



**Kettle River Music Festival deemed success**

**B4 | A5**

**Vehicle theft suspect flees deputies, drowns in river**

# THE OKANOGAN COUNTY CHRONICLE

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FAWN SWAN | Special to The Chronicle

Flames from the Whitmore Fire, on the Colville Indian Reservation, burn close to a yard in the Kartar.

## Wildfires remain active

By DEE CAMP  
The Chronicle

OKANOGAN — The Whitmore Fire, one of 15 fires burning in north central Washington, blew up over the weekend, forcing evacuations and burning several structures on the Colville Indian Reservation southeast of Okanogan.

The fire began Aug. 3 from a fierce thunderstorm that blew across Okanogan County. (See related story, Page A3.)

As of Monday afternoon, it had burned across 55,148 acres of land with 15 percent containment.

A second fire, Hamilton, merged with the Whitmore Fire and the combined blaze burned from Columbia River Road south of Omak Lake eastward through the Kartar Valley and beyond, south to the Columbia River and northeast into heavy timber in the Kartar Creek and parallel drainages.

It prompted Level 3 (get out now) evacuation notices from Okanogan County Emergency Management for the area south of Columbia River Road from Panama Canyon to Peniel Ranch and north of Columbia River Road from Panama Canyon to Omak-Kartar Road.

Level 2 (be ready) alerts were sent



FAWN SWAN | Special to The Chronicle  
An aircraft drops retardant on the Whitmore Fire, burning on the Colville Indian Reservation.

for the area along both sides of Highway 155 from the Colville agency in Nespelem to the St. Mary's Mission turnoff outside Omak, and south of the highway to the north end of Omak Lake and then eastward to the highway at the chain-up area.

An evacuation shelter was set up at Paschal Sherman Indian School.

Air tankers, scooper planes and

small aircraft dropped retardant and water to slow spread of the fire, which was fanned by erratic winds, according to Northwest Incident Management Team No. 12.

"We were boxed in with the fire-fighters from all directions," said Fawn Swan, who lives in the Kartar Valley. "Saturday was the worst day, as none of us could help each other as each one of us had a fire in our backyard. The wind blew from all four directions and the fires burned a complete 360 around us."

Some homes were lost, said residents and fire officials, but an exact number had not been confirmed by press time Monday afternoon.

State mobilization of fire resources was authorized Aug. 6 by the Washington State Patrol Chief John Batiste at the request of Fire District No. 8 Chief Ed Townsend.

Incident Commander Bobby Shindelar, during a Sunday afternoon update, said the fire had an aggressive local attack, but the flames still escaped.

Whitmore is the national No. 1 priority fire, he said.

"We are getting resources," he said.

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## Gebbers, L&I settle COVID case

Brewster company agrees to \$2 million in improvements

By DEE CAMP  
The Chronicle

BREWSTER — Gebbers Farms and the state Department of Labor and Industries have reached a settlement worth more than \$2 million over violations of state COVID-19 regulations regarding worker safety.

The state called the pact a "landmark" settlement, while the Brewster-based fruit growing and packing company termed it a "successful settlement."

Last year, the state fined the company more than \$2 million in work place safety and health fines, one of the largest actions in state history.

But rather than pay the full fine to the state, under terms of the mediation agreement Gebbers Farms will spend more than \$2 million improving housing, quality of life, safety and access to health care for its workers and their families, according to L&I.

"Gebbers Farms has always cared deeply about the well-being and safety of its workers," said Cass Gebbers, CEO of Gebbers Farms. "Each year, Gebbers Farms makes improvements to its temporary housing facilities to enhance the safety and comfort of its workers."

"This mediation agreement will result in even more improvements, and it will benefit the community at large through the farm's donations to community charities and non-profits."

In 2020, two state inspections found 24 violations of pandemic regulations, 12 for unsafe sleeping arrangements in temporary worker housing and 12 for unsafe worker regulations, said L&I. Gebbers was fined \$13,200 after the first inspection and \$2,038,200 after the second.

Two workers - Juan Carlos Santiago Rincon of Mexico and Earl Edwards, 63, Jamaica, died - from COVID-19 while living and working on the farm.

The state said the company was cited for six other violations, including not reporting a fatality.

"Real, on-the-ground improvements for farmworkers and their families are a fitting way to honor the memories of the Gebbers workers who died," said L&I Director Joel Sacks.

Other investigation found the farm didn't ensure adequate social distancing by allowing workers to use both top and bottom bunks in sleeping quarters, and that there were no barriers in the kitchen/cooking areas, said L&I.

The company maintains that it implemented COVID-response protocols that it developed in consultation with an infectious disease specialist, and consulted with Okanogan County Public Health early in the pandemic. Protocols were put in place in February 2020, before the state issued safety regulations, the company said last year.

Late last summer, the state Department of Health ordered Gebbers to have all its workers tested.

Under the settlement, Gebbers Farms agreed to:

- Make \$1.4 million in capital improvements to temporary worker housing. Improvements will include new farmworker housing and sports facilities, picnic tables and benches, landscaping around housing areas, additional air conditioning units and signs to aid emergency responders in locating facilities.

One of the company's older, temporary worker camps, built in the 1970s, will be demolished and rebuilt.

A cell tower will be constructed so workers can have reliable communications with family, electrical services will be upgraded to support washing machines and dryers, new mattresses will be purchased and electrical upgrades made, the state said.

• Donate \$513,000 to improve access to health care for workers and their families. They money will go to area hospitals, health care centers, emergency medical services, and day care and recreational centers serving the workers and their families.

• Spend \$150,000 to hire a full-time safety officer for three years. That person would oversee and supervise worker safety and health, including training and supervising staff who develop, implement and enforce the company's safety program. The safety officer also would have authority to stop any activity deemed unsafe or in violation of safety and health rules, the state said.

• Pay a fine of \$10,000.

• Post the settlement agreement for employees to view for 10 days.

After 10 days, the state Board of

See **GEBBERS**, page A5

## Tribe sues U.S. government over North Star, Tunk Block fire losses

NESPELEM — The Colville Confederated Tribes are suing the United States government over losses from the 2015 North Star and Tunk Block fires.

The suit was filed Aug. 4.

Damages related to the fires, which burned across more than 240,000 acres of land on the reservation in 2015, are sought. The tribe alleges the United States failed to maintain adequate forest health through measures such as prescribed burning, which led to fires of unprecedented size and intensity.

Both fires began in August 2015 and ultimately burned more than 590 square miles and 800,000,000 board feet of the tribe's commercial timber over a two-month period. Lost timber represented approximately 20 percent of the commercial timber on the reservation and remains the largest

loss of board feet of timber of any fire event on any Indian reservation in recorded history, according to the tribe.

Colville Business Council Chairman Andrew Joseph Jr. said that apart from the loss of timber, the fires caused long-term damage to cultural resources on the reservation.

"Tribal members hunt, fish and gather food and medicine throughout the Colville reservation," Joseph said. "In many areas the fires burned so hot that they sterilized the soil and created a moonscape. It will take decades for our resources to completely recover in those areas."

The United States owes a variety of fiduciary duties to the tribe under federal law. The lawsuit alleges the United States breached those duties, including duties to manage fuels adequately and maintain forest health on

the reservation.

The tribe also alleges that the United States failed to provide adequate firefighting resources for the reservation by prioritizing off-reservation, non-trust property over the tribe's trust forests.

Joseph said deficiencies in the United States' preparation for and response to the North Star and Tunk Block fires in 2015 have not been addressed and the Colville tribes remains gravely concerned about ongoing and future wildfires on the reservation.

Two fires currently active on the Colville reservation - Chuweah Creek and Summit Trail - have destroyed multiple homes and burned across more than 60,000 acres.

"We hope this lawsuit will result in the Department of the Interior finally living up to its trust responsibilities to the Colville tribes," Joseph said.



BROCK HIRES | The Chronicle

Flames consume timber in the 2015 Tunk Block Fire.

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## BRIEFS

### Fires restrictions extended

SPOKANE — Fire restrictions are being extended on public lands administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management Spokane District and the Bureau of Reclamation in eastern Washington.

The temporary ban was renewed Aug. 7 in Adams, Asotin, Benton, Chelan, Columbia, Douglas, Ferry, Franklin, Garfield, Grant, Kittitas, Klickitat, Lincoln, Okanogan, Pend Oreille, Spokane, Stevens, Walla Walla, Whitman, and Yakima counties.

The restrictions are expected to be in effect until fire conditions change, said the BLM. The agency encourages target shooters to visit local private and public target range facilities.

In addition to prohibiting all campfires and target shooting, restrictions on the use of off-road vehicles in certain locations and smoking also are prohibited on public lands administered by the two agencies in eastern Washington.

The complete modified fire restriction order can be found online at <https://www.blm.gov/orwafire>.

### Summer reading program wraps

WENATCHEE — The last month of NCW Libraries' summer reading program is underway and there's still time for folks to get in the running for prizes.

The program is one of several virtual and in-person programs offered by the library system.

All libraries offer gift cards from local businesses as drawing prizes in the summer program. Book sets and other prizes will be given in the online reading program.

Information about library programs is at [ncwlibraries.org](http://ncwlibraries.org).

— The Chronicle

## GEBBERS

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Industrial and Insurance Appeals will issue an order and the agreement takes effect, said L&I.

"Although we are pleased this issue is resolved, we have not forgotten the thousands who lost loved ones during this pandemic," said Cass Gebbers. "Sadly, in 2020, Gebbers Farms also lost longtime team members and familiar faces to our family.

"These men, their families, and all Gebbers employees are part of the reason why we are gratified that the agreement includes our continued investment in our workers and our local communities."

A year ago, the high COVID-19 incidence rate in Okanogan County and, particularly, Brewster - including the deaths of two Gebbers Farms employees - prompted Gov. Jay Inslee to visit town Aug. 13, 2020.

Inslee met with county health officials, mayors, state 12th District Reps. Keith Goehner and Mike Steele, then-Colville Business Council Chairman Rodney Cawston, farmworker advocates and agricultural leaders, including Cass Gebbers.

Of 924 total positive cases in Okanogan County through Aug. 16, 2020, Brewster accounted for 541 of them, or about 58.55 percent. Among the county's nine COVID-19 deaths, six were from Brewster, according to Okanogan County Public Health figures.

As of Aug. 6, 2021, Okanogan County has had 2,918 positive cases. Brewster accounted for 773 of them, including eight of the county's 37 deaths. Within the Brewster ZIP code, 4,481 of 5,213 people have been fully vaccinated against the virus - at 85.95 percent the highest percentage in the county.

Gebbers Farms employs about 4,500 people, some 2,500 of whom are H-2A guest workers from other countries.

## College requires students be vaccinated

WENATCHEE — Students who enroll in Wenatchee Valley College in-person classes this fall will need to be fully vaccinated before classes start Monday, Sept. 27.

The college recently decided students at both the Wenatchee and Omak campuses must document their vaccination status by then by using the free online documentation tool, which will be available beginning Aug. 16. Waivers are available for medical, religious or philosophical reasons.

The decision was made in light of the governor's higher education proclamation last month, and in response to new information surrounding the COVID-19 Delta variant, said the college.

WVC President Jim

Richardson announced the decision in an email to students Aug. 5.

"We don't make these decisions lightly," Richardson wrote. "Throughout the entire pandemic, our goal has always been to put the safety and health of our students and employees first."

Students and employees can receive a vaccine for free at one of multiple on-campus vaccine clinics this month and next.

Both WVC campuses will reopen fully in September before the start of fall quarter, with all on-campus services and programs resuming normal business hours. Online resources will be available at [wvc.edu/Online](http://wvc.edu/Online).

Masks are required for everyone on WVC campuses.

WVC is joining with the Chelan-Douglas Health District for

walk-in vaccination clinics in Wenatchee and Omak for students, employees and the public:

- Wenatchee Pfizer vaccine clinic — First dose noon to 2 p.m. Aug. 18, second dose noon to 2 p.m. Sept. 8. Both clinics will be at the student recreation center off Fifth Street.

- Wenatchee Johnson & Johnson vaccine clinic — Noon to 2 p.m. Sept. 9. A single dose is needed to be considered fully vaccinated. The clinic will be at the student recreation center off Fifth Street.

- Omak Pfizer vaccine clinic — First dose noon to 2 p.m. Aug. 16, second dose noon to 2 p.m. Sept. 7. Both clinics will be in rooms 401 and 402 of the Omak campus, 116 W. Ash St.

## Vehicle theft suspect flees deputies, drowns in river

MALOTT — A foot chase between Okanogan County Sheriff's Office deputies and a stolen vehicle suspect turned deadly when the suspect attempted to flee into the Okanogan River and drowned.

Shortly after 5 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 5, the Okanogan County Sheriff's Office received a report of an owner, Jesus Dominguez-Martinez, 43, Brewster, who observed his stolen vehicle in an orchard in Malott.

Dominguez-Martinez apparently approached the suspect, who displayed a

knife and then chased Dominguez-Martinez back to the vehicle in which he arrived. Dominguez-Martinez locked the door of the vehicle and fled from the suspect, according to Sheriff Tony Hawley.

The suspect, Zidany Amado, 22, Bridgeport, allegedly began chasing Dominguez-Martinez in his stolen car. Amado then turned into a different orchard. Dominguez-Martinez notified authorities and waited for deputies to arrive.

Sheriff Tony Hawley said K-9 Havoc began tracking the suspect.

"Residents in the area

contacted sheriff's office communications reporting a male running, wearing all black, no shoes and carrying a backpack," Hawley said. "He was last seen floating down the river holding onto a log."

Deputies later found Amado and told him to stop running.

"The male responded he would not give up and he continued along the river out of view," Hawley said. "Following up on additional reports to communications, deputies responded to another area and observed (the suspect) walking on the east side of the river."

"He then ran back toward

the river when they arrived," Hawley said. "Several deputies and assisting law enforcement officers spoke with him, advising him to give up. He either ignored their requests or told them he would not give up."

Amado ran along the river side for a while before getting back into the water.

"He returned to the river and began swimming toward the west side of the river," Hawley said. "At about 6:54 p.m. Sgt. (Tait) Everett advised to contact Okanogan County Sheriff's Office marine patrol to respond with a boat."

Hawley said at around 7:18

in the northbound lane of travel prior to the collision," Hawley said. "She was struck by a vehicle, which left the location northbound on Elmway.

"In checking the area for any further witnesses, they located a residence with a security camera," he said. "The suspect vehicle from the security footage appears to be a white or silver small passenger truck."

Hawley said the investigation remains ongoing. Anyone with information regarding the collision or the vehicle involved is asked to contact the Okanogan County Sheriff's Office at 509-422-7232.

## FIRES

from page A1

"State mobilization helped with structure protection."

Local firefighters from Fire District No. 8, Malott, Okanogan, Omak and Riverside also were called late last week for structure protection.

More firefighters, ground equipment and aircraft were ordered, Shindelar said.

Ken McNamee, state Department of Natural Resources manager in Colville, said firefighters throughout the West are strapped for resources because there are so many fires.

"Not one team has the resources they need," he said. "We need to look at the values at risk. We're doing the best we can."

Firefighters got a little reprieve Saturday when a cold front moved across the region, delivering some rain to the fire area.

"It's an extreme fire," said Ike Cawston, fire management officer for the reservation.

"Large fires usually come at the beginning of Stampede, but his year is different"

So far this season, there have been more than 40 fires on the reservation, he said. As of Monday afternoon, Coyote Creek Road and Columbia River Road were closed because of Nespelem Valley Electric Cooperative work on power lines.

Other fires in the region:

### Cedar Creek

The lightning-caused Cedar Creek Fire, west of Mazama and Winthrop, had burned across 52,859 acres of land as of Sunday evening and was 33 percent contained.

Highway 20, which has been closed for several weeks because of the fire, reopened Monday, although some areas are one lane only with a pilot car. The state Department of Transportation urges motorists to be prepared for delays.

Firefighters are mopping up the fire line from Thompson Ridge to Forest Road 4415, securing and improving line from Highway 20 to the rock slide at the base of Vasiliki Ridge, holding and securing line from Forest Road 45 to the Cabin Creek drainage, and mopping up and securing lines in other areas.

Minimal fire activity is expected in the next few days, according to fire officials. Evacuation levels have been reduced in some areas, including the Pine Forest and eastern Wolf Creek south areas that

went from Level 3 to Level 2.

The fire began July 11.

The Delancy Fire, north of Highway 20 and west of Mazama, continues to creep.

### Cub Creek 2

The Cub Creek 2 Fire, which began July 16, was 26 percent contained as of Monday and had burned across 62,368 acres of land north of Winthrop.

The blaze has burned into the Falls Creek drainage and as far north as Disaster Creek northwest of the Chewuch River and eastward into the Boulder Creek-Pebble Creek and Boulder Creek drainages. On the west it has burned over Buck Mountain and into the Deer Creek drainage and Sweetgrass Ridge.

Firefighters are opening interior roads and taking down hazard trees, mopping up Forest Road 51 from the Brevicomis cabins to Lake Creek, and preparing Forest Road 39 in anticipation of easterly growth. Potential control line locations are being scouted along roads and ridges in the Bear, South Beaver and West Fork Salmon creeks areas.

Officials say they expect the fire to continue smoldering at night, but fire activity is expected to increase this week as weather warms. Temperatures in the 100-degree range are anticipated by this weekend.

The fire area received some rain over the weekend.

All evacuation levels were dropped Aug. 8.

### Muckamuck

A fairly new fire, Muckamuck, had burned about 989 acres as of Monday, Aug. 9. The lightning-caused blaze began Aug. 4 after a thunderstorm the night before.

On Saturday, fire behavior moderated as firefighters worked to establish containment lines. Along the southern flank, heavy equipment reopened bulldozer lines from the 2006 Tripod Fire.

Along the northeastern flank, firefighters moved equipment along Forest Road 38.

A Level 1 (be aware) notice was issued Friday for Conconully.

### Bulldog Mountain/Mack Mountain

The two lightning-caused fires, which were reported Aug. 5, are burning in northeastern Ferry County.

As of Monday, Bulldog Mountain had burned across 1,800 acres of land and Mack Mountain was listed at 50 acres. Both were at zero percent containment, said fire officials.

Rain helped firefighters Sunday, giving them an opportunity

to work close to the fire's edge in some areas. Heavy equipment aided in fire line and road construction.

No structures had been lost as of Monday morning.

Local crews made the initial attack, but the fire was turned over Saturday to the Type 3 Northeast Washington Interagency Management Team. Several aircraft also assisted firefighters.

The Mack Mountain fire is burning in steep, rugged terrain with limited to no access.

Level 1 evacuation alerts and road closures are in place. Boulder Creek Road and Highway 395 remained open as of Monday.

### Walker Creek

Walker Creek Fire, which began Aug. 3, had burned across 238 acres of land and was 10 percent contained by Monday. Nearby, the Spur Fire was at 1,935 acres with no containment.

Areas around Bonaparte Lake, where both fires are located, remain under a Level 3 evacuation notification.

Rain on Sunday assisted firefighters, but shifting winds are expected to bring hot, dry conditions and assist in drying out fuels, said fire officials with Northern Rockies Incident Management Team No. 6.

On Walker Creek, crews will continue building contingency lines and holding the line to the south. Air operations are expected to continue.

On the Spur Fire, a helicopter assisted Sunday with fire suppression. On the northwest end, crews connected Forest Road 100 down to the waterfront at the Boy Scout camp.

Cause of the Walker Creek blaze is under investigation, according to Northeast Interagency Incident Management Team 1.

### Chickadee Creek

The blaze, 15 miles west of Tonasket, is burning in Douglas fir, western larch, Engelmann spruce and lodgepole pine.

The lightning-caused fire began Aug. 4 and, by Monday, had burned across 490 acres of land.

It's being managed by Northern Rockies Incident Management Team No. 6.

No control percentage estimate had been announced as of Monday.

### Nine Mile

The Nine Mile Fire, another northeastern Ferry County blaze, started Aug. 4 after a thunderstorm hit the area the night before.

As of Aug. 9, it had burned across 117 acres of land and was 20

percent contained. The fire is 4.5 miles south-southeast of Laurier.

Level 1 evacuation notices were issued Aug. 8 for residents of Imperial Way and Sand Creek Road. Nine Mile Road is closed.

Rain on Sunday helped firefighters, said the Northeast Washington Interagency Type 3 team in charge of the blaze.

Firefighters planned to continue direct fire attack where appropriate.

The five-acre Jenny Fire is west of the Nine Mile blaze. Mop-up was expected Monday.

### Summit Trail

The blaze on the Colville Indian Reservation west of Inchelium has blackened about 28,250 acres of land and was 25 percent contained as of Monday, Aug. 9.

A weekend cold front assisted firefighters, giving them the opportunity to build direct fire line in some places.

Crews plan to extend and connect fire lines on the fire's east side.

Level 1 evacuation alerts remained in place from Lafleur south along Hall Creek Road to Hall Creek Flat, Seyler Valley Road south to Bridge Creek Road and Long Bridge Creek Road to Twin Lakes, including the Twin Lakes area.

### Upper Lime Creek

The 265-acre blaze on the Colville reservation was zero percent contained as of Monday. It threatened about 25 homes and prompted Level 3 evacuations along Highway 21 near Keller.

The highway was closed from late Saturday night until about 7:44 a.m. Sunday, according to the state Department of

Transportation.

One lane of the highway was open, with a pilot car, on Monday.

### Chuweah Creek

The lightning-caused blaze on the Colville Indian Reservation northeast of Nespelem, was listed at 36,752 acres and was 97 percent contained as of Monday. Mop-up and patrol are ongoing.

Firefighters don't expect the fire to grow beyond its present boundaries, although conditions are expected to warm and dry this week.

The blaze, which began July 12, burned 14 structures, including seven homes.

### Bear Creek

The Bear Creek Fire erupted in the Chilliwack area of North Cascades National Park Complex just south of the U.S.-Canadian border and west of Ross Lake more than a week ago.

The fire was last estimated at 150 acres, said the National Park Service in Sedro Woolley.

Acreage is expected to increase as more accurate mapping information becomes available, said park officials.

The fire is burning in the remote Stephen Mather Wilderness Area with extremely steep terrain, limited access and heavy, low-moisture fuel. Because of the location, weather and smoke constraints, firefighters have been unable to fight the fire directly.

Crews are working to develop a strategy to confine and contain the blaze, said the park service.

Park officials have closed portions of the Copper Ridge and Chilliwack trails. Copper Lake, Bear Creek and Indian Creek camps are closed.



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