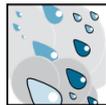




NOAA Weather Weekend Forecast

Cloudy with showers for the weekend. High 48, low 39.



Outdoor dining ahead? Page 3

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Sea lion follows high water to Grays River

By Diana Zimmerman

It was an unlikely sight for motorists on SR 4, when an errant Steller sea lion was seen testing out his land legs Jan. 6 while taking a walk on the highway in the Grays River area.

The sea lion was described as a sub-adult male, likely five or six years old, and probably weighing 800 pounds, according to a report by Columbia River Pinniped Biologist John Edwards of the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

In an earlier report, Captain Dan Chadwick of Region 6 wrote that when the WDFW police responded to the news of the sea lion on SR 4, they found the sea lion in a blackberry bush near a small creek about 100 yards from Grays River.

"The sea lion had moved off the road by the time officers arrived," Chadwick continued. "They attempted to herd it back to the river. The sea lion stopped at the county road 20 yards from the river and would not go any further."

The officers left, hoping the sea lion would find its way to the river by morning.

"Not so lucky," Chadwick wrote.

Instead, the sea lion returned to the same place they first found it: the blackberry bush. The officers continued to monitor the animal, and continued to hope that it might find its way back to the waterway on its own.

If necessary, they planned to live trap the sea lion and return it to the river.

"At the time, waters were near flood stage, which is often the reason for sea lions venturing up side channels and getting lost," Chadwick wrote. "We see smelt runs this time of year in Grays River, which could be a reason the sea lion was in the river."

When the WDFW officers and biologists returned, they found the sea lion sitting in the creek bed just above a culvert leading to the Grays River, and half submerged in the creek flow, according to the report by Edwards.

"After evaluating the situation, we decided on herding



A sea lion cruised down SR 4 last week after having ascended the Grays River and Hull Creek. Wash. State Dept. of Transportation photo.



The sea lion was a bit cramped in the Hull Creek channel. Washington Dept. of Fish and Wildlife photo.

the animal back to the river, either downstream through the culvert that emptied directly into the river or an alternate route up over the road to the river, depending on which way the animal started moving first," Edwards wrote. "The primary difficulty came from the terrain—the creek walls were steep and it was choked with blackberries, so we were constrained in where and how closely we could safely approach the animal."

They tried prodding the sea lion with bull poles and creating noise, even deploying a seal bomb, a small explosive device, upstream.

The sea lion wouldn't budge.

They began clearing a path,

hacking away at the blackberries with a machete, hoping to approach the sea lion from upstream.

Meanwhile, they tossed crowding boards into the creek. The boards are large flat panels with hand holds generally used to create a temporary wall, thus keeping the user out of harm's way. The group began banging on the crowding boards and generated such a racket that finally, the animal started moving. It needed a little more encouragement, but eventually it headed downstream and back through the culvert to Grays River.

Turning upstream. "Not our preferred direction," Edwards wrote, "but we'll take it."

Rains flood SR 4, county roads

County commission approves emergency culvert repair

By Rick Nelson

Wahkiakum County commissioners dealt with the impacts January's heavy rain when they met Tuesday.

The board voted to declare a state of emergency to allow fast track repair of a failing culvert on Salmon Creek Road.

Public Works Director Chuck Beyer reported that a culvert, 24-30" in size, was partially gone, taking away one lane of the road.

The department is working with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife on emergency permitting to allow the replacement; the new culvert will have to be 6-8' in diameter, Beyer said.

The emergency declaration will also allow the county to waive the competitive bidding process.

The heavy rainfall, over 6" Monday night and Tuesday in Middle Valley according to a Facebook post, troubled other roads.

On Tuesday evening, the Washington State Department of Transportation closed SR 4 at Seal River west of Rosburg because of water over the roadway. A department press release said highway personnel would evaluate the situation on Wednesday to determine whether or not to open the highway.

Sheriff Mark Howie reported that, as of Tuesday morning, roads in the Deep River, Grays River and Skamokawa valleys were flooded and closed. They included Hull Creek, Loop, Covered

Bridge, Eden Valley, Deep River and Middle Valley roads.

Commissioners handled other business and discussed issues.

The board reappointed Cathlamet Mayor Dale Jacobson to a two-year term to the county Marine Resources Council, and they approved calls for bids on asphalt and rock products.

Commissioners agreed they wanted to channel some of the state/federal covid-19 relief funds to Wahkiakum PUD to help cover late payments from people impacted by the pandemic. They planned to have an interlocal agreement ready to sign at their next meeting, Jan. 19.

In discussions, Commission Dan Cothren reported the county Real Property Rights Committee has questions and concerns about state requirements on property assessments that should be raised with the state legislature.

Cothren said the state requirements make assessments too high, and they aren't imposed equally among counties.

"Pacific County is not assessed that way," he said. "These taxes are too high. They're pricing people out of their homes."

Board Chair Gene Strong said the covid-19 pandemic will impact county tax collections because of economic impacts.

"A lot of people will be struggling," he said. "We haven't seen the end of this."

Local woman recounts experience with covid

By Diana Zimmerman

Kellie Mendez had been staying at a friend's house when she developed a headache on December 12, but she didn't give it too much thought. There isn't anything too unusual about a headache. But when she went to bed that night, she felt sluggish and tired, and didn't sleep well.

The next morning, on her 43rd birthday, it hit her.

"I had full blown body aches," Mendez said. "It felt like when you have the flu, but it was probably 100 times worse. I was completely drained and my body was killing me. I had a fever. The chills."

Her husband, Lorenzo, came and got her.

The next day, she went to Kaiser to get tested for covid-19.

"You had to have an appointment ahead of time," she said. "Then you pulled around to the back and called a number."

They had her walk to a window at the back of a portable. She gave them her information and they gave her a nose swab.

"It wasn't that bad," Mendez said. "I was so out of it. I've heard other people say, 'Oh my God,' they go halfway up your brain. I don't remember them doing that to me. My kids were like, 'I swear they hit my brain when they were testing me!'"

The results came back the next day. She had covid-19.

"I got home and I pretty much laid down," Mendez said. "I slept the whole time. I couldn't keep my eyes open. I was exhausted. I couldn't eat, I couldn't drink. I don't know if I got up to go

to the bathroom, to be honest with you."

The first five or six days were the hardest, she said, with the body aches and the fever. She had no appetite and is pretty sure she didn't intake anything, including fluids, until the fourth



Kellie Mendez
Courtesy photo

day, when she started drinking orange juice.

"That's all I wanted," Mendez said. "Thankfully, I didn't get dehydrated."

There was no vomiting, or diarrhea, although there was the nausea and the headaches. She also lost her sense of taste and smell.

Ten days after it started, she was finally able to get up and get out of bed.

"I could do a little bit, but then I was back to bed," she said.

She was improving, but on New Year's Eve, she had to return to the doctor to get some medical tests done. She was having a lot of chest pressure and

Continued on Page 3

Covid-19 update

County case count now 64; local vaccinations underway

By Diana Zimmerman

As of Tuesday, the number of confirmed cases of covid-19 in Wahkiakum County had risen to 64, with 12 considered active.

Three had been hospitalized, and 1,110 tests had been conducted so far, according to the Washington Department of Health.

Pacific County was reporting a total of 616 cases, with 22 considered active, and seven deaths attributed to covid-19. The total number of cases in Cowlitz County had risen to 3,043, with 319 considered active, and 29 deaths reported.

Across the river, Clatsop County had a total of 657 positive cases and four deaths, and Columbia County was reporting 976 total cases and 17 deaths.

"Several states are now badly overwhelming their hospitals," Wahkiakum Health and Human Services Director Chris Bischoff said on Monday, later turning his focus to hospitalization in Washington State. "We had started to head down in hospitalizations, but we can see that is headed right back up again. For December, we averaged 127 new hospitalizations per day. Our highest month before that was 77. Our low in September was 28 per day."

At one point during an earlier peak of the pandemic, there were about 60,000 people in the hospital for covid-19, nationwide, he said. There are currently 130,000 people, more than twice as many as the worst numbers during the first two peaks.

Bischoff said that new cases, deaths, and hospitalizations are

all headed up pretty strongly for the past 14 days.

"We started seeing a climb after Christmas, and we're up here, maybe peaking now, but my guess is that we have at least another week before we actually hit the peak for New Years," he said of new cases. "That's probably likely to continue to increase for another week."

Local vaccinations

As of last Friday, WHHS had administered 255 doses of the Moderna vaccine. They have 260 doses on hand, and those have been scheduled. They are awaiting another 100 doses, and will begin scheduling those this week.

He expects that the 260 doses that are already scheduled will all have been administered by January 21.

"We've been getting about 100 doses per week," Bischoff said. "I'm very reluctant because the supply chain isn't as consistent as we would hope it is. The state is struggling. They have been very consistent with us, which we are very grateful for, but not as much with everybody else. I'm afraid that might affect us at this point, so I'm not going to schedule anybody for a vaccination that I don't know I have the dose for."

"It took us a minute to get through the 1a's," he stated.

Category 1a includes any high risk medical personnel. Locally it is Emergency Medical Services, ambulance crew, and other closely related first

Continued on Page 3