

Methow projects to receive \$9.7M from state RCO

Grants are for recreation upgrades, land conservation

BY NATALIE JOHNSON

Okanogan County projects will receive \$12,790,848 in grants from the state Recreation and Conservation Office (RCO) in 2021 — more than any other county in eastern Washington and less than only King and Pierce counties.

Of the 22 projects receiving grants in the county, 15 are located in the Methow Valley, totaling \$9,731,606 in funding.

The largest of the Methow grants is also the largest grant in the county — a \$2,594,003 award to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) to buy 569 acres of land in the Methow Rapids Natural Area to include in the Methow Rapids Natural Area Preserve.

“The land contains the largest of only three intact examples of the smooth sumac/bluebunch wheatgrass community in the state and the largest of only nine intact examples of the antelope bitterbrush/bluebunch wheatgrass community in the state,” according to the RCO.

The land also is home to species of birds listed as Species of Greatest Conservation Need by the WDFW’s state Wildlife Action Plan.

The area in question is along the Columbia River, downstream from the confluence with the Methow River.

“These grants are fundamental to keeping Washington the beautiful state it is,” said Gov. Jay Inslee in a news release. “The funding comes from state and federal sources and is invested in hundreds of projects to give our kids places to play, ensure our food is grown close to home and keep our green spaces healthy for wildlife.”

The RCO awarded 342 grants to organizations across the state totaling more than \$164 million. The grants are matched by more than \$221 million from grant applicants with cash, donations, staff time and equipment.

“The grants are very competitive,” said Megan Duffy, director of the RCO, which supports the funding board. “Every grant is evaluated by advisory committees made up of local residents and technical experts, Duffy said. “They rank the applications ensuring that the most needed and best projects rise to the top. That’s important because nearly 40% of the applications remain unfunded. There’s just an incredible need out there.”

The second-largest grant in the county is also for a Methow Valley project by the WDFW. The \$1.9 million grant will go toward a project to conserve 110 acres of sagebrush-steppe and grassland surrounded by



Photo courtesy of Recreation and Conservation Office
A meadowlark perched on barbed wire at the Golden Doe Wildlife Area, which will be the beneficiary of a \$1.9 million grant to conserve 110 acres.

the Golden Doe Unit of the Methow Wildlife Area. The land is home to populations of mule deer, black bear, coyotes and golden eagles. The project would improve access to the area.

Another \$1,140,000 grant awarded to Methow Conservancy would buy a

conservation easement to protect 390 acres of land that has been used as a farm for the past century on Wolf Creek Road.

“The farm contains high-quality

See GRANTS, A2

Mission accomplished, Twisp PDA will fade away

Oversaw TwispWorks campus development

BY DON NELSON

The Twisp Public Development Authority (PDA), created in 2008 to launch the conversion of a former U.S. Forest Service complex into what we now know as TwispWorks, is about to disappear into history.

The Twisp Town Council will hold a July 27 public hearing on a proposal to dissolve the PDA, a request that came from the authority’s own board of directors. The board, chaired by David Gottula, the soon-to-retire general manager of the Okanogan County Electric Cooperative, sent a letter to the town in April of this year, asking that the authority be dissolved.

The PDA, having achieved its original goals and handed over operation and development of TwispWorks to the non-profit TwispWorks Foundation several years ago, has no assets or property, no source of income and no ongoing projects — in effect, no remaining reason to exist. The resolution the Town Coun-

See PDA, A2

FINE DAY FOR PLANES AND PANCAKES



Photo by Ashley Lodato
The annual Fly-in, Cruise-in & Pancake Breakfast last weekend drew hungry crowds to the Twisp Municipal Airport, where they could see not only aircraft but also antique and classic cars, trucks and motorcycles.

Long-haul COVID-19 victim endured months of mysterious ailments

Vaccination finally relieved symptoms

BY MARCY STAMPER

For almost a year, Megan Barton struggled with episodes of burning in her lungs, coughing and headaches. Her hair was coming out in fistfuls. She couldn’t walk a short distance without stopping to catch her breath, and chores on her farm in Tonasket were impossible. Even conversations were difficult because of the dryness in her throat.

Barton contracted COVID-19 in July 2020, although no one has been able to pinpoint how she got it. Equally puzzling is why she developed the debilitating symptoms of what’s called long COVID (or post-COVID condition).

This May, Barton got the COVID vaccine. After 10 months of strug-

gling, her symptoms vanished. “As soon as I had the second dose, it all went away,” she said. “It’s almost like it completely reset my system back to normal.”

Although 30% to 40% of people with long COVID see their symptoms disappear after vaccination, no one can explain that, either.

Barton is an executive assistant at Mid-Valley Hospital in Omak. While she doesn’t work in patient care, she’s part of the hospital’s incident command team and receives daily updates on the virus. She has followed strict protocols of masking, hand hygiene and social distancing, both at work and in her personal life.

But in July 2020 — when per-capita cases in Okanogan County were the highest in the state — Barton developed all the classic symptoms of COVID. She had body aches and couldn’t take in air.

See COVID, A3

Irrigation ditches east of Methow River enclosed

\$10 million project improves fish habit

BY ANN MCCREARY

Two open irrigation ditches, operated by Barkley Irrigation Company and Methow Valley Irrigation District (MVID), have been completely enclosed in pipe through a project that broke ground almost three years ago.

Since the early 1900s, Barkley and MVID have provided irrigation on the east side of the Methow River north of Twisp. Like other previously open ditches in the Methow Valley, including the Skyline and other portions of MVID, the Barkley and the last open section of MVID are now piped to

improve fish habitat by reducing the amount of water diverted from rivers.

Plans to transform Barkley’s 8-mile-long open canal to a pipeline system began almost 10 years ago, after the irrigation company was told by federal fisheries officials that it needed to change the way it diverts water from the Methow River.

The \$10 million construction project, led by Trout Unlimited, is being completed this summer, said project manager Aaron Penrose.

“We got started in late fall of 2018 ... and just wrapped up the final major construction phase this spring in May,” Penrose said. “The Barkley has now joined the 21st century. It is a big deal and a major upgrade.”

“The historic canals and ditches were

put in during the early 1900s; the infrastructure that allowed that to happen is ancient and in disrepair,” Penrose said. “Making water move more efficiently” has become more critical with the impacts of climate change, he said.

As a result of the changes to the irrigation systems, more water will remain in the Methow River to support fish. “And Barkley and MVID have new infrastructure for the next century,” Penrose said.

Work was completed in several phases over the past three years to allow water to continue being delivered during irrigation season, Penrose said. One of the most visible signs of the changes is removal of cottonwood trees that thrived along the open ditch that flowed

See IRRIGATION, A3



Photo Courtesy of Trout Unlimited
A pumping station was installed at the new Barkley ditch headgate as part of a project to enclose open ditches on the east side of the Methow River.

ADDRESS LABEL

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65°
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Sunshine

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July 9
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64°
Mostly
Sunny

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July 10
99°
66°
Very Hot

SUN.
July 11
93°
67°
Very Warm

MON.
July 12
96°
58°
Mostly
Sunny

TUES.
July 13
96°
59°
Partly
Sunny

INSIDE ...

OPINION A4

HARTS PASS A4

SPORTS & REC A6

EXTRA! B1

CLASSIFIEDS B2

BLOTTER B3

COMMUNITY B5

VALLEY LIFE B6

WEATHER DATA BASED ON ACCUWEATHER.COM FORECAST FOR TWISP

COVID

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It was as if there were a thousand bricks sitting on her chest, she said. She lost her sense of taste and smell. “It was blatantly obvious. I called my boss in tears,” Barton said.

Barton isolated in a guest room in her basement. The fit 36-year-old couldn’t walk down the hall to the bathroom without her husband’s help.

Barton was so short of breath that she was afraid she’d die in her sleep. So she tried to stay up all night and to sleep while her husband was awake during the day. She had a terrifying seizure.

Seven weeks after her infection, the fatigue started to dissipate and she was able to return to the office.

New symptoms

But then a collection of new and incapacitating symptoms

began to plague her.

Barton had terrible headaches and severe shortness of breath. She’d wake up coughing, which kept her up half the night. Her husband had to sleep in another room so he could get enough rest to go to work. Her body temperature went haywire—she was either sweltering or freezing.

The most concerning thing was the pain in her chest. “It felt as if someone had poured gasoline on my lungs and set them on fire,” Barton said. Sometimes the burning would go away after an hour, but sometimes it lasted for days.

In January, she finally went to the doctor, who said Barton’s symptoms were consistent with long COVID.

Because she works in health care, Barton was eligible for the COVID vaccine early on, but she was wary. It’s not that she didn’t trust it, but she’d read that some people who’d had a severe case of COVID relapsed after being vaccinated. “I just didn’t want to feel that sick again,” she said.

But as more and more people got vaccinated, evidence was

mounting that long-haul symptoms often disappeared after the vaccine.

After her first dose, Barton suffered a bout of her original COVID symptoms, which sent her back to bed for a few days. But then even the long-haul symptoms subsided.

Now, seven weeks after her second dose, Barton feels normal again. “My lung capacity’s great. It’s like a switch was flipped,” she said. The only lingering symptom is a dry throat when she talks for too long.

Barton now acknowledges that she minimized the seriousness of her infection last summer. But she had seen how devastating the disease could be and wanted to be sure that limited resources were available for people she thought were even sicker, she said.

Barton decided to share her story because she believes it’s important for people to know how easily COVID can spread, and how the effects of the disease can linger. It touches your family, your neighbors and your community, she said. “COVID affects all of us, and it’s personal,” Barton said.



Photo courtesy of Megan Barton

Megan Barton had another reason to celebrate her recovery — she was finally able to ride her colt, Jesse James, which had been at the trainer all year.

IRRIGATION

From Page A1

next to the Twisp-Winthrop Eastside County Road.

Impetus for change

The impetus to develop a new irrigation system for the Barkley ditch came in 2012 when federal fisheries officials told the Barkley Irrigation Company to end its longstanding practice of creating a temporary dam. Each July, as the Methow River began to approach summer low flows, the company, under a permit from the state, would drive a bulldozer up a side channel of the river to create an earthen dam to direct water toward the ditch.

The temporary dam channeled water from the mainstream of the Methow River into a side channel leading to the Barkley headgate, adversely impacting fish habitat, Penvose said.

The canal headgate was located about a half-mile upstream from the confluence of Bear Creek and the Methow River. Because the first half-mile of the canal did not have a fish screen, endangered fish species—including juvenile spring Chinook, steelhead, bull trout and Pacific Lamprey — would become stranded when the ditch was shut down, and had to be removed by hand.

Trout Unlimited and numerous other partners worked with the irrigation company to develop a plan to address those issues and reduce the amount of water taken out of the river.

The new Barkley irrigation system combines gravity-fed and pressurized piped systems to serve Barkley water users. The point of diversion from the Methow River was moved 4 miles downstream from the original headgate and consolidated with an MVID diversion near

the south end of the Methow Valley State Airport.

Improving fish habitat

Moving the Barkley diversion downstream improves instream flow in those 4 miles of the Methow River by 26 cubic feet per second (cfs), Penvose said. And Bear Creek, which previously dumped water into the Barkley canal, will be reconnected to the Methow River through a restoration project by Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation, providing access to habitat suitable for steelhead spawning and rearing, he said.

Water for MVID and Barkley is carried from the diversion near the airport in two buried pipes that run parallel to each other downhill to Mill Hill, located across the river from the Twisp Park. The water for Barkley and MVID previously converged in an open ditch about 2

miles above Mill Hill.

The rest of MVID’s open canal system along the east and west side of the Methow River was enclosed in a project that was completed in 2016. Barkley serves about 40 shareholders, and MVID has approximately 240 members.

The easement for the new buried pipelines along the Twisp-Winthrop Eastside County Road, previously an open ditch, is now a smooth flat surface, which has proved to be an attraction to bikers and walkers, Penvose said. However, the easement is on private property and not open to the public for recreation, he said.

In addition to the piping, a pump station was installed at the new Barkley headgate near the airport to feed a smaller pipeline that pushes water to irrigators with property above the grade of the new pipeline.

“Creating a pressure system generates the most water savings,” Penvose said. It provides an “on-demand” service, in which water is only transported when needed by irrigators, rather than being carried in an open ditch throughout the irrigation season.

At the upper end of the Barkley ditch, upstream of the airport, six ditch customers were provided wells, “eliminating 1.5 miles of leaky earthen canal

and the need for a lengthy pipe installation with few services,” Penvose said. With those customers served by wells, “a large portion of the upper Barkley was abandoned,” he said.

The project was initially estimated to cost about \$5 million. But consolidating the diversion for the two ditches and piping the upper four miles of MVID, coupled with higher construction and material costs—especially for 40,000 feet of pipe—pushed the project budget just over \$10 million, Penvose said.

Funding for the project comes from the Bureau of Reclamation, Bonneville Power Administration, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Nation, Chelan and Douglas County Public Utility Districts, Natural Resource Conservation Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Priest Rapids Coordinating Committee, Department of Ecology, Washington State Conservation Commission, U.S Forest Service, Okanogan Conservation District, Methow Conservancy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Salmon Recovery Funding Board and Trout Unlimited.

Restoration opportunities

The redesign of the irrigation system offered opportunities for habitat restoration, including a project undertaken


by the Methow Salmon Recovery Foundation (MSRF). The two-year project, which began last year and continues this year, “will restore ecological processes at the historic location of the Barkley Irrigation Company diversion to improve fish habitat for steelhead and spring Chinook,” according to MSRF.

The project will repurpose and enhance the irrigation features no longer needed by the Barkley irrigation company to improve floodplain connectivity, MSRF said.

Specific actions include creating a new inlet to the existing side channel, removing the existing head gate and converting portions of the irrigation canal into side channel habitat. The project will also remove riprap protecting the irrigation canal and reconnect Bear Creek with the Methow River.

Engineered logjams and other wood placements within Methow River, connected side channels, and the floodplain will increase habitat for the endangered salmon, according to MSRF. Work within the Methow River is limited to the month of July in each year to protect fish species.


Work began this year in late June and will continue along the left bank of the Methow River through July.



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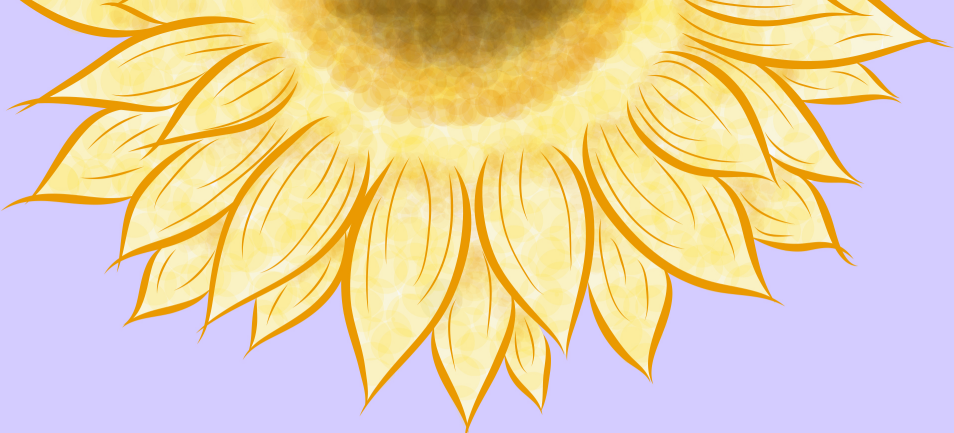
BUSINESS BRIEFS

STIPE NAMED CHAIR OF NCB BOARD

North Cascades Bank (NCB) has announced the recent appointment of Beth Stipe as chair of its board of directors. Stipe has more than 25 years of experience in governance and board leadership and joined the NCB board in June 2018. She is the executive director of the Community Foundation of North Central Washington and has led the foundation for 18 years. Stipe has a BA from Indiana University and a masters of nonprofit management degree from Regis University. NCB is a division of Glacier Bank of Kalispell, Montana, and has a Twisp branch.



Beth Stipe




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