chance to handle gopher snakes during the hike, the rattlesnake was left in peace. Slade said this is common practice while in the field.

"We never handle rattlesnakes unless we have to," she said. "Unless we're relocating them from a place where they shouldn't be or moving them off the highway. Most of the time it doesn't take very much work or patience to just let them sit there. You can get a much better view that way and they won't rattle and try to run away from you."

Growing up on the West Side, Slade said she didn't have the opportunity to attend events like GISS because they either didn't exist in that area or she wasn't exposed to them if they did.

"That was a loss," she said. "It should have happened, because I really did like nature. Nobody told me outright that the best way I could work with animals was to get a biology degree and be a wildlife biologist."

With so many children attending the event, Slade saw it as an opportunity to gauge kids who are above average in their passion for nature and educate them about the paths they can take in the field.

"You have to be very precocious to realize that's

what you want to do when you're like 10 years old," she said. "Just telling them that you can actually make this a living. And it's really sustainable for mental health, too. Nature is my version of therapy."

Slade sees another benefit of the event being the ability to show people another side of the shrub-steppe that they won't see from their car while driving through the region.

"I feel like it's the middle child of the Pacific Northwest," she said. "Like no one pays attention to it."

Growing up in Kittitas County, Larsen said he never really knew much about shrub-steppe ecology until he began to go on hikes and explore the environment.

"You can't appreciate it until you get in it," he said. "You see all the different little wildflower species and all the animals that inhabit it. The best part about it to me is that it's kind of a secret. It's beautiful, and it changes so much throughout the year."

Insurance/

from A1
"What's important about this plan is that the government is coming in and taking a more aggressive role in regulating the cost drivers of health care," Frockt said.

The core proposition of Washington's plan, dubbed Cascade Care, is that it will save consumers money by capping payments to doctors, hospitals and other health care providers.

The cost cap is central to the program's long-term survival: Set it too high, and there will be no savings to pass along. Set it too low, and the state runs the risk of providers declining the plan, leaving it to whither as consumers seek alternatives that provide more choice, said Jennifer Tolbert, director of the Kaiser Foundation's state health care analysis program.

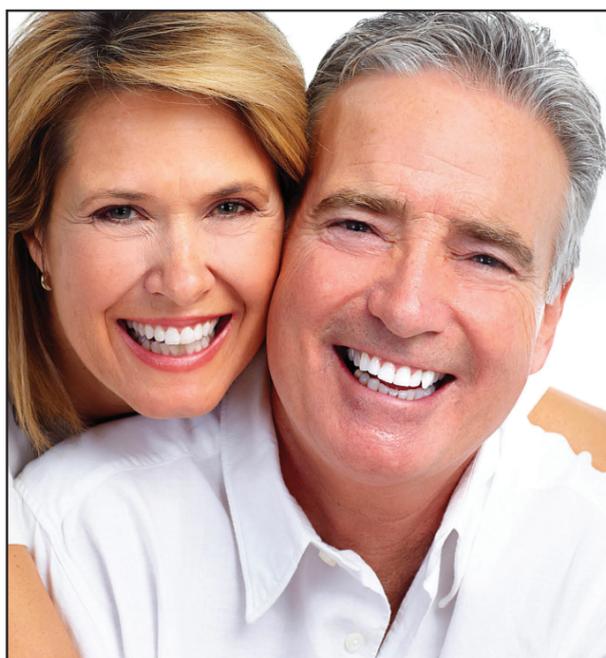
The question is especially critical in Washington's rural counties, many of which were already hit hardest by health care cost increases.

To attract providers, Washington lawmakers chose a relatively high figure to start: The plan caps payouts at 160 percent of federal Medicare rates.

That's more than other states have proposed. In New Mexico, lawmakers considered using Medicaid rates, among the lowest paid to doctors and hospitals by any insurance plan. Lobbying firm Manatt estimated that could have translated into cost savings for consumers of more than 20% compared with similar private plans on the individual market.

By comparison, Washington's higher pay rate for doctors is estimated to save participants only 5 to 10%, according to Jason McGill, Inslee's senior policy adviser on health.

But even at the higher rate, the plan risks leaving coverage gaps in the least-populated counties, said Democratic Rep. Eileen Cody, an early architect of the plan who chairs the House Health Care and Wellness committee.



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