

THE NEWPORT MINER

Serving Pend Oreille County, WA

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BUSINESS HOURS

8:30 a.m.-5:15 p.m. Monday-Friday
421 S. Spokane Ave., Newport, WA.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION RATES

Pend Oreille County, WA.....\$28.90
West Bonner County
and Spirit Lake, Idaho.....\$28.90
Out-of-County & Elk.....\$38.50
Single Copy.....\$1.00**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Newport Miner, 421 S. Spokane Ave., Newport, WA. 99156.Telephone: 509-447-2433
E-mail: minersubscriptions@povn.com

Published weekly by Newport Miner, Inc., 421 S. Spokane Ave., Newport, WA. 99156. Periodical Postage paid at Newport, WA.; USPS No. 384400.

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HOW TO CONTACT US

By Mail: 421 S. Spokane Ave.
Newport, WA 99156By FAX: (509) 447-9222
* 24-HoursComments or Information
By Phone: (509) 447-2433
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Priest River fish die due to heat wave

Die-off is small scale, unusual for time of year

BY SOPHIA ALDOUS
OF THE MINER

PRIEST RIVER – It wasn't just humans and our pets that were affected by last week's heat wave. Dead fish began to float up along Priest River as water temperatures rose too, killing around 160 fish, according to the Selkirk Conservation Alliance (SCA).

Betty Gardner, a 42-year resident of Priest River checked the outside temperature at her home on Monday, June 28. It was 106 degrees. The next day she says she saw five dead white fish in the river. She says she looked at the fish and didn't see any signs that they had been hurt or wounded. On Wednesday, June 30 Gardner says there were 21 dead white fish and one large rainbow



COURTESY PHOTO

Last week's heat wave where temperatures exceeded 100-degrees for several days straight has caused fish kills, a term that refers to a localized die-off of fish populations.

SEE FISH, 7A

COVID: Lost periods of time when she was in the hospital

FROM PAGE 1

daughter's temperature and was relieved to see it was normal.

"I thought she was getting better," Denise says. Later that day Denise checked in on Masters and lightly touched her back when she stumbled next to the bed.

"She said 'ouch' and flinched like I had smacked her when I barely touched her," Denise says. "But her voice didn't sound good. I asked her what was wrong and when she picked up her head off the pillow to answer me, I could hear the raspiness in her voice."

Denise called Newport Hospital for advice and was told to bring Masters into the emergency room.

An hour later she was transported to Holy Family Hospital in Spokane where she was diagnosed with pneumonia in both lungs due to COVID. Masters spent a week in the intensive care unit (ICU) and a week in the acute care unit. Because of hospital policies during the pandemic, Masters couldn't have visitors, not even her mother.

"It was so scary," says Masters, who is special needs and has a close bond with Denise. "I get separation anxiety without her. It's bad enough that I'm claustrophobic."

She says she lost periods of time while she was in the hospital and doesn't remember everything. She commends the nurses that took care of

her, saying, "The nurses don't get enough credit through this" and she has a sense of humor about the ordeal.

"They had good popsicles," Masters says, smiling. "Actually, the food was pretty good. You usually hear people complain about his bad hospital food is, but I can't complain about that."

Of the three other members of her household, including Denise, Masters was the only one to get COVID. She was discharged from the hospital on July 29, just in time for her niece's birthday party, which she is thankful for.

"It makes you so angry when people say this is a hoax," Denise says. "I

could've lost my girl. We have family living with us and we were worried that we could've picked it up too, but we didn't."

Masters was on portable oxygen for about a month afterwards. The family has Medicare, so they didn't have to deal with a hospital bill afterwards. Both Masters and Denise received their COVID-19 vaccinations this spring. Masters says she wished she had listened more to health officials' advised precautions before she got sick.

"I didn't wear a mask. I didn't wash my hands as much as I should've. I just didn't think it was that big of a deal," Masters says. "Then I almost died from it. What pisses me off now is that no one is

talking it seriously. No one understands it. I wish people would stop fighting about it; that's so stupid."

According to Northeast Tri County Health District (NETCHD), Pend Oreille County has had 820 positive cases of COVID-19 since the disease came to Washington State in March 2020.

There have been nine COVID cases reported in the last 14 days, with seven of them in Newport. Pend Oreille County's vaccination rate against the disease is only 32% of the county's populations, with 65% unvaccinated. As of deadline Tuesday, July 6, 3% were initiating the process of becoming vaccinated.

JOBS: Governments not having as tough a time hiring

FROM PAGE 1

said. Starting pay at the Newport McDonald's is \$14-\$14.50 an hour, based on availability. "We continue to offer paid time off, health/dental insurance, a 401K plan, free meals while working, a national 30% food discount at McDonald's restaurants, and free uniforms."

Washington's minimum wage is \$13.69 an hour.

While Idaho's minimum wage is significantly lower at \$7.25 an hour, Yoni Solis, owner of the Mi Pueblo restaurants, pays almost double that in Idaho and is having trouble getting and keeping workers. He has restaurants in Priest River, Bonners Ferry and Spirit Lake in Idaho, as well as a restaurant in Newport.

"We have to pay more," he said. Not only does he have trouble getting new workers, he has trouble keeping them. "Some of the people we hire don't stay," he said.

Solis' restaurants are normally open seven days a week, but he's started closing one day a week.

"People were working extra and we don't want to wear out the employees," he said. Solis said that for the first time, he closed for three days over the Fourth of July weekend instead of just one, partially so people could spend time with families,

but also to give workers a break. He has about 10-11 employees at each restaurant. He feels fortunate his three oldest children work full time at the family business.

April Stamos, manager of Burger Express in Priest River, said she has also had to reduce the hours the restaurant is open because of a lack of staff.

"We're not staying open as long," she said, closing at 9 p.m. instead of staying open until 11 p.m. as the restaurant normally would in the summer. She has 16 employees, but could use another seven.

Skubitz, who owns three McDonald's in Idaho and another in Spokane, said the state doesn't really make a difference for attracting employees, but the location does.

"There isn't much difference between the two states regarding staffing, but each location is unique to itself," he said. "The retail growth in the Newport/Oldtown communities brings more employment opportunities for those seeking retail employment i.e. a leaner employee pool."

Governments are not having quite the same problem finding workers as restaurants are.

Pend Oreille County Human Resources Manager Terra Sirevog said the county went on a hiring spree after the CO-

VID-19 hiring restrictions were lifted in May.

"We hired about 30 people in almost all departments," Sirevog said.

Pend Oreille County has a few jobs advertised on their website, including two entry level dispatcher jobs that start at \$18.32 an hour. A 4/5ths time solid waste transfer station technician job paying \$20.25 an hour has been open since June 2.

Other county jobs include Counseling Services jobs that require advanced degrees and a public information officer position.

Newport Hospital & Health Services is facing some stiff competition for nurses, with one Spokane hospital offering a \$20,000 signing bonus for nurses.

Joseph Clouse, head of Human Resources for the hospital district, says not only is that hospital group offering the signing bonus, they are also offering a \$20,000 referral bonus.

Clouse said Newport Hospital & Health Services have about 65 nurses, with a base pay of \$30-\$60 an hour. They earn more than base pay for night and weekend work, as well as for work requiring more accreditation.

Clouse said he's not really stressed about attracting and

keeping nurses. He says the hospital has excellent benefits and offers fair pay.

The hospital is one of the largest employers in the county, with 308 fulltime equivalent employees.

Clouse said it is not unusual for the hospital to need employees in the summer, and this year is no different.

"We have an uptick in the summer," Clouse said. There are a couple dozen job openings on the hospital's website.

The hospital district pays \$15.12 an hour for activities aides at River Mountain Village Advanced Care.

Clouse said the hospital has a hard time getting certified nursing assistants. Those jobs pay in the neighborhood of \$15 an hour and are hard work, but important.

Kim Petrich of the FarmHouse Café in Metaline Falls said she hasn't had trouble finding staff.

"I know a lot of teenagers," she said. She has nine employees and is open seven days a week.

But she seems to be an exception for area restaurants.

In addition to the extra unemployment compensation available in Washington, there are other factors that may contribute the shortage of workers, not the least of which is the lack of affordable childcare.



FILE PHOTO

In 1981, about 12,000 people attended the Rainbow Family Rendezvous, which concluded its seven day event near Power Lake in Pend Oreille County.

Down Memory Lane

FROM THE MINER'S FILES

110 years ago 1911

Newport's mighty baseball club had 14 wins, only one loss and one tied game. On the Fourth of July, they beat Metaline Falls 8-7 in a 13 inning squeaker, then trounced Spirit Lake 14-7.

The Fidelity, the Panhandle and the Dalkena sawmills all closed down their night shifts.

After the July 4 celebration, the Idaho & Washington Northern railroad carried 1,026 merrymakers back to Spokane on one train alone.

100 years ago 1921

A traveling freight agent for the Great Northern came to town to promote rail-road service over automobiles, which had begun to hurt his business.

Cusick's Fourth of July celebration

was highlighted by a morning automobile parade, comprising decorated cars of every description.

Klenzo dental creme sold for 25 cents a tube.

90 years ago 1931

Orlo W. Krauter, Newport, married Mildred M. Specht of Priest River.

A pioneer river man of the Pend Oreille, Capt. Napoleon LeClerc, joined Jason McInnis, one of the river's first sawmill operators, to investigate Metaline's new mines.

The American Legion Auxiliary elected Muriel Brigham as its new president.

80 years ago 1941

The pounding rapids at Kettle Falls were preparing to vanish along with the town. The water behind Coulee Dam was rising and would eventually flood the area.

Forty-seven young men from Pend

Oreille County registered for the draft.

The Idaho Land Board held up 16 million feet of state-owned white pine to Stanley W. Jones of Priest River. They felt his lone bid of \$6.50 per thousand feet was too low.

70 years ago 1951

Rev. Robert Rayburn arrived in Dalkena to take charge of the church.

Work was started to improve and nearly double the capacity of the Skookum Creek fish hatchery.

60 years ago 1961

The Pend Oreille County Rural Development Committee took steps toward getting the area eligible for federal aid.

The State Department of Natural Resources decided to build a new ranger station just north of the Kaniksu ranger station on Highway 6.

T-bone steak went for 98 cents a pound.

50 years ago 1971

The Newport School District planned to build a new softball diamond.

Bob and Alice represented Newport at the annual Kiwanis convention in San Francisco.

The county auditor explained the rules of voting after the amendment allowing 18-year-olds to vote was passed.

40 years ago 1981

Key Tronic, Inc. suspended its plan for a satellite assembly plant in Spirit Lake and the Newport plant was expected to employ a full force of 350 workers by the end of 1981.

Professional grant writers were welcome in Newport to help solve its sewer and water financing problems, the city council agreed.

SEE MEMORY, 8A

FISH: Fish kills were being reported at several locations throughout week

FROM PAGE 2A

trout, followed by more fish on Thursday and Friday.

"On Wednesday I checked the water temperature," says Gardner, who volunteers with the IDAH2O Master Water Stewards Program of the University of Idaho Extension Office. "It was 83 degrees. I've never seen it above 78 degrees and that was unusually hot a few years back."

Water that registers at 83 is fatal for Salmonoids (trout and white fish). Gardner says she checked the river's Dissolved Oxygen (DO) level. Dissolved oxygen is a measure of how much oxygen is dissolved in the water, or the amount of oxygen available to living aquatic organisms. The amount of dissolved oxygen in a stream or lake relays information about its water quality.

"On a scale of 4 through

9, 4 is bad, 9 is good," Gardner says. "It read 4. Salmonoids become stressed when DO gets below 7."

Gardner says she spoke with Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and the University of Idaho Extension Office. Fish kills were being reported at several locations throughout last week, according to SCA.

"A fish kill has happened during the heat dome on Lower Priest River below Outlet Bay Dam," SCA posted to their

Facebook page July 2.

A casual mortality survey between McAbee Falls upstream to the dam at several sites found 153 mountain whitefish, including one bull trout, one large lake trout, two small salmonids, one sculpin and one sucker.

"All of the experts I spoke to agreed it is the high-water temperature and low DO that is causing these kills," Gardner says. "The United States Forest Service predicts that the weather we have seen for the last few years is the new normal. We can expect higher sum-

mer temperatures, less snowpack, less rainfall, more draughts and more forest fires. There will be more fish kills."

Idaho Department of Fish and Game Regional Fishery Manager Andy Dux says that though the die-off is unusual for this time of year, anglers don't need to be too worried.

"It doesn't indicate a population problem overall, as this is more localized," Dux says. "It is related to the extreme temperatures we had in the last week, but the reports have been coming

mostly from the Priest River, with some from the Post Falls Park pond and Cocolalla Creek.

According to Dux, fish kills are reported periodically, but the last one that was on par with the more recent incident was in 2015, when wildfires were all over the Inland Northwest.

"It becomes a problem if it becomes more frequent," Dux says.

SCA is asking that anyone with any additional information on the fish kill email SCA@SCAWILD.ORG or use messenger.

WHO TO CONTACT

WASHINGTON

Federal

President Joseph R. Biden (D)
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington DC 20500
Comments: 202-456-1111
Switchboard: 202-456-1414
www.WhiteHouse.gov/Contact

Senator Patty Murray (D)

154 Senate Russell Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-2621
Spokane office:
10 North Post Street #600
Spokane WA 99201
Phone: (509) 624-9515

Senator Maria Cantwell (D)

511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510
Phone: (202) 224-3441
Spokane office:
W. 920 Riverside, No. 697
Spokane WA 99201
Phone: (509) 353-2507

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R)

1035 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 225-2006
Colville Office:
555 South Main
Colville WA 99114
Phone: (509) 684-3481

State

Governor Jay Inslee (D)

Office of the Governor
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002
360-902-4111
Relay operators for the deaf or hard of hearing, dial 7-1-1
www.governor.wa.gov

Legislative District 7 - Position 1

Rep. Jacquelin Maycumber (R)
425B Legislative Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
Phone: (360) 786-7908
Email: jacquelin.maycumber@leg.wa.gov
No home office yet

Legislative District 7 - Position 2

Rep. Joel Kretz (R)
335A Legislative Building
PO Box 40600
Olympia, WA 98504-0600
Phone: (360) 786-7988
Email: kretz.joel@leg.wa.gov

State Senator - Legislative District 7

Shelly Short
409 Legislative Building
PO Box 40407
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