

U.S. immigration officials take mushroom pickers into custody

Six Guatemalans detained in upper Twisp River area

BY MARCY STAMPER

Six young men from Guatemala who'd been picking morels in the upper Twisp River area were taken into custody by federal immigration officials in late May.

After being held overnight at a

county jail in Wenatchee, four of the men were released on bond, given court dates, and permitted to return to picking mushrooms. The other two were transferred to the Tacoma Northwest Detention Center, which is run by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

The detention was reported by Leahe Swayze, a member of a group in the Methow Valley that supports immigrants. Swayze spoke to the four Guatemalans after they had returned

to the camp and she connected them with a hotline that aids immigrants. The local group focuses on making sure that people understand their rights and how the process works, said Swayze.

Swayze learned about the detentions after receiving a text message on May 22 from an advocate with the local chapter of Showing Up for Racial Justice. The message said that an unidentified individual had spoken with immigration officials parked

near Twisp. The detained men were in the officials' vehicles, according to the message.

A few days later, Swayze and an interpreter went to a campsite for mushroom pickers at the Twisp River Sno-Park, about 12 miles west of Twisp, where she met the four men who'd been released.

Swayze called a hotline operated by volunteers with the Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network, a network of 150 organizations across the

Keep Washington Working Act

A new state law called the Keep Washington Working Act, which took effect May 21, prohibits state and local agencies and jails from detaining people on behalf of immigration authorities. It also prohibits them from cooperating with or assisting in

an investigation or enforcement of a federal registration or surveillance program that targets residents on the basis of race, religion, immigration or citizenship status, or national or ethnic origin, according to a summary of the law by state Senate staffers.

state. A hotline volunteer spoke with the four men who'd been released, and was able to track the other two men to the facility in Tacoma and to give the men

information about their friends.

Brenda Rodriguez, coordinator of the solidarity network,

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Class (of 2019) acts



Above: Graduating Liberty Bell High School senior Tanner White shared a quiet moment with his great-grandmother, Bernice Kammers, after the class of 2019's graduation ceremony last Friday in the high school gym. White was one of about half a dozen grads who donned cowboy hats, complete with tassels, rather than the traditional mortar boards. Right: Tova Portmann-Bown, center of the photo, and Neela Mitchell picked out roses they would give to their parents during the processional. For more photos, and information about the graduates' plans, scholarships and awards, see page B1.

Photos by Don Nelson



Okanogan County Planning Commission begins review of updated comp plan draft

Environmental impact assessment also underway

BY MARCY STAMPER

Access to public lands and bodies of water. The importance of recreation. Adequate water for development. Wildfire protection and safety.

These were the big themes as the Okanogan County planning commissioners began their in-

depth review of the current draft of the county's comprehensive plan on Monday night (June 10) with Okanogan County Planning Director Perry Huston and his staff.

The planning commission is weighing in on a draft created by the county commissioners in November. That draft is part of the county commissioners' commitment to take a fresh look at the county's 2014 plan. They agreed to revisit the plan after a lawsuit claimed it didn't protect water quality and quantity or

address wildfire risk.

Since recreation is such a big economic driver in the county — and one of four quadrants in the county's logo — planning Commissioner George Thornton wants the plan to emphasize the importance of recreation.

Older versions of the comp plan put more emphasis on recreation, said Huston, who said he'd provide the section to the planning commissioners. The county

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MV schools get \$1 million to support graduates entering trades

Gift creates endowment for scholarships

BY RALPH SCHWARTZ

An anonymous donor has donated \$1 million to the Methow Valley School District's scholarship foundation, to create an endowment to support graduates interested in skilled trades that do not typically require a four-year degree.

Superintendent Tom Venable announced the seven-figure gift during the class of 2019 graduation ceremony on Friday (June 7) at Liberty Bell High School.

The donation comes at a time when Methow Valley School District is shifting away from what had been a stronger emphasis on academic courses



File photo by Marcy Stamper

Students in Liberty Bell High School's construction program have assisted with many projects on the TwispWorks campus.

and getting students into four-year colleges, Venable said in an interview.

"How we define and measure success should not be solely limited to attendance at a four-year university," he said.

"There's a lot of research that says nearly 60 percent of tomorrow's work force will not require a four-year university degree, but rather ... participation in

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Photo by Marcy Stamper

Trucks delivered dirt on Monday (June 10) that will be applied as a top layer of fill where a mudslide damaged Highway 20, 8 miles east of Loup Loup summit.

Hwy 20 repairs complete next week

Return of two-way traffic will simplify travel, commutes

BY RALPH SCHWARTZ

Emergency repairs on Highway 20 east of Loup Loup summit should be completed next week, enabling the road to open to two-way traffic, according to the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

The agency did not set a specific date before press time for reopening both lanes. Lauren Loebbeck, communications manager for the WSDOT's North Central region, indicated in an email sent June 6 the

work should be completed by June 20.

As repairs continue, one lane of Highway 20 remains open. Two-way traffic through the single lane is controlled by a traffic signal or flaggers.

The highway was closed completely at the work site, at milepost 222.4, from May 28 to June 4 so the contractor could excavate the soil under the roadway. During the full closure, drivers traveling between the Methow Valley and Okanogan/Omak took a 70-mile detour through Pateros and Brewster.

Highway 20 was undermined on May 1 by a mudslide caused by a failed culvert. The fill material used to repair the bank under the roadway included

porous rock that will allow groundwater to flow freely into Loup Loup Creek.

Hurst Construction of East Wenatchee was hired under a \$1.3 million emergency contract for the first 30 days of work. The contractor will remain on the job until it is finished, Loebbeck said.

The emergency repair has delayed the planned reconstruction of Canyon Street in Twisp because the town had hired Hurst for the job. The \$781,000 Canyon Street project includes water-line replacement, sewer repairs and a new sidewalk. The project may start in early July, Twisp Public Works Director Andrew Denham said, and is expected to take 40 days to complete.

Malott man captured, arrested in connection with stabbing death

A Malott man has been arrested and booked into the Okanogan County Jail in connection with the stabbing death of his mother on Monday (June 10), Sheriff Tony Hawley said in a press release.

The man in custody, 34-year-old Jose Mejia, was apprehended after deputies responded to a report of a woman being stabbed by a man at a location near Old Highway 97 and Central Street in Malott, Hawley said.

The woman, 64-year-old Juana Ferreria Demejia, died at the scene of the stabbing, Hawley said. The sheriff said she was the mother of the suspect.

According to Hawley’s press release, at about 2:44 p.m. on Monday, sheriff’s deputies, Malott Fire and Lifeline Ambulance responded to the report of a stabbing incident. Deputies responded within 7 minutes and began searching for a suspect who reportedly fled on foot.

“The suspect had made his way to the river and was contacted there by deputies,” Hawley said in the release. “He resisted arrest and attempted to disarm one of the deputies of his firearm. Deputies and the suspect were in the river during the struggle to arrest him.”

Jose Mejia was transported to Mid-Valley Hospital to be treated for an injury to his hand, according to the release.

The Washington State Crime lab responded to the scene to assist detectives with the collection of evidence at the scene, Hawley said.

IMMIGRATION

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said in an interview this week that she didn’t know why authorities had initially approached the mushroom pickers. She couldn’t say if the immigration agents had a warrant or probable cause to stop the men.

Routine patrols

The agents in the national forest were most likely with the U.S. Border Patrol, a component of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), according to Jason Givens, a public affairs specialist with the agency. Givens said he had no information about specific citations issued to mushroom pickers.

“The area is routinely patrolled by Border Patrol and CBP does not target or have a concerted effort to check the documents of individuals involved in commercial mushroom picking operations in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest,” said Givens by email. “However, there could be instances in which CBP receives information or has reason to believe an individual is in the country illegally,” he said.

All individuals picking mushrooms

must have legal authorization to live and work in the United States, said Givens. Anyone found to be illegally living or working in the United States would be arrested and processed accordingly, most likely returned to their country of origin.

Although most Border Patrol work is conducted in the immediate border area, agents have broad authority and are not limited to a specific geographical region, said Givens. Agents have the authority to question individuals, make arrests, and gather evidence.

The U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act states that immigration offi-

cers, without a warrant, may “within a reasonable distance from any external boundary of the United States ... board and search for aliens in any vessel ... or vehicle,” said Givens. A reasonable distance is defined as within 100 air miles from the border, he said.

Because CBP has jurisdiction near the border, its agents tend to be more active in Okanogan County, said Rodriguez. CBP officers have more leeway than ICE and can ask about immigration status based on probable cause, she said.

The cases of the two Guatemalan men still in detention were passed on to the

Northwest Immigrant Rights Project, which assists immigrants through legal services and education, said Rodriguez.

Many commercial mushroom pickers are originally from other countries, a large number from Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, according to people in the industry. Swayze said a Cambodian mushroom picker at the camp had directed her to the men who’d been detained. Another man said the immigration officials hadn’t talked to the Asian pickers at the camp, she said. The Guatemalans told Swayze they live in Oregon.

Local support

The local immigrant-support group evolved organically about two years ago as people saw and heard about needs in the community, said Swayze. Their focus is on supporting the immigrant community and helping with education to make sure people are aware of their rights.

The group leads “know your rights” workshops regarding interactions with immigration authorities. They’ve received legal-observer training so that people know how to lawfully and safely observe, document and respond if they witness an interaction, said Chris Hogness, a Mazama resident working with the support group. They also provide

Know your rights

When stopped by police or immigration agents, people have the right:

- to remain silent
- to refuse to allow officers to search a person or his or her car
- to deny entry into a home unless the officer has a search warrant signed by a judge

People are not required to answer questions about:

- where they were born
- whether they’re a citizen
- how they entered the country

People also have the right to a lawyer but, if they’re not citizens, they don’t have the right to a free lawyer.

There are different rules at the border and for people with certain types of visas. Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network hotline: 1-844-724-3737
Solidary network text alert: (253) 201-2833

Source: American Civil Liberties Union; Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network

observer training to others in the community. Much of their work has been in the Brewster area.

“It felt good,” said Swayze. “The men were thankful somebody had been interested in finding out where their friends were and was willing to help.”

PLAN

From Page A1

also has a separate recreation plan, he said.

The commissioners explored the extent to which the county can require construction, landscaping and road access for wildfire safety. They discussed fire-resistant buffers and landscaping, building codes for non-flammable roofing, and ingress and egress for emergency vehicles. They considered who should shoulder the cost of providing fire protection in remote areas.

Huston noted that the county is about to begin the revision of its Community Wildfire Protection Plan.

Planning Commission Chair Albert Roberts asked how much the county can use the comp plan to protect lands for agriculture, forestry and mining.

“In my brief years on this earth, access to public lands has become gradually more restrictive,” said Thornton. “If we have public lands, we should guarantee some level of access, or what’s the point?” he said. Planning Commissioner Dave Schulz said he’d like to ensure access to rivers and lakes.

Public access is addressed in the 2014 comp plan in a section about coordinating with state and federal agencies, said Hus-

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— planning commissioner George Thornton

ton. The plan can include more detail about public access and provide incentives for developers to include public access, he said.

Planning Commissioner Gina McCoy wants the county to direct growth to areas where there’s enough water, and to take into account local variations in precipitation and evaporation.

The comp plan is the philosophical basis for the county’s zoning code, which contains specific zones for particular types of development and lot sizes.

Based on these zones — which designate areas for towns, commercial and industrial use, and rural areas, among other things — the zoning code includes a detailed list of acceptable uses. That list includes everything from asphalt plants to dairy farms to wineries. McCoy suggested making the list more

practical by emphasizing compatible land uses.

Environmental review

Huston is working on the environmental impact statement (EIS) for the comp plan, which he hopes to complete by the end of June. The EIS will emphasize water, roads, wildfire and critical areas such as wetlands, said Huston. It will also include a section on climate change.

The EIS will compare four alternatives — one that allows growth in the county to be driven by the real estate market, one that links growth to transportation and other infrastructure, and one that creates even greater specificity to direct growth to areas that can support it. One alternative is the “no-action” alternative, which leaves the 2014 comp plan as is.

The EIS will incorporate



Photo by Marcy Stamper

The Okanogan County planning commissioners want the comprehensive plan to emphasize recreation, access to public lands, and wildfire safety, and to direct growth to areas with enough water.

suggestions from an alternative proposed by the Methow Valley Citizens Council. That alternative directs growth to cities and towns and designates areas where intensive residential, commercial, and industrial development would be discouraged. Those areas would be preserved for farming, forests and

mineral uses.

The county is currently accepting feedback on the comp plan. There will be a formal 45-day comment period on the EIS and the plan itself, most likely with a public hearing at the planning commission’s July meeting, said Huston.

The working draft of the comp

plan is available on the Planning Department website at www.okanogancounty.org/planning under “Comprehensive Plan Update” and then “Draft Comprehensive Plan.” The county’s 2014 plan is also available at that link.

Comments can be sent to Huston at phuston@co.okanogan.wa.us.



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