

Broncs, bulls return

The Methow Valley Rodeo is back this weekend

INSERT, B SECTION

Stepping down

Leslie Hall retires as MV Nordic Team coach

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County beefs up IT security after cyber assault

No evidence that mysterious hacks used maliciously

BY MARCY STAMPER

After a devastating cyber attack that paralyzed the county government for several days in January and took three weeks to completely remediate, Okanogan County is running 24/7 defensive security protection that flags any unusual network activity.

The cyber attack temporarily corrupted files on all the county's computers and servers. Through its risk insurer, the county worked with the cyber-security firm Arete, which undertook full-scale decryption to restore the system and files, Okanogan County Central Services Director Karen Beatty said.

The county paid nothing for the remediation and investigation into the attack, since it was completely covered by its risk insurance, Beatty said.

Arete used technology called SentinelOne to resolve the attack and scan for further problems. The county doesn't know if Arete identified the "threat actors" who hacked into the system, nor if they learned where the attackers were based. The

insurance company didn't pay any ransom to resolve the problems, Beatty said.

The county didn't receive a formal written report of the investigation because the cyber firm worked with the risk-pool attorneys, meaning that much of the information fell under attorney/client privilege, Okanogan County Risk Manager Tanya Craig said. "They were adamant that they can't discuss every detail," she said.

Court cases opened

Beyond the corrupted files, the investigators detected that the attackers had opened some old District Court cases—going back as far as the 1990s—but not altered or compromised them in any way, Craig said. The county sent letters to the last-known address on the cases to notify people of the attack, but hasn't heard from any of the individuals involved, Craig said.

In addition to the court cases, investigators found that some documents from the county's Department of Public Works had been opened, including correspondence from the county commissioners directing Public Works to report on a road, Craig said.

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Photo by Marcy Stamper

Beavers helped this area recover after it was severely burned in the 2014 Carlton Complex Fire.

Beavers reclaim, reshape the Methow landscape

Phased restoration project targets burned areas

BY MARCY STAMPER

At first glance, the pond complex near Winthrop looks messy but tranquil, a tangle of sticks and mounded branches, some topped with fresh mud. Waterfowl glide across the surface while other birds

grab insects on the wing.

What may look untidy to the human eye is a thriving environment that today supports an intricate ecosystem, thanks to a dozen beavers that have reclaimed an area severely burned in the 2014 Carlton Complex Fire. The Methow Beaver Project relocated six beavers—in phases—to the site after the fire and the animals stayed and reproduced, said Kent Woodruff, who headed up the project during that period.

Alexa Whipple, the project's current director, took a group this spring to see the pond complex and to explain how to interpret the effects of beavers. While it's hard for the uninitiated to read the landscape, just about every flat field along a creek or river was once a wetland maintained by beaver engineering, Whipple said. "The Methow was a very watered landscape, as dry as it is," she said.

As the climate gets drier, interest in restoring beavers to the

Methow Valley—and other parts of the West—has grown. Pools and wetlands built by beavers add complexity to an entire watershed. And those wetlands are vast water-storage areas, providing places for rivers to spread out and meander, keeping water from flowing quickly downstream. They also raise the water table, helping wells at risk of running dry.

The slower streams and pools

See BEAVERS, A2

HIGH STRIDING



Photo by Steve Mitchell

If you're running a long way, it might as well be in nice weather. Runners in last weekend's Rainshadow Running Sun Mountain races — 50 miles, 50 kilometers and 25 kilometers — enjoyed clear days.

Summer is garbage time in Winthrop

Visitors overload town, private dumpsters

BY DON NELSON

Where there are tourists, there will be garbage. And if they don't take it home with them, it ends up somewhere.

Too often, "somewhere" is a private dumpster that may seem convenient on the way out of the valley, a local business owner told the Winthrop Town Council last week. Or it could be a town-owned garbage receptacle intended for light trash, not campers' accumulated garbage.

Jacob Young, co-owner of the Old Schoolhouse Brew-

ery in Winthrop told the council in a letter that the pub's industrial-size dumpster has been increasingly used for garbage disposal by visitors. Other business owners have the same problem, Young said. He asked the town to consider providing more facilities to handle tourists' waste.

Council members did not dismiss the problem, but said it is not the town's responsibility to solve it.

"As the one who pays the bill for dumpster services for the Old Schoolhouse Brewery, I see firsthand as the problem has gone from bad to horrible," Young said. "My example is simply one among many others I have heard from my fellow business owners."

Young said that last summer the pub paid for three extra dumpster pickups a week to handle the garbage overflow because people left trash and even building materials in the dumpster.

"When dumpsters overflow, it not only looks horrible and smells bad, but it attracts animals and disease," he said.

Padlocked now

Earlier this year, Young said, WasteWise, the valley's waste and recycling collection service, provided upgraded dumpsters that can be secured with a padlock. Old Schoolhouse Brewery's dumpster is locked now, Young said. If his and other

See GARBAGE, A6

State transitions from mass vaccination sites to mobile clinics

Revised approach targets people with limited access

BY NATALIE JOHNSON

About four months into the state effort to distribute doses of the COVID-19 vaccines at state-run mass vaccination events, the state Department of Health (DOH) announced last week plans to transition to mobile vaccination clinics.

This new phase of vaccine outreach will help the state

reach people who have experienced barriers in vaccine access and help distribute life-saving shots more equitably and conveniently across the state of Washington, DOH said.

North Valley Hospital, based in Tonasket, began its own mobile vaccination effort at the beginning of May, targeting remote communities in the hospital district including Loomis and Wauconda. The district used a small bus that it already owned, with a small refrigerator to transport the vaccine.

John McReynolds, CEO of North Valley Hospital district, said the changes at the state level will not have a direct impact on local efforts.

"In Okanogan County we are struggling with the same issue, that the large mass vaccination events take a lot of time and labor to plan, organize, set up, and staff. When we have fewer people coming to the big events we cross a threshold where it stops making sense," he said.

"As we move forward, vaccine delivery in more traditional venues (clinics and

pharmacies) and non-traditional (pop-up or mobile clinics) will likely replace the mass vaccination events," McReynolds said.

Locally, Aero Methow Rescue Service and the Methow Valley School District have hosted vaccination events, with help from providers including Family Health Centers, while the Okanogan County Fairgrounds has had large events in the central part of the county.

Family Health Centers (FHC) is still planning large events to vaccinate agricul-

tural workers, including events scheduled for May 28 and June 1. Over those two events, FHC plans to vaccinate just under 950 people.

"Since opening Jan. 26, our four state-led mass vaccination sites have administered nearly 300,000 doses of vaccine," said Secretary of Health Umair A. Shah. "This remarkable achievement could not have been attained if it wasn't for the hard work of DOH staff, the Washington National Guard, our local and private sector partners, as well as our community mem-

bers who visited these sites to get vaccinated. This transition isn't closing a door to vaccine opportunity but opening several new ones that will allow for more equitable vaccine access in the future."

The state's mobile vaccine units have already given 32,000 doses of vaccine. The DOH plans to make more announcements about the mobile vaccine providers in coming weeks.

The state's mass vaccination site in Spokane will stay

See VACCINE, A6

ADDRESS LABEL

THURS.	FRI.	SAT.	SUN.	MON.	TUES.
May 27	May 28	May 29	May 30	May 31	June 1
57°	64°	75°	83°	87°	92°
37°	36°	45°	46°	56°	51°
Periods of Rain	Warm with Showers	Warmer	Sunshine	Sunny and Warm	Plenty of Sun

WEATHER DATA BASED ON ACCUWEATHER.COM FORECAST FOR TWISP

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BEAVERS

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collect organic matter—leaves, bits of wood gnawed off trees by beavers, beaver droppings—that builds nutrients for macroinvertebrates fish eat. Quiet pools provide refuge for those fish. And the wetter environment reduces the risk of wildfire and keeps fires from spreading as far and fast, Whipple said.

Historically, the location of streams and rivers could vary from year to year as they moved throughout their channel-migration zones, Whipple said. Beavers even built stepped systems of pools on steep hillsides—they went anywhere they could and improved even marginal habitat, she said.

“Beaver are a keystone species, meaning that they have a disproportionately large effect on their environment relative to their abundance,” according to the Beaver Restoration Guidebook, a publication produced by federal agencies, universities and partners including Woodruff.

Before humans started tinkering with the waterways, there were thousands of beavers throughout the Methow. The current beaver population is about 10% of what Woodruff estimates was once at least 5,000.

In the Methow Valley, for the past two decades, biologists and the

beaver project have been relocating beavers to places where there were historic wetlands. Beavers live in colonies that may contain two to 12 individuals, usually the adult breeding pair, the kits of that year, and kits of the previous year.

Beavers are known for building dams but, in the right conditions, they live in burrows along river banks or in piles of logs near a river, since that’s easier than building a dam and lodge, Woodruff said. While these beavers provide useful habitat for fish and add complexity to the river with the trees they fell, their benefit to the watershed is minuscule compared to beavers that construct elaborate complexes of dams and lodges, he said.

Beavers are the largest rodents in North America. Adults average 40 pounds and measure more than 3 feet in length, including the tail. They are extremely mobile and can easily travel 100 miles. The beaver project has been able to track beavers that travel on the mainstem rivers through a PIT tag embedded in their tail using equipment that tracks fish. About 60 beavers have been picked up by tag readers, Woodruff said.

But when they’re successful—if beavers are happy in their new home and stay put—the beaver project has no way of tracking them, Woodruff said. “It would be great to have a satellite monitoring system to read all

the tags—if you had \$100 million,” he said.

WDFW’s role

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) manages beavers in a variety of ways. The agency partners with the Methow Beaver Project, deals with conflicts with landowners, and oversees trapping and harvest, WDFW Okanogan District Wildlife Biologist Scott Fitkin said.

“WDFW places high value on the benefits that beavers and their activity provide for Washington’s natural systems,” WDFW Small Game, Furbearer, and Resident Game Bird Specialist Sarah Garrison said. “The agency believes in a holistic approach to beaver management.”

WDFW oversees a five-month trapping season from November through March, which allows people to trap fur-bearing mammals including beavers, skunks and coyotes. There’s no limit to the number of beavers someone with a license can trap. In the past five years, WDFW has sold an average of 582 trapping licenses per year, Garrison said.

The going rate for a beaver pelt is about \$20, according to Whipple.

From 2016 to 2019, from 13 to 45 beavers a year were trapped in Okanogan County, and 676 to 810 statewide. That’s a sharp drop

from the state’s annual average in the 1990s of some 5,300 beavers, reduced by the passage of a voter initiative that banned the use of body-gripping traps.

Those numbers may include beavers trapped by licensed trappers on private property where there was a human-beaver conflict, Garrison said.

In many states, it’s illegal to move beavers. But a WDFW pilot program allows trained relocators to get a permit to trap beavers and relocate them to more suitable habitat, Whipple said. The biggest loss of beavers results from conflict with humans and their infrastructure, not trapping, she said.

A property owner or employee may trap or kill a beaver on that property if the beaver is threatening human safety or causing property damage, according to WDFW. Dams cannot be removed or modified without a permit from WDFW.

Because it’s difficult to count beavers, WDFW doesn’t know how many beavers are in the Methow watershed, Fitkin said. In his 10 years with the beaver project, Woodruff said they released more than 400 beavers at 90 sites. He estimates there were 600 in the watershed when he retired in 2017.

A draft assessment by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services estimated there are 69,000 beavers in the state, Garrison said.

WDFW is funding a research project with Washington State University to develop a method for monitoring beavers using detection through water samples via environmental DNA, she said.

‘Amazing work’

Whipple is impressed by how the area and ponds she visited are rebounding after the Carlton Complex Fire. “This has been my inspiration and illumination about what beavers can do on a landscape,” she said.

The fire killed trees and scoured hillsides, allowing debris to erode and wash into rivers. The river channels became deep and incised, with water rushing so fast that even beavers couldn’t get a foothold to do their work.

But nearby springs provided a low-flow source of water that was easy for the beavers to dam. Eventually, their dams allow the streams to spread out and reconnect with their historic floodplains, Whipple said.

“The beavers are doing amazing work putting structure back in the creek,” replacing wood that farmers removed so they could use the streams for irrigation, Whipple said. There’s even the potential for the large, dry field near the beaver complex to become a wetland again as beavers restore the landscape, she said.

Problems remain

Although Whipple has been known to say, “Whatever the question, beavers are the answer,” in the wrong place, beavers can create problems. Their engineering projects can flood a house and other human infrastructure. Their drive to dam flowing water incites them to block culverts.

The beaver project and WDFW use several interventions to allow beavers and people to coexist. The agencies wrap trees, screen culverts, and even artificially adjust the level of a pond to keep it from flooding nearby infrastructure. They also add beaver-dam analogues—strategically placed human-made constructions of sticks that encourage beavers to colonize an area.

Although the Methow Beaver Project carefully selected the areas where it released the beavers, it wasn’t uncommon to take several tries before the animals stuck around, Woodruff said.

Today, many of those sites are flourishing. Woodruff recently visited several complexes where the beaver project helped the beavers get a start. “I was thrilled to see them fully occupied and really thriving, with fresh mud and frogs croaking like crazy,” he said.

“We need to do this all over the watershed, and allow beaver to establish where they used to be,” Woodruff said.

SECURITY

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Arete said there was no reason to believe that any of the information in the opened files had been used in a malicious way, and nothing was extracted or taken, Craig said. There was no pattern to the documents that had been opened, and the security firm wasn’t able to determine a motive, she said.

While the county had been using regular virus protection, it wasn’t adequate to present-day threats, Craig said. They don’t know how the attackers breached the county’s system. “It was busy, busy, busy here in Central Services. It’s any IT Department’s nightmare,” Beatty said.

The county is now using SentinelOne’s protection on every computer and server to monitor all activity, on top of ordinary virus protection, Craig said. SentinelOne learns “normal” patterns and notifies the county about any activity that seems suspicious. The county can exempt file formats that SentinelOne deems questionable but that are used regularly in county business.

The county signed a three-year contract with SentinelOne for the security service for \$56,000. The program also performs nightly back-ups that will

be stored on a system that’s separate from the county’s computer servers.

Training to spot attacks

The risk-pool insurer has also authorized training for county employees using KnowBe4, which sends fake, harmless phishing emails so employees learn to recognize suspicious activity. While the emails may appear to be from a trusted person, they could contain malicious attachments or links, and the training will give people techniques to determine if the sender may have been hacked or is otherwise not legitimate, Beatty said.

If someone clicks on a link or downloads an attachment in one of the training emails, KnowBe4 sends a note informing them that they have just “infected” the county’s computer system, and provides instructions about how to be more careful.

The KnowBe4 training hasn’t started yet because it may be combined with training for other counties covered by the risk pool, which could make it more economical, Beatty said.

“We were down about a week. That’s a long time for government. We learned important lessons. It could have been a lot worse,” Craig said.

Electric co-op hires new general manager

Replaces David Gottula in July

The Okanogan County Electric Cooperative announced last week that it has selected Greg Mendonca to be its new general manager, effective July 19.

Mendonca will replace Dave Gottula, who announced his retirement earlier this year, after 10 years leading the electric co-op.

The consumer-owned private power utility serves about 3,000 customers in the Methow Valley.

“I am extremely excited for the opportunity to take on the position of General Manager at Okanogan County Electric to

provide safe and reliable service to our members,” Mendonca said in a statement provided to the Methow Valley News. “Member service is at the heart of the mission of every electric cooperative and I am honored the board of directors has selected me to lead the team at OCEC to continue to work towards that mission.”

Mendonca was most recently the vice president of power supply for the Pacific Northwest Generating Cooperative in Oregon. In that position, he was responsible for power contract management, planning, load forecasting, rate modeling, electricity acquisition, energy efficiency and other duties.

He has a Bachelor of Science

degree in business administration and a Masters of Business Administration from Oregon State University. He lives with wife, Jessica, and children Cora and Miles.

“The industry landscape is rapidly changing and we must not only rise to meet the challenges facing us today, but we must also plan for the challenges we face in the future,” Mendonca said. “Finally, I look forward to mov-

ing my family into such a beautiful valley and meeting members in the community.”

The OCEC board worked with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association to find a candidate for Gottula’s replacement.

When asked what the OCEC board is looking forward to under Mendonca’s tenure, and what made him stand out as a top applicant to the board, board president Dale Sekijima declined to comment.



Greg Mendonca

Since our first clinic on January 27th, we have partnered with clinics and hospitals to vaccinate 1,100 people in the Methow Valley. We did this over the course of six large events and several smaller events. It would not have been possible without countless hours and support from the staff at several agencies and more than 1,000 volunteer hours from members of our community.

We extend a heartfelt thank you to all who reached out to help make our community safer.

Liberty Bell High School - Lead Vaccinator and School Liaison Adriana Vanbianchi, Chuck Meyers, Bud Hover, Georgia Darwood, Tom Venable, and Debbie Bair
Kiwanis - Ken Malloch and his team of volunteers listed below
Okanogan County Fire District 6 - Ken Malloch and team of volunteers listed below
Methow Trails for the sandwich sign boards
Sunflower Catering - Kathy Borgersen, for providing lunch for the volunteers

Family Health Centers - Julie Wehmeyer, Elizabeth Tripp, Lisa Marshall, Amanda Davis, Mary Humling, Kat Werle, Victoria DeSalvo, Blue Bradley, and Aspen Ostlie Pritchard
Three Rivers Hospital - Gretchen Aguilar, Eva Olea, and Isabel Rodriguez
North Valley Hospital - John McReynolds
Okanogan County Department of Emergency Management - Maurice Goodall
Okanogan County Public Health - Lauri Jones, Dr. James Wallace, and Jessica Kuzma
Confluence Health
Okanogan County Sheriff’s Office - Laura Wright
Lifeline Ambulance - Wayne Walker and Tyler Blakeny

Aero Methow Rescue Service: Cindy Button, Justin Porter, Adriana Vanbianchi, Laura Stamp, Ian Ross, Ruth Payne, Kurt Oakley, Byron Braden, Nina Ravenstein, Becky Taylor, Theresa Remsberg, Jen Schumacher, Kathleen Calvin, Stephanie Rowatt, Bruce Hevly, Chuck Timchalk, Gail White, Meg Trebon, Joe Talbert, Lotty Ekblad, Craig Howard, Jay Gorham, Kevin Beshlian, Carolyn Groninger, Brian McAuliffe, Shane Swanson, Joel Reid, Bryson Williams, and Ellen MacNary

Kiwanis, Okanogan Fire District #6, and Okanogan County Search and Rescue - Ken Malloch, Alisa Malloch, Alan Fahnestock, Rick Norby, Bryn Stevens, Bob Sutherland, Jim Archambeault, Ron Overbeck, Nadine Van Hees, Bill and Sue Ellen White, Shirlee Evans, Kate Wynne, Cindy Macklin, Bruce Carter, Mo Kelley-Akker, Rick Rottman, Michael Koerner, Max Jones, Jeff Jones, Kathy Busse, David Hooker, Peggy Sarjeant, Nancy Place, and Maryann Yakabi.

Community Volunteers: Daniel McGill, Charlene Burns, Leslie Tregillus, Ann Diamond, Betsie Brennand, Jill Calvert, Ann McCreary, Peter Bauer, Denise Kittleson, Annie Coghlan, Jocelyn Murray, Elizabeth Weiss, Kimber Faulkner, Pat Gilmer, Joanne Leyva, Diane Gordon, Sharon Cupp, Michelle Jerome, Catherine Rogers, Karen Mulcahy, Joanne Hunold, David Bonn, Lisa Johnson, Dana Golden, Randy Johnson, Sophie Daudon, Maud Daudon, Marc Daudon, Patricia Leigh, Cherri Thomas, Polly Fabian, Richard Murray, Kari Anderson, George Schoenfeld, Liz Johnson, Katherine Williams, Tavish Fenbert, Jennifer Zbyszewski, Sarah Gilman, Catherine Chingren, Elizabeth Boyd, Dotti Wilson, Nelle Horsley, Lee Summerfield, Gloria Herron, Jeanne Johnson, KC Golden, Sharon Fisher, Megan Jepson, Kristi Skanderup, Maryann Marci, Mark Applebee, Kim Romain-Bondi, Erik Strand, Cathy Davis, Sharon Cohen, Vicky Douxmont, Julie Palm, Kevan Coffey, Jonathan Hawley, Frances Kaul, DJ Jones, Darlene Sallee, Ben Corwin, Frauke Rynd, Ina Clark, Raleigh Bowden, Maryann Timchalk, Sandra Bowen, Anne Johnson, John Box, Marian Osborne, Jen Fry, Leslie Mittendorf, Boo Turner, Beth DiDomenico, Madeleine Eckmann, Michael Pritchard, Josh Rubenstein, Martha Rothe, Jennifer Zajac, Hannah Viano, Joan Winsor, Sharmon Figenshaw, Linda Schomaker, Peter Arniel, and Bob Hoffman.

