

Dying words
Death Cafe explores end-of-life options
STORY page B4

Bounced ballots
State audits reasons for rejections
EXTRA! Page B1

Methow Valley News

PUBLISHED WEEKLY SINCE 1903

TWISP, WASHINGTON

VOL. 118 NO. 47

WWW.METHOWVALLEYNEWS.COM

March 23, 2022

\$1

Paulsen steps down as Conservancy executive director

Sarah Brooks to take over leadership in April

BY ANN MCCREARY

The Methow Conservancy will see a change in leadership this spring. After 16 years as executive director, Jason Paulsen will step down next month and Sarah Brooks, current associate director, will become executive director.

Paulsen will be taking a full-time trustee position with the Campion Advocacy Fund, a 501(c)4 organization, where he will work with staff on regional and national conservation, homelessness and affordable housing. He has been a part-time trustee of the Campion Advocacy Fund.

"I'm humbled by the opportunities I have had to be part of dreaming big and making good things happen alongside this community," Paulsen said in a news release from the Methow Conservancy. "Serving the Methow Valley has truly been the honor of a lifetime and I'm grateful for the opportunities I've had to work with so many people who care about this place in shaping the character of the Methow for the benefit of future generations of valley residents, fish and wildlife."

Paulsen said he felt confident in handing leadership of the Methow Conservancy to Brooks, who has been involved in the Conservancy for more than 18 years. Brooks was unanimously chosen by the Conservancy's board of directors to succeed Paulsen.

"She understands the importance of conservation in this community and in inspiring people to care for the land and each other," Paulsen said. "She is beyond capable, optimistic, and thoughtful and she'll ensure conservation doesn't skip a beat in this community."

"I've loved working in partnership with Jason these past many years," Brooks said. "I'm committed to doing everything I can to continue to support the good work of this amazing staff, board, volunteer crew and community in building that rural mountain community that is a great example of balancing the needs of people, wildlife, and healthy land and water."

Methow Conservancy Board President Sam Nancy added, "We are grateful for the incredible impact Jason

has had upon our organization and valley, and we look forward to Sarah's leadership as we embrace the opportunities ahead."

Staying in valley

Under Paulsen's leadership, the Methow Conservancy carried out the "Imagine the Methow" campaign, which raised more than \$20 million for new land conservation projects in the Methow Valley.

Paulsen will continue to live in the Methow Valley in his new position with the Campion Advocacy Fund. "I'm excited to have this opportunity to play a role in building relationships and accelerating progress in the areas of conservation and housing security on a regional and national stage, while continu-

See CONSERVANCY, XX



Photo by Daniel Senner

From left, Sarah Brooks, Methow Conservancy Board President Sam Nancy, and Jason Paulsen, who is leaving the executive director role that will be filled by Brooks.



Photo courtesy of Louise Johns

Methow Valley journalist Ashley Ahearn, left, interviewed Melanie Elzinga, a rancher in central Idaho whose family has changed the way they manage their cows in order to better coexist with wolves.

Podcast series explores some stock answers

Valley journalist chronicles women in ranching

BY ASHLEY LODATO

The industrial meat system in the United States is fraught with problems, but across the American West ranchers are seeking creative solutions to the way they raise meat.

In a new podcast series

hosted by Boise Public Radio — "Women's Work" — Methow Valley resident and journalist Ashley Ahearn chronicles the challenges and successes of raising meat through interviews with female ranchers who are reimagining land and livestock management in the west.

When Ahearn moved from Seattle to the Methow Valley in 2018, she was a vegetarian. "It was easy to do that as a city person," she said. "I knew the

narrative: Beef was bad for the climate, cows were overgrazing pastures, beef's [global water footprint] was huge."

But as Ahearn settled into life in the valley, joined the Methow Valley Backcountry Horsemen, and began volunteering to help others move cows, she began seeing how much ranchers care for the land.

"Their livelihood depends on a healthy landscape," Ahearn said, "so they're not

going to just trash it. You don't ranch to get rich. You ranch because it's in your heart, in your gut."

It was seeing the heart underpinning the ranching community that inspired Ahearn to tell the stories of meat raisers across the west. "It's an attempt to change the conversation," she said. "To find solutions to the problems with beef, we have to change

See RANCHING, XX

Is RiverWalk finally hitting a dead end?

Lack of easements thwarts Winthrop rec trail plan

BY DON NELSON

Frustration over lack of progress on the long-imagined RiverWalk trail boiled over at last week's Winthrop Town Council meeting, raising the question of whether the project will go dormant.

For several years, the town has devoted time and resources to a plan to extend a pedestrian walkway following the banks of the Chewuch and Methow rivers, from the Sa Teekh Wa bridge downstream to the Spring Creek Bridge, including an underpass beneath the north end of the Chewuch River Bridge at the four-way stop. Much of the trail would be on the back side of commercial buildings that front on Riverside Avenue.

The main roadblock to completing the trail has been dealing with concerns raised by the owners of Riverside Avenue property whose parcels would be crossed by the path. Those concerns range from whether the backs of their buildings would have to meet the town's Westernization requirements, to loss of parking to ongoing maintenance to questioning the need for such a path.

For those reasons, despite its ongoing efforts the town has been unable to get easement

agreements from all the affected property owners.

In 2020, the town developed a "letter of intent for RiverWalk easement" and began working in concert with Methow Trails to obtain easements for the trail. By agreeing to terms of the letter, property owners will allow the town to have access for surveying and planning the trail's route.

Mayor Sally Ranzau reported in early 2020 that 14 of 22 affected property owners had signed letters of intent. But at a council meeting in October 2021, Ranzau said there were still several holdouts.

At last week's meeting, council members engaged in a discussion of the RiverWalk project, related to the requirement that the town get construction of the pedestrian underpass going this year. Some despaired of making any more headway with property owners who don't want to participate, and questioned whether further efforts will make any difference.

Council member William Kilby said he favored moving forward with the underpass portion of the project. But council member Bill McAdow said his discussions over the past several years with downtown business owners had led him to believe that "it doesn't sound like it [RiverWalk] is going to get support."

Council member Joseph O'Driscoll was more blunt.

See RIVER WALK, XX

'Be A Scientist' unit is more than experimental

Program challenges seventh-graders to learn methodology

BY MARCY STAMPER

Methow Valley seventh-graders have been setting fire to wood chips, melting bismuth, testing the brightness of light, and hitting baseballs with wooden and metal bats — and then carefully documenting and analyzing their results.

The "Be A Scientist" unit at Liberty Bell High School takes

an enriched approach to the traditional science fair, pairing students with 11 scientists from the community as mentors.

The mentors came from diverse backgrounds, including fisheries biologists, engineers, retired science teachers and microbiologists. Working with mentors gives each student individual attention and allows them to design experiments that are more quantitative, rigorous and scientifically valid, said Liberty Bell International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program Coordinator Matt Hinckley, who helped coordinate the projects in Randi

Williams' science class.

Working with mentors also accomplishes another important goal — introducing students to the wide range of careers in science, Hinckley said.

Mentor Chuck Timchalk, who worked as a biomedical scientist and toxicologist at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory in Richland before he retired, shared with the students his lifelong experiences with science, from his own science-fair projects to work analyzing chemical exposures at the lab.

The projects helped students develop and understand of the

scientific process, said mentor Joe Weirich, restoration coordinator for the Methow Beaver Project. Weirich told the students he's always been interested in science, but that his interest evolved over the years. He thought he'd work in sports medicine, but his curiosity about the outdoors drew him to biology and natural science.

Seventh grade is a perfect time for this type of research, because students have the math background to support the research and can graph results

See SCIENTIST, XX



Photo by Marcy Stamper

Wynter Woras tested the interaction of baking soda, baking powder and vinegar to see which provided the most oomph to inflate a balloon, while Sam Kaltenbach looked on.

ADDRESS LABEL

THURS.
March 24
55°
36°
Cloudy

FRI.
March 25
61°
39°
Mostly Cloudy

SAT.
March 26
62°
38°
Cloudy

SUN.
March 27
58°
43°
Mostly Cloudy

MON.
March 28
59°
33°
Afternoon Rain

TUES.
March 29
61°
36°
Mostly Cloudy

INSIDE ...

OPINION	A4
HARTS PASS	A4
ARTS	A5
SPORTS	A6
CLASSIFIEDS	B2-B3
COMMUNITY	B5
VALLEY LIFE	B6

WEATHER DATA BASED ON ACCUWEATHER.COM FORECAST FOR TWISP

RANCHING

From Page A1

how we think about it and how we talk about it.”

Focused on women

As Ahearn researched her topic, she began to realize that ranching is changing, and that it was women at the forefront of these changes. Although she has been writing about farming and ranching couples for years, more often than not the women were silent partners, pulling their weight but imparting few words.

“I wanted to pass the microphone to the part of the couple that doesn’t usually do the talking,” Ahearn said.

Ahearn’s decision to focus on women in regenerative ranching was further crystallized in the research process. She was talking to a longtime rancher who told her, “Everybody knows that if you want to get something done in a ranching community you talk to the women.”

“It’s true,” Ahearn said. “Women are the connectors in these ranching communities. They share the information. And when it comes to presenting new ideas, to changing ranching systems, it’s the women who are the ones convening these conversations and leading the charge. The more contacts I made, the clearer it got that I needed to focus on the women.”

But ranchers in general aren’t just issuing wholesale invitations to journalists to visit their properties, especially those without street cred in the ranching world. Ahearn said that she gained access to ranching communities through “currency in the form of knowledge,” an

asset she wholly attributes to her Methow Valley ranching contacts.

Learning the language

“A couple years ago I started volunteering to help move cows with Craig Boesel, Moccasin Lake, and Deed and Carrie Fink,” Ahearn said. “They’ve answered more stupid questions from me in the past two years than anyone should have to, but they put up with me. And they gave me the vocabulary I needed to be able to make contacts for this podcast series. This is language a city journalist just wouldn’t have, and it gave me my entry into the wider ranching community.”

Thanks to her time on horseback herding cows (on her horse that “only listens to me half the time,” Ahearn said), Ahearn knew what to ask ranchers: “when do you calve,” “how is the drought affecting you,” “where do you go for meat processing?”

She also played the long game. For “Women’s Work,” Ahearn wasn’t just seeking a quick snapshot into the lives of female ranchers, she wanted to understand the broader story, and took a full year to tell their stories.

“I start with relationship-building, deep observation, and being curious,” she said. “I wanted to know what makes them tick and how they make a living. I wanted to know what they were doing that was different and how they talked about it.”

The result is that each episode of “Women’s Work” is a portrait of a woman rancher set against the backdrop of a bigger issue or theme: flooding fields for waterfowl, food sovereignty, wolves, soil recovery post-wild-

fire, development pressure.

Relevant issues

Although Ahearn chose not to feature any of our “amazing Methow Valley women ranchers,” most of the episodes speak to issues that are relevant and timely here. Ahearn will address these parallels in a Methow Conservancy First Tuesday presentation on April 5 from 7-8 p.m. via Zoom on your home computer (email events@methowconservancy.org for Zoom link).

She also intends to address the concept of agricultural lands as open space, as well as sharing personal stories about what being a part of the Methow Valley community means to her.

Ahearn said that to some extent she has found her place in the local community through her connections with ranchers — whom she refers to as “the people who stitch a community together by helping one another” — and wants to connect other residents with local growers and meat raisers by “creating a dialogue about ranching” in her First Tuesday talk.

“The cool thing about podcasting is that it allows you to take a tiny bite of a topic,” Ahearn said. “I want to share that with other people, to make them want to ask questions and learn more.”

Before moving to the valley, Ahearn worked for seven years as an award-winning science and environmental multimedia reporter for the public radio station KUOW in Seattle. She regularly contributed to national programs including “The World,” “Morning Edition,” “All Things Considered,” “Here and Now” and “Living



Photo by Ashley Ahearn

Carrie Fink of Fink Cattle Company in Winthrop ear-tagged a cow. Local ranchers like Fink were the inspiration for Ashley Ahearn’s podcast series on women ranchers.

on Earth.” She also worked as a reporter for the Methow Valley News. Recently Ahearn produced “Grouse,” an eight-

part podcast series in partnership with BirdNote Presents and distributed in collaboration with Boise State Public Radio.

Listen to the “Women’s Work” podcast at: www.boisestatepublicradio.org/podcast/womens-work.

New COVID plan moves state ForWARD

BY MARCY STAMPER

Washington has a new plan to keep people safe and healthy as residents learn to coexist with COVID.

Now that the mask mandate and all restrictions on events have been lifted, the Washington Department of Health (DOH) has released the ForWARD plan, which has three main components: empowerment, prevention and readiness, Secretary of Health Umair Shah said at a news conference last week.

The ForWARD plan will guide the state as it transitions from response to recovery. It provides a general overview of what health agencies are doing to ensure that the state is prepared to assess future risks and to know if the risk of COVID has increased enough to necessitate a return to stricter precautions.

DOH officials point to the

fact that Washington has one of the lowest death rates from COVID in the country as proof that the state’s approach to the virus has been successful and is a model that will protect people over the long term.

The empowerment aspect of the plan relies on people’s ability to protect themselves with vaccines and testing, and points to social-service programs that support people with day-to-day needs if they have to isolate. There are many resources where people can get necessary information about testing and other interventions, Shah said.

The prevention component focuses on vaccination, protective equipment for health care workers and the general public, and COVID tests. The plan commits the state to keeping enough vaccines, protective gear and tests on hand even if a surge in cases or a

new variant increases demand.

The state can give up to 60,000 vaccines a day, Deputy Secretary for Prevention, Safety and Health Lacy Fehrenbach said. Washington has already distributed more than 8 million at-home COVID tests and has an inventory of 7.5 million high-quality masks for health care workers and community members if needed, she said.

The third major component provides for readiness of the health care system, along with disease detection to prevent new cases, hospitalizations and deaths, Shah said. It also ensures a supply of treatments, including antiviral medications and monoclonal antibodies.

Genomic sequencing and wastewater surveillance will enable the state to track new variants as they develop, Fehrenbach said.

Because the Omicron surge

— which produced the highest case numbers in the two years of the pandemic — has fallen so precipitously, health officials are comfortable moving into this next phase, State Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases Scott Lindquist said. State epidemiologists have been tracking the virus around the country and world and see a similar pattern here, he said.

Although state health officials are optimistic, they remind the public that COVID is still with us and it’s conceivable that we’ll need to temporarily resume precautions to respond to a new variant, prevent a surge in infections, and protect health system capacity.

The plan is designed so that local health jurisdictions can spot the potential for a surge and recommend necessary precautions, rather than impose restrictions on a statewide level, Lindquist said.

The transition in Methow Conservancy leadership will occur before May 1, according to the Conservancy’s news release. The Conservancy plans a public celebration to recognize both Paulsen and Brooks in May on the trails of

the Meadowlark Natural Area in Winthrop.

The Methow Conservancy, a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, was created in 1996 through a merger of the Methow Valley Land Trust and the Methow Valley Environmental Center.

Much of the land conserved by the Conservancy is permanently protected with conservation easements, which preserve wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, riparian ecosystems, historic property, scenic views and open space.

CONSERVANCY

From Page A1

ing to call the Methow Valley home,” he said.

In addition to his work with the Conservancy, Paulsen has

been a leader in other areas of valley life, including serving on the board of Methow Valley Long Term Recovery, a nonprofit organization formed after the Carlton Complex Fire in 2014 to guide post-fire and flood recovery efforts.

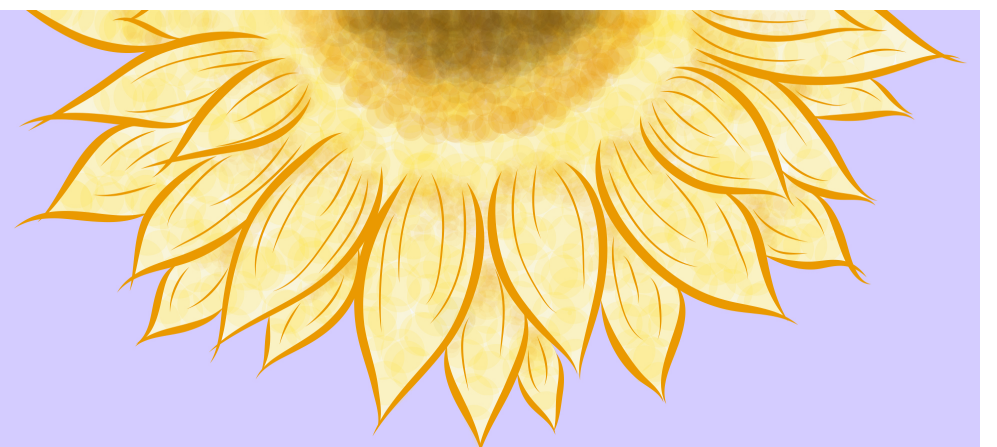
He said he hopes to find ways to remain active in supporting the Long Term Recovery group and other efforts he has been a part of forming or advising, including the Methow Housing Trust and Fire Adapted Methow Valley.

Branches in Twisp, Okanogan & Omak

Bank local with a FREE
Checking account and
get a FREE gift!

 North Cascades Bank
Division of Glacier Bank

MEMBER
FDIC



Twisp Medical
Monday-Friday
8am-5pm

Call 800 660-2129
for information on
FHC Dental hours
and closings

 FAMILY
HEALTH CENTERS
WHOLE PERSON HEALTH