

# The Northern Light

November 18 - 24, 2021

Community Newspaper of Blaine and Birch Bay

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## Border businesses receive \$2.6 million

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

The state department of commerce awarded Covid-19 relief grants to over 100 Whatcom County businesses impacted by the U.S./Canada border closure, accounting for more grants than any other county.

The Border Business Relief Program was the latest round of funding from the Washington State Department of Commerce's Working Washington grant series to help businesses suffering from Covid-19 economic impacts and is the first specific to border town communities. Only businesses in Whatcom and nine other counties reliant on Canadian customers could apply. The total \$2.6 million statewide award amount was announced on November 10 after the two-week application window closed mid-October.

Whatcom County had the highest number of businesses receiving grants of any other county, 107, which was more than half of the total number of businesses, 206, to receive grants throughout the state, according to data the department of commerce provided to *The Northern Light*.

In total, Whatcom County received \$1,479,386 in grants, which means the average business award was \$13,826. This is about \$1,200 more than the average grant award statewide of \$12,680.

Skagit County had the second highest number of grants given, 29, and Clallam had the third highest, 23. With three each, Ferry and Stevens counties had the least number of grants awarded.

Twenty percent of applicants received the grant, said Penny Thomas, spokeswoman for the state department of commerce. "Clearly, the need is great," she said.

Thomas said the agency won't release the names of businesses that applied and businesses that were awarded until the program closes December 31. Although the program closes at the end of the year, Thomas said the agency is working to distribute grants before then.

"We are working hard to get as many  
(See Grants, page 2)



▲ Gail Morgan of Birch Bay Village leaves her flooded home after rescuing her two cats. Heavy rains caused flooding of Birch Point Road which runs parallel to Morgan's home.

Photo by Ruth Lauman

## County crews grapple with devastating flood

East county is forced to evacuate, while roads like Birch Bay-Lynden are washed out

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Devastating floods that hit Whatcom County earlier this week forced hundreds of evacuations for residents along the Nooksack River and have emergency responders scrambling to understand the extent of damage to homes and tattered roads.

After heavy rainfall over the weekend, governor Jay Inslee declared a severe weather state of emergency on Monday, November 15 for 14 counties, including Whatcom and Skagit, which bore the brunt of the storm. While Blaine and Birch Bay saw record-setting amounts of rain-

fall that allowed people to kayak through downtown streets, low-lying areas near the Nooksack River such as Everson, Nooksack, Sumas and Ferndale were hit the worst, displacing over 300 in emergency shelters.

Whatcom County emergency responders from the Whatcom County Sheriff's Office (WCSO) Division of Emergency Management, Whatcom County Public Works Department, Washington State Department of Transportation and city of Bellingham gathered in a quickly-assembled media briefing Tuesday, November 16. Emergency personnel were still responding to the historic event and couldn't give much de-

tail to the flood damage during the conference, emphasizing they needed more time to assess. But they said water levels were receding as the rain stopped Tuesday.

"This event was larger than our recent historical high of 1990, and that is the standard we've used for most of our gauging," said county public works director Jon Hutchings, referring to severe flooding in November 1990. "It will be interesting as we monitor and assess the high water marks to really understand how much water actually moved down the Nooksack River, came from lowland flooding and

(See Flood, page 6)

## Boule civil case goes to U.S. Supreme Court, could expand First Amendment rights

BY IAN HAUPT

A civil case between Smuggler's Inn owner Bob Boule and a U.S. Customs and Border Protection agent has made it to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Boule sued border patrol agent Erik Egbert for harassment after the agent suspected Boule of smuggling a Turkish immigrant through the U.S./Canada border. After Boule reported Egbert to his super-

iors following the incident, the agent reported Boule to the IRS and other government agencies.

The case could expand the court's precedent to claims filed against border patrol agents under the Fourth and First amendments.

Smuggler's Inn is only steps away from the U.S./Canada border and O Avenue. The bed and breakfast has allegedly been used for illegal border crossings and drug traf-

ficking. According to the court petition, Egbert had previously gone to the inn to apprehend people illegally crossing the border, and repeatedly stopped at the inn on his patrols.

The petition also says Boule had served as a paid government informant whose information prompted multiple arrests of his guests but, more recently, been suspected

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This Week's FLYERS

- Village Books
- Rite Aid





▲ Custer resident Michael Hedley stacked about 400 sandbags to mitigate flooding in the early morning of November 15. Neighbors and friends helped Hedley throughout the night to create the barrier to water that reached over six feet in his backyard. Photo by Michael Hedley

## Flood ...

From page 1

came from mountain sources so we can improve our ability to predict these events in the future.”

The governor was scheduled to visit the county's emergency center as well as families in Everson and other east county cities on November 17, Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu said during the conference. Sidhu said he had spoken with the governor multiple times in the past couple of days about the county's situation.

### Countywide

About 300 Whatcom County residents were sheltered in Lynden at North County Christ the King Church and Sonlight Community Church, WCSO spokeswoman Deb Slater said in a statement Tuesday evening. First responders assisted about 100 rescue calls to move residents in north and northeast counties on Tuesday; all calls were complete by evening. It's unclear the total number of rescues that occurred in the county, but an additional 70 calls were made before 9 a.m. Monday.

Sumas officials reported 75 percent of homes had water damage Monday and most of the city's 1,600 residents had evacuated. U.S. Customs and Border Protection spokesperson Jason Givens said about 10 Blaine agents helped with 32 rescues by boat and vehicle in Sumas.

The city of Ferndale encouraged voluntary evacuation for downtown residents and businesses Tuesday morning and the evacuation orders remained in place by press time because of the potential for the Nooksack River to overflow the town's levee. Temporary shelter was made available at Ferndale High School.

By Tuesday night, first responders were still searching for an Everson man swept away by the flood early Monday morning using drones, K-9s and search and

rescue volunteers. PeaceHealth spokeswoman Bev Mayhew said no one was admitted to the Bellingham hospital for flood-related injuries.

Across the border, Vancouver and Lower Mainland B.C. were experiencing significant flooding as well. CTV News Vancouver reported Tuesday that Canada Border Services Agency is waiving the Covid-19 test requirement for people who can't access Canada through closed highways. There was no way out of the Lower Mainland without crossing into the U.S., according to CTV News. The Canadian military was also reported to be helping with the B.C. floods.

### Residents face flooding

Custer resident Michael Hedley called 911 around midnight on November 15 after water began plowing into his house near Dakota Creek. County public works arrived at his doorstep with 300 sandbags, to help with the 150 he already had. Neighbors and friends worked tirelessly throughout the night barricading off water that was over six feet in his backyard.

“It's been nonstop getting water out of the basement and cleaning the pumps,” he said Monday evening, expecting another sleepless night as the water stayed above the sandbag level.

Hedley, who moved his kids to sleeping upstairs after water entered their first-floor hallway, said he's never seen anything like this. The flooding over Superbowl weekend 2020, the last major flooding in Whatcom County that left millions of dollars in damage, didn't make it past berms Hedley built in his backyard. This time, the water overwhelmed them.

Hedley said he might keep more sandbags on hand in the future, but there's not much more he can do because of current county regulations for cement barriers.

“How are we going to fix it? When is it going to go down? Is it going to get worse?” Hedley said of the thoughts going through his

mind since Sunday night.

### City of Blaine

The Blaine police department started responding to weather-related incidents around 1:30 a.m. Monday morning, spokesperson Brent Greene said. Officers responded to four hazards in that hour and 10 total on Monday. No injuries were reported in Blaine.

“It would be unusual to get two to three calls a day during inclement weather, so we're getting three times more than anything that's unusual,” Greene said.

Greene said at one point the police department had 100 calls pending. Calls included businesses flooding, water on the roads and a fallen tree on the I-5 exit 275 onramp. The police department responded to calls for the WCSO and Washington State Patrol, which were overwhelmed by emergency response efforts.

“There are so many hazards that only the really bad ones are being addressed,” Greene said on Monday. “The small-level ones are not getting attention but are still dangerous to drivers.”

In a race to get information to the public, the police department posted on social media that northbound and southbound access to Bellingham would close for 24-48 hours starting Tuesday afternoon, but this information was unfounded. County public works posted closures online but struggled to keep up with updating information as the number of dangerous roads increased.

“Relative to the county, Blaine was fortunate we didn't get hit as hard as places along the Nooksack River,” Greene said. “Blaine got very lucky with what we sustained from this giant storm.”

City manager Michael Jones echoed Greene's sentiments, and said while the city was supporting its residents, it was also focused on helping neighboring towns more severely impacted.

Blaine's damage is minimal in comparison to the rest of Whatcom County. The largest city

(See Flood, page 8)



▲ Aidan Button, 21, front, and Alex Hall, 20, made the most of flooding in downtown Blaine on November 15. Photo by Sherri Button

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# Flood ...

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damage was erosion on the gravel roads going to the Pipeline Road wellfield, but Jones said this was not an urgent issue. Modest erosion occurred on Semiahmoo Spit, which Jones said was expected as the city is working on a long-term plan for sea-level rise and climate change adaptation. "We knew we needed it before the storm event and it only reinforced that we still need it," he said of the Semiahmoo Spit erosion.

The city doesn't have a total on the number of flooded businesses and residences at this time, Jones said.

In the coming weeks, the city's public works department will look more closely at the parks and underground electrical facilities. Public works director Bernie Ziemianek said no Blaine residents lost power during the flooding.

Ziemianek said Monday's response was chaotic, as the department received a "tremendous" number of phone calls but public works was unable to do

much while the heavy rainfall and strong wind compromised employee safety.

"It was hectic," he said. "We had everyone running around doing as much as they could."

Wastewater treatment resumed to normal on Tuesday after discharge was leaking outside of the treatment facility due to the high water intake, Ziemianek said. Blaine Marine Park, which still needs erosion repairs from a king tide storm last January, had minimal damage, Ziemianek said.

"This was significant, potentially the largest single-day rainfall incident we've had in the last 50 years or so," Jones said. "But we were fortunate for the most part that the water stayed where it belonged."

Blaine City Council convened for a virtual emergency meeting at 3:30 p.m. November 16 to allow the city to enter interlocal agreements with Everson, Sumas, Ferndale and Nooksack for emergency aid. During the meeting, city officials said three public works employees were sent to help with sandbagging in Ferndale on Tuesday after concerns water would flow over the levee. More than 100 people stacked 3,000 sandbags in Ferndale on Tuesday, WCSO said in a statement.

Birch Bay Water and Sewer District (BBWSD) had a record six inches of rain in a 48-hour period from Saturday to Monday. For comparison, the water and sewer district considers 1 inch of rain in a day significant, BBWSD manager Dan Eisses said.

The district also received 4.7 million gallons of water coming into the sewer treatment facility Monday, which is nearly double the facility's record of 2.7 million gallons in a single day recorded in 2010, Eisses said. Despite the heavy rainfall, Eisses said everything operated well except for sewer backing up in 17 homes, Eisses said.

## Road closures

Public works director Jon Hutchings said workers have closed over 100 county roads since November 14 due to flooding, water damage and mudslides. The county is assessing over 25 roads for roadway and shoulder damage, he said, not including roads that still have water over them. "Which are fairly numerous in and around the county," Hutchings said.

Road closures inhibited travel throughout the county, most significantly closing several sections of I-5 north and south of Bellingham. Travelers experienced two-hour delays from Bellingham to Blaine Tuesday morning and over two-dozen roads were still listed as closed Wednesday morning.

Birch Bay-Lynden Road has had major culvert blowouts. Hutchings said the section of Birch Bay-Lynden Road near Ham Road will remain closed for weeks "at least," until workers can complete a reasonable repair of the heavily-traveled roadway that collapsed over California Creek. It was unclear by press time what time the road closed but it seems to have been after the evening of November 15. Whatcom News reported November 16 that only locals were allowed on Birch Bay-Lynden Road between Portal Way and Kickerville Road, and traffic was being diverted through Portal Way, Loomis Trail Road and Blaine Road.

Public works project manager Roland Middleton said Birch Bay-Lynden Road is a complete loss. Public works engineers are considering a temporary bridge, he said, but need to make sure there is enough roadway left to support it. "It will be some time until we can get a temporary fix."

As for Birch Bay, Middleton said most of the areas covered by the berm were protected. Areas south of Harborview Road experienced flooding during high tide as Terrell Creek was backed up but the roadway was protected from wave action. Those north of Harborview Road in the Cottonwood area, who did not wish for the berm to be built on their private beaches, experienced major flooding and drainage issues. Middleton said the drainage improvements that came with the berm could've aided the area if they had granted permission for the berm to be built in their area. "They're in a low area and low areas flood," he said.

Several roads within the city of Blaine closed Monday, including parts of 4th Street and Pipeline Road, but reopened Tuesday, Greene said.

More road damage such as failed pavement and sinkholes will become known as water recedes in the coming days, WCSO officials said. The county's public works department will assess damages to roads and bridges later this week.

Heavy rainfall also postponed the railroad work at Peace Portal Drive and Bell Road until after Thanksgiving, according to the Washington State Department of Transportation. The three-day intersection closure was scheduled to start November 16.

The Birch Bay State Park beach area is closed to vehicle traffic after significant damage to Birch Bay Drive, Washington State Parks spokesperson Meryl Lasse said. There is no time estimate when the beach access will reopen, but the upper day-use area at the park is open through Helweg Road. People can still walk to the beach.

## How to donate

Whatcom County and Blaine officials are recommending people who wish to provide aid to people displaced by the flood can donate to the Whatcom Community Foundation's Resilience Fund at [bit.ly/3oA7cUZ](http://bit.ly/3oA7cUZ). Donations are being matched up to \$115,000.

Community Assistance Program, a local nonprofit for Blaine, Birch Bay and Custer residents, has a free clothing bank to help people who may have lost clothing because of the flooding, CAP board member Laura Vogee said. Vogee said local pastors were working on east county relief efforts, but the nonprofit hadn't received any request for flood-related assistance by Tuesday evening.

"The need for funds to these displaced families and the damages is going to be with us for the next several months," said county Executive Satpal Sidhu. "So any help we can get through this funding, in addition to what the county will do or the state government will do, [is helpful]."

The county expects to release information on FEMA this week. WCSO encourages anyone who has had flood damage to keep as much documentation as they can, including photos.

"We've had our share of floods but we haven't had anything this bad," Greene said. "A big snow storm can do something similar but nothing like this."

Whatcom County residents can report non-emergency flood impacts to 360/788-5311 and non-emergency road impacts to 360/778-6400.

*Ian Haupt contributed to the reporting of this article.*

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## Blaine prepares to welcome Canadians with open arms

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Canadian health officials announced they will drop Covid-19 testing requirements for fully vaccinated Canadians making short trips into the U.S. The new rule goes into effect Tuesday, November 30 and was met with open arms by Blaine residents and businesses that have gone nearly two years without their Canadian family members and customers.

The Public Health Agency of Canada announced November 19 that Canadians and permanent residents leaving Canada don't need a Covid-19 test if they will return to Canada within 72 hours. Children under 12 and people medically unable to receive the vaccine are also able to now take short trips without a Covid-19 test. The exemption applies to both land and air travel.

"My kids were all calling me saying, 'Mom! Mom! Have you heard the news?'" said Blaine resident Allyson Grant, who has three children living in Canada. "My kids couldn't wait to get vaccinated so they could travel and then they had to wait."

Grant, a Canadian native, was able to obtain her green card September 2020 and move to Blaine to live with her husband and step-son. But this meant going over a year without seeing her three adult children. Once the Canada and U.S. border reopened partially to those fully vaccinated, she said travel still wasn't an option because of the expense and hassle of getting a Covid-19 test.

"I was absolutely thrilled when the border reopened but the only complication was the Covid test," Grant said. "To have my kids come down for the weekend, it would have been over \$1,000."

Canada partially opened its border for nonessential trips to fully vaccinated U.S. travelers in early August but required a Covid-19 test within 72 hours, which deterred many by complications such as the price of a Covid-19 test for travel, not covered by insurance, and the limited ability

(See Border, page 5)



▲ November 15 flooding forced evacuations at Birch Bay Leisure Park on Birch Bay Drive. At least 20 residents in the 718-unit seasonal park were evacuated by park maintenance crews and as of November 21 were unable to return to their homes while the park continued to assess electric and sewer impacts. Photographed is residual water on November 19.

Photo by Christopher Ramirez

## Whatcom County starts flood assessment as new damage is discovered

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Whatcom County officials and community members are working around the clock to assess the full impact of catastrophic floods that washed over Whatcom County a week ago, while more damage has been discovered since the storm hit November 14-17.

Collateral damage is being assessed, including impacts to Whatcom County farms. Flood impacts to a Sumas grain producer that supplies about 80 percent

of western Washington dairy farms could hurt milk supply, said Jed Holmes, community outreach facilitator for the Whatcom County Executive's Office. EPL Feed in Sumas was severely flooded, impacting equipment and grain, and is unable to get supplies by train because of the BNSF Railway train track damage after several train cars derailed last week.

EPL, which produces grain to feed dairy cows in Skagit, Snohomish and King counties, needs to maintain their feed distribution or else dairy farmers

won't have the right mix of food which could result in their cows' lactation could stop, Holmes said. Dairy farmers need the grain supply running again before hitting a crisis point, which Holmes said differs for each farm depending how much grain supply they have left.

The Whatcom County Sheriff's Office (WCSCO) Division of Emergency Management is brainstorming a solution, which may mean a Ferndale grain producer

(See Flood, page 9)

## Proposed school board district boundaries could give Birch Bay majority of seats

BY IAN HAUPT

Under the drafted Blaine school board district boundaries presented in a special board meeting November 22, Birch Bay could gain a simple majority on the board in upcoming elections if residents in the new boundaries decided to run, and win. This possibility, however, did not comfort residents looking for more Birch Bay repre-

sentation on the board and in the district.

During the redistricting plan special meeting, Birch Bay Chamber of Commerce secretary Doralee Booth and Birch Bay State Park board member Pat Jerns voiced their concerns of the lack of representation that the unincorporated, 10,115-person area has. Only one of the five school board members lives in Birch Bay. Booth mentioned the difficulties of transporta-

tion from the south end of the district and not having a school in the Birch Bay area, which makes up nearly two-thirds of the district's population.

"We feel like with this map that we just do not have a sense of place for the Birch Bay community," Booth said.

According to 2020 U.S. Census data,

(See School, page 7)

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# Flood ...

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working as a substitute in the interim. Holmes said BNSF may have the tracks repaired that lead to the Sumas farm Wednesday, November 24, but it will take time to transport the raw products sitting in Everett.

"You can't just snap your fingers," Holmes said. "There's a lot of congestion in the supply chain."

The body of Everson resident Jose Garcia, 49, was found by law enforcement personnel in the 600 block of Main Street at 1 p.m. November 17. Garcia had been missing since November 15, when he was swept away by the flood on his way to work.

The Lummi reservation became an island as all roads were closed at one point during the flood. By the morning of Friday, November 19, Haxton Way and Slater Road reopened. Lummi Nation police boats reportedly transported emergency services and medical staff between the reservation and mainland.

Meanwhile in Blaine and Birch Bay, floods forced evacuations at Birch Bay Leisure Park on Birch Bay Drive the morning of November 15. The park was still closed as of November 21 after it was swamped up by 4.5 feet of water.

"It's been a lot of a waiting game. Waiting for the water to go down, to make sure the sewer systems are good," park manager Lisa Fisher said. "Staff has been here 24/7 to clear drainage ditches and get stuff that's flowed down."

The park's maintenance staff evacuated about 20 residents who were stranded with dump trucks, Fisher said. The park doesn't have a total on the number of people who evacuated the 718-unit season park, she said. Those who evacuated are staying with friends or in a hotel while the park remains closed for crews to assess whether the sewage and electric systems are safe.

Water had receded to 4 inches in the deepest part of the park. Fisher said she hasn't seen flooding to this extent since the late '70s.

While the park remained closed to volunteers by press time, Fisher said people who want to help can call the office at 360/371-7122.

Aside from Birch Bay Leisure Park, Birch Bay WCSO deputy Derek Jones said Birch Bay was spared from the severe flooding. A few vehicles needed to be towed after venturing past closed road signs around North Enterprise and Willeys Lake roads near Custer, he said. To his knowledge, WCSO didn't assist with any Birch Bay evacuations or rescues.

Residents in the 8600 block of Semiahmoo Drive lost parts of their backyard during a flooding-induced cliff collapse on November 15. Lorri Garske said she lost at least three feet of land behind her bushes, while next-door neighbors had a road to their house made impassable by an average vehicle. "Who's going to pay for all of this damage?"

Garske asked.

The city of Blaine public works department closed Yew Avenue between Pipeline Road and Hughes Avenue on Monday, November 22 after the flood eroded the side of the avenue. City manager Michael Jones said public works believed a small stream caused the collapse. The city will assess damage and create a repair plan, but expects the avenue to be closed for the foreseeable future. The city is not concerned about any other roads, he said.

The city of Blaine also has not received claims from property owners concerned the city played a role in any of their flood damage, Jones added.

Both Birch Bay-Lynden Road near Ham Road and Birch Bay State Park entrance on Birch Bay Drive will remain closed to vehicle traffic.

Drayton Harbor Oyster Company announced on its social media that it wouldn't serve oysters until around December 7, after heavy rainfall and overflowing sewage shut down shellfish harvesting for at least three weeks.

The oyster company is required to close its shellfish harvest in Drayton Harbor for one week if the area receives more than 2 inches of rain in a day, which Blaine exceeded. But the company was requested to shut down three weeks after the Lighthouse Point Water Reclamation facility became overwhelmed and sewage leaked onto Marine Drive. The restaurant will still be serving other seafood until oysters are back on the menu, co-owner Steve Seymour said.

Drayton Harbor shellfish harvesting also closed for three weeks when sewage leaked near Blaine High School in the summer 2020, Seymour said, adding that Blaine public works does a great job operating its sewer plant. "It's a fact of life when we farm in an urban population," he said.

Across the border, the B.C. government began rationing gas and putting restrictions on non-

essential travel November 19 because of damage to highways and Trans Mountain pipeline. The Canadian government is working to increase gas supply by truck and boat.

The new emergency order limits B.C. residents in several areas

including Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island to only buy 30 liters of fuel per purchase. The order will last until Wednesday, December 1.

### What's next

Whatcom County will hold a community meeting 6-8 p.m.

Wednesday, November 24 at Nooksack Valley High School, 3326 East Badger Road in Everson. The meeting was also expected to be live streamed, but the WCSO hadn't sent a link by

(See Flood, page 16)

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# Flood ...

From page 9

press time.

The meeting will cover the extent of the flood; impacts to infrastructure, homes and busi-

nesses; debris management; and the planning permit process, according to a WCSO release.

Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu, U.S. Congresswoman Suzan DelBene, state representatives Sharon Shewmake and Alicia Rule, mayors

of east county cities and Mark Personius of Whatcom County Planning and Development will be in attendance. Masks are required.

Whatcom County officials estimated damage would total \$7-10 million during a November 16 press conference.

"The pain these folks are in right now is considerable," governor Jay Inslee said during a November 18 conference, the day after he toured Whatcom County. "But they are remarkably resilient and we're seeing the spirit of that county."

Inslee said the state didn't yet know if damage met the level needed for federal assistance,

but said they would aggressively request money. He said it was important for residents and business owners to record their damage, not only for themselves, but for the state to request federal assistance.

The governor also said he spoke with a Federal Emergency Management Assistance (FEMA) administrator about potential for president Joe Biden to declare a disaster, as well as the state's request of 'strong consideration' for individual assistance and housing assistance for those impacted by the floods. Inslee hopes to soon distribute cash to families and is looking into short-term shelters and housing.

Detailed inspections of the worst-hit areas from flooding were scheduled Monday, November 22 to Wednesday, November 24, a needed first step in assessing the financial impact of damages and requesting FEMA money, according to WCSO.

The Emergency Management Division of the Washington State Military Department was scheduled to conduct detailed inspections alongside county officials in Nooksack, Everson and Sumas. Two teams of three state and two local representatives will assess damages.

"The teams will be validating and confirming the data that communities have already collected as well as evaluating additional damages which have yet to be reported," John Gargett, deputy director of WCSO Division of Emergency Management, wrote in a news release.

Residents don't need to meet with the assessors. WCSO is asking people who haven't reported damages or don't know if their property has been assessed call 360/788-5311 and leave their name, address and damage.

A makeshift debris site at 3010 Halverstick Road in Sumas was set up for residents whose homes or businesses had been flooded. The WCSO is asking for people to sort household hazardous waste at the staffed site, open daily from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

More information on volunteering or getting help if impacted, visit [whatcomcounty.us/flood](http://whatcomcounty.us/flood).

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# Volunteer support pours in following damaging flood

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Almost as immediate as the flooding began, an outpour of community support was palpable throughout Whatcom County as residents began repairing damaged homes.

By Thursday, November 18, volunteer groups began forming – the Salvation Army, Samaritan's Purse and Team Rubicon offering assistance from spraying for mold to delivering cleanup supplies. The Red Cross set up a site at the Northwest Washington fairgrounds in Lynden. BP Cherry Point brought personnel and equipment.

Social media became a community hub and information center in the midst of chaos as neighbors offered any support they could give to fellow neighbors. The Nooksack River Flood Disaster November 2021 Facebook page gained 7,500 members within days of being created on November 15. Almost as immediate as requests for assistance were there responses. A Custer resident offering his free RV, another their Thanksgiving turkey.

Pop-up daycares were created nearly overnight across the county for parents to leave their children as they salvaged homes. Whatcom County cities put out calls for any volunteers to gather and they would be assigned a job.

Roads in normally quiet east county roads were packed with trucks hauling debris and household items. People offered coffee and snacks along city roadways as others loaded their vehicles with water and essential supplies to give away.

The Blaine High School boys

basketball team offered support after their practice by going house to house in Sumas helping residents rip out wet insulation and clean crawl spaces Saturday, November 20.

"I asked who would be willing to help and hands just shot in the air," basketball coach Brett Farrar said. "Everyone jumped at the opportunity. Those kids said they were willing to serve the community in need and didn't ask questions."

Farrar said the team helped an entire ground level of an apartment complex in addition to about 15 homes. By the end of the day, Farrar said teammates were already talking about wanting to help more.

"Everyone was there ready to help at a moment's notice," he said. "Everyone was there to give everything of themselves to people who were going through a really, really hard time."

Back in Birch Bay, The Bridge Community Hope Center had experienced over 80,000 gallons of flooding at its 4815 Alderson Road location on November 15, but had everything cleaned up by the middle of the week thanks to volunteers. Through it all, the nonprofit organizers continued to help a few dozen people needing assistance from the flood in addition to its current client base.

The Bridge volunteers sorted clean and brand-new clothing so they were ready for families in need, donated mattresses, and collected tents for people experiencing homelessness in Bellingham. They're also working to network volunteers with people needing assistance after the flood.

The Bridge plans on meeting

the community's needs as they develop, said Lee Connors, executive director of The Bridge. This could mean getting people blow-up mattresses while they're in transitional housing, but eventually furniture once they have secure housing.

"What we're gearing ourselves up for is to be a sustainable resource for the community and outlying areas to come to us and get help for food, clothing and things like that," Lee Connors said. "There's already a lot of needs in the outlying areas of east county."

The Bridge will continue servicing Birch Bay to make donations accessible to residents who can't get to east county.

"You don't have one fire hydrant for the entire county in the middle," Brian Marcus, who volunteers with The Bridge. "You have them all over the place so they're where they're needed."

Treasures Unknown thrift store, 8101 Blaine Road, is offering help to people impacted by the flood. Owner Jessica Cardinale said the store is giving away blankets, pillows, clothing and dishes, but she still needs toiletries, pet food, diapers, canned food and coats.

"We want to be able to reach as many people as we can with furniture and items to help cover their losses," Cardinale wrote in an email to *The Northern Light*. The store, open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday, also has a donation jar.

People can still donate to Whatcom Community Foundation's Resilience Fund, gifts matched up to \$115,000. Contributions can be made at bit.

ly/3oA7cUZ.

Whatcomstrong.com also set up a volunteer and donation sign up on its website.

After a long, tiresome weekend for many, there's more work to do in the county. Mud-drenched driveways, pools of water still covering Sumas' baseball field, cars overturned in blueberry fields and a makeshift garbage dump piled high with ruined appliances next to the Everson

shopping center were a few of the scenes remaining the night of Sunday, November 21.

But for every water-laden item, there seemed to be someone offering to haul it.

"There's been this need for people to reconnect during the pandemic," said Rosemary Connors, secretary for The Bridge. "A silver lining in the flood is people are starting to experience kindness, love, help and assistance."

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▲ The Blaine High School basketball team helped clean an apartment complex in addition to over 15 homes in Sumas on November 20.

Photo by Michael Baldwin



**More  
Holiday Events**

ON PAGES 8 & 9



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# Final results are in for Whatcom County's November election

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

The Whatcom County auditor's office certified final results from the November 2 election on November 23.

The ballot measure to fund the Birch Bay library didn't meet its supermajority requirement and voters rejected the proposed North Whatcom Fire and Rescue levy lid lift.

Proposition 2021-14 to fund construction of the future Birch Bay Vogt Library needed to be voted on by at least 40 percent of people who voted in the November 2020 election and receive a supermajority. While the library received 59.3 percent voter support, it needed 26 more yes votes to reach its supermajority. The measure will be on a special February 8 election ballot.

North Whatcom Fire and Rescue, or Fire Protection District 21, had its Proposition 2021-9 ballot measure fail with 60.2 percent voting against the levy lid lift. The ballot measure would have increased the current levy of 30 cents per \$1,000 to \$1.45 per \$1,000 to fund new equipment and firefighting personnel.

Slightly less than half of the

157,063 registered voters in Whatcom County voted in the November election, with 76,876 people returning their ballots.

Here are the final election results:

- Blaine City Council Ward 1, Position 2: Kerena Higgins received 1,141 votes (59 percent), defeating J. Calvin Armerding, who received 790 votes (41 percent).
- Blaine City Council Ward 2, Position 4: Rhyan Lopez received 1,266 votes (63.4 percent), defeating Colin Hawkins, who received 722 votes (36.2 percent).
- Blaine City Council Ward 3, Position 6: Eric Davidson received 1,018 votes (52 percent), defeating Barbara Sturdivant, who received 932 votes (47.7 percent).
- Blaine City Council, At-Large Position 7: Mike Hill received 1,305 votes (64.4 percent), defeating Sukhwant Gill, who received 716 votes (35.4 percent).
- Blaine school board, District 3: Erika Creydt received 3,146 votes (50.9 percent), narrowly beating Bob Feaster, who received 3,016 votes (48.8 percent).

• Blaine school board, District 5: Laura McKinney received 4,975 votes (81.2 percent), defeating Rocky Butler, who received 1,140 votes (18.6 percent).

• Whatcom County Council At-Large Position A: Barry Buchanan received 39,877 votes (54.1 percent), defeating Kamal Bhachu, who received 33,413 votes (45.4 percent).

• Whatcom County Council, District 1: Kaylee Galloway received 7,062 votes (55.8 percent), defeating Eddy Ury, who received 5,419 votes (42.8 percent).

• Whatcom County Council, District 2: Todd Donovan received 10,655 votes (77.5 percent), defeating Kelley O'Connor, who received 1,243 votes (9 percent). Nancy Hill ran as a write-in candidate; write-ins received 1,849 votes (13.5 percent).

• Whatcom County Council, District 3: Tyler Byrd received 8,138 votes (53.1 percent), defeating Rebecca Lewis, who received 7,125 votes (46.5 percent).

• Port of Bellingham, District 1: Michael Shepard received 40,832 votes (56.5 percent), defeating John Huntley, who received

31,346 votes (43.3 percent).

• Port of Bellingham, District 2: Ken Bell received 39,141 votes (53.8 percent), defeating Kelly Krieger, who received 32,820 votes (45.1 percent).

• Blaine-Birch Bay Park and Recreation District 2, Position 1: Jesse Creydt received 4,119 votes (73.5 percent), defeating David Halme, who received 1,466 votes (26.2 percent).

• Birch Bay Water and Sewer Dis-

trict, Position 1: Jeff Benner received 2,077 votes (75 percent), defeating Pedro Nieto, who received 670 votes (24.2 percent).

Sheli Moore and Billy Brown retained their seats on Blaine-Birch Bay Park and Recreation District after running unopposed. John Crawford and Kimberly Calman-McMurray ran unopposed for North Whatcom Fire and Rescue commissioner positions.

## More flooding impacts restoration efforts

BY GRACE MCCARTHY

Heavy rain continued to fall through the Thanksgiving weekend in Whatcom County with even more on the way.

### Birch Bay

Birch Bay Leisure Park began flooding again the morning of November 28 after the 718-unit park flooded in the first flood during the November 14-17 storm system. Park manager Lisa Fisher said on Monday, November 29 that flooding had reached about 2.5 feet in low-lying levels of the park.

Before the most recent flooding, Fisher said the park was looking at \$500,000 in damage to park building and infrastructure, not including individual damage to the vacation homes, which she said residents are estimating to be \$5,000 to \$10,000 per home. "It's going to be a lot," she said.

The main lift system that pumps water into the wastewater treatment plant stopped functioning after water fried it, Fisher said. Without a working sewer system and a supply chain delay for the needed part, Fisher said it could be a month until park residents are able to move back into their vacation homes.

The park flooded up to 4.5 feet earlier this month because of broken tide gates and wetlands on both sides of the park that overflowed with water, Fisher said. Whatcom County has been working on fixing the tide gates and replacing culverts with an open ditch system for at least two years, Fisher said.

"Anything having to do with state or county government is extremely slow, which is frustrating. We're looking unfortunately probably two years out in the per-

mitting process, maybe longer," Fisher said, adding the county was doing the best it could. "When we get that done, there will still be some flooding but it should never be like this."

With about 90 percent of park residents being Canadian, Fisher said many were waiting until November 30 to assess the damage to their properties, when the Canadian government was set to drop the Covid-19 test requirement for trips into the U.S. under 72 hours. "Not being able to get down here is bad because it means more time for the mold to grow," Fisher said.

In the meantime, park maintenance lead Mario Miranda has been escorting people to their homes and taking photos of damage for those who don't have proper PPE to wade through water.

"It's been a lot of de-clogging and planning for the future, but it's been hard to plan for the future due to the weather," said Miranda, who went door-to-door evacuating people in his work truck November 15.

Fisher said older residents will likely need volunteer help to look at the insulation under their homes when the water recedes.

### Blaine

Bernie Ziemianek, director of the city of Blaine public works department, said public works briefly closed part of Pipeline Road by Yew Avenue on November 27 but no other roads closed. Yew Avenue between Pipeline Road and Hughes Avenue will remain closed until the city hires a consulting engineer to fix where the side of the road eroded, Ziemianek said. "We can't allow the chance of someone driving too close to the edge," he said.

Heavy rainfall also caused more waste discharge outside of the Lighthouse Point Water Reclamation Facility around 11 a.m. November 27. An effluent pipe, outflowing treated wastewater to Drayton Harbor, broke in Semiahmoo November 28. Public works crews worked all day to vacuum the water and create a temporary repair, Ziemianek said, but a full repair probably can't happen until spring when the city is able to shut down the wastewater treatment plant for a few hours.

"This heavy rain has touched about every drain and manhole. It's all over the place so it's keeping us busy," Ziemianek said. "We're doing our best to ensure the storm drains are open and cleared."

Blaine school district delayed school for two hours Monday, November 29 because of heavy rainfall. Birch Bay Water and Sewer District recorded 4.4 inches of precipitation between November 22-28, with nearly half of that rainfall recorded November 27 and 28.

### Whatcom County

Feed supply for dairy cows in Whatcom County is transitioning to normal operations after a large Sumas feed plant was flooded, causing a disrupted supply chain and an emergency for dairy farmers needing to feed their cattle.

Sumas' EPL Feed, which provides 60 percent of grain to Whatcom County farmers, was flooded in the November 14-17 storm system, knocking out electrical units and damaging grain. But EPL Feed is back to full operations as of earlier this week, which is weeks earlier than anticipated, said Fred Likkel, executive director of Whatcom Family

(See Flood, page 7)

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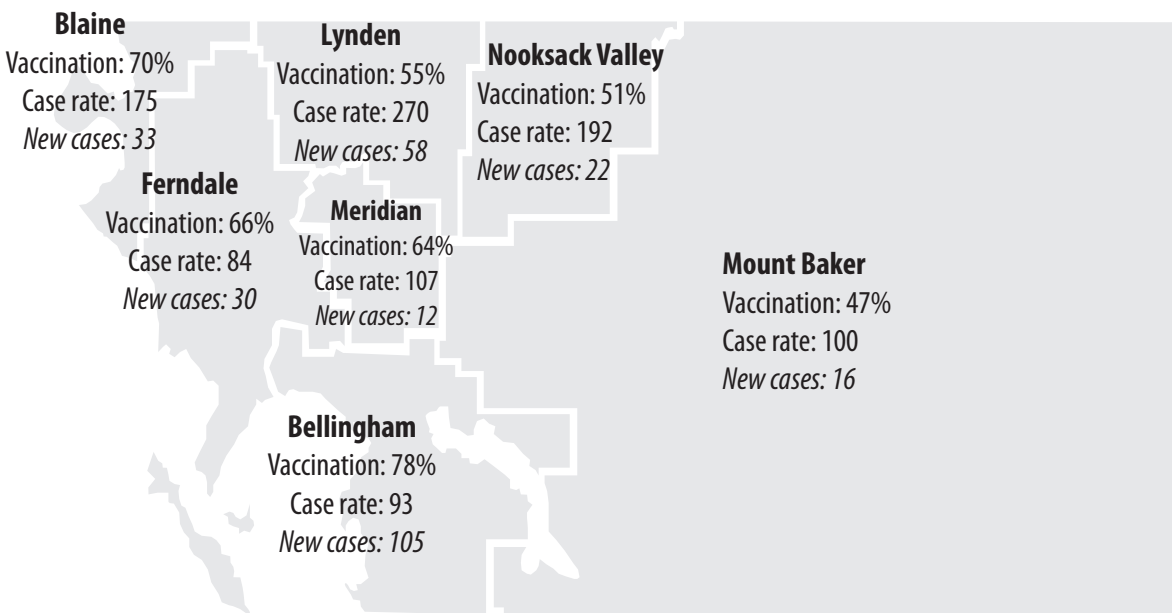
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# Covid-19 in Whatcom County, by school district boundaries:

## Recent two-week case rates, cumulative counts and vaccinations



▲ The case rate is the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases per 100,000 people over the past two weeks. New cases are the total number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in the last week. Vaccination is the percentage of the population that has had at least one vaccine shot. Rates were updated November 27.

Covid-19 case rates decreased in all Whatcom County school district areas except for Nooksack Valley. The Blaine school district area decreased from 196 cases per 100,000 people to 175 cases per 100,000 this week. Blaine school district has 33 new cases since last week and has the third highest case rates in the county, behind Lynden and Nooksack Valley.

Blaine school district has a 70-percent vaccination rate, making it the second highest vaccination rate area in the county following Bellingham with a 78-percent vaccination rate. To date, Whatcom County has had 175 confirmed deaths since the pandemic started. The number of deaths make up 1 percent of total confirmed Covid-19 cases in the county.

On December 1, 29 people at St. Joseph Medical Center in Bellingham had either been admitted for Covid-19 or tested positive for Covid-19 after being admitted for another reason. For more Whatcom County information, visit [whatcomcounty.us/covidvaccine](http://whatcomcounty.us/covidvaccine) and [whatcomcounty.us/coviddata](http://whatcomcounty.us/coviddata). State information is available at [bit.ly/3r2URJj](http://bit.ly/3r2URJj).

# County ...

From page 1

dangerous for residents to enter and four homes are in danger of collapsing into the river.

Gargett said the water in Sumas City Hall was twice as deep as 1990, damaging all of their computer and phone equipment. The city of Sumas estimates it's lost 40-50 percent of its road network, which is similar to Everson, but Nooksack roads fared better, Gargett said.

The county found damage to about 60 areas of county roads, bridges and levees, according to public works. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is doing emergency repairs to three levees, but the county's bridges didn't have structural damage.

"There's a lot of damage out there, no question about it, but the amount of major infrastructure damage is pretty modest considering the extent of this flooding," Hutchings said of the levee and river systems. "It's pretty amazing it withstood that amount of water for as long as it did."

Whatcom County public works encouraged east county residents to prepare for the flooding November 24 as residual water was still left behind from the first flood, increasing the likelihood of more flooding and landslides.

On November 24, Whatcom County officials held a community meeting at Nooksack Valley High School to answer the public's questions on the first flood.

Among those in attendance were U.S. Congresswoman Suzan DelBene, county executive Satpal Sidhu, Washington state Emergency Management Division director Robert Ezelle, Gargett, Hutchings, east county mayors, county health department director Erika Lautenbach, sheriff Bill Elfo and 42nd district representatives Alicia Rule and Sharon Shewmake.

During the 3-hour meeting, county residents voiced concern on the county's emergency response to the flooding and asked the county to resume dredging the Nooksack River.

Sidhu waived permit fees for emergency building repairs on November 24 and the county said it would refund those who paid for the permit fee before Sidhu's executive order.

Following the meeting, on November 26, the Washington state National Guard deployed along with county emergency workers to help with more heavy rainfall that was expected after Thanksgiving.

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) began distributing disaster cash assistance on November 30 in Everson. The aid ranged from just over \$400 for one person to \$1,290 for a family of eight or more people, according to a sheriff's office media release.

For more information on the county's flood response, visit [bit.ly/3d7EHIX](http://bit.ly/3d7EHIX).

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## Flood ...

From page 3

Farmers.

A Ferndale feed producer and eastern Washington farmers helped while the Sumas feed mill was down, he said.

"It was neat to see farmers and truck drivers hauling feed," Likkel said. "It was neat to see the community come together."

BNSF Railway train tracks used to transport the feed were restored around November 24 after being damaged during the first flood, Likkel said. BNSF Railway has been able to get product that was waiting in Everett while the tracks were broken up to Sumas, he said.

"It was pretty nerve-wracking in the beginning but we were able to get through it with minimal damages," Likkel said.

Farmers are now carefully watching cattle to observe what sort of stress the flooding may have caused, like standing in water for several days, which can make them more susceptible to diseases. Crop damage will be-



▲ Birch Bay Leisure Park began flooding for a second time November 28, with waters reaching up to 2.5 feet. Photograph taken November 29.

Photo by Grace McCarthy

come more evident later, Likkel said, adding that raspberry and blueberry fields don't do well in standing water.

Farmworkers are facing these challenges requiring them to work overtime to keep farms going all while many have had their homes destroyed during the floods, Likkel said.

"Our farmers are a resilient group and they've had a really 'pick each other up' attitude," he said. "I'm really proud of them."

### How to report damages

Whatcom County residents with any flood-related damages to homes or businesses need to call 360/788-5311 or report damages at [whatcomcounty.us/damageform](http://whatcomcounty.us/damageform) by December 6.

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