

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend. I'm Jim Burke, with local news and commentary for Tuesday, June 18, 2024.

From the *Peninsula Daily News*: A summer burn ban will automatically go into effect between July 1 and September 30 each year in Jefferson County following updates to the county's fire danger regulations. The ban affects burning for landscaping and clearing purposes but does not impact recreational fires on private property, including campfires, charcoal grills, and other small flames – at least not yet.

Updates to the county's burn regulations were unanimously approved by the Board of Jefferson County Commissioners, making the July-to-September ban recurring. It also changed the county's fire danger rating system and set new enforcement tools for county authorities. The update also changed the county's fire danger rating system to match that of the National Fire Danger Rating System used by the federal government: a color-coded 1-to-5 scale ranging from low to extreme. On Monday, Jefferson County's fire danger rating was "low."

Each level comes with restrictions built in that automatically take effect when the rating is changed. Ratings are set by the fire marshal in consultation with local fire officials. Starting July 1 of every year, the county's rating automatically will be raised to level 2 – "moderate" – which prohibits open flame devices and burning brush piles. Phil Cecere, building official fire marshal for the county, said, "Most folks this won't affect other than brush burns," and noted that exemptions are available for commercial and agricultural purposes.

The updated regulations also set penalties for violating the burn rules. Enforcement will be managed by Cecere in conjunction with the Jefferson County Sheriff's Office, but Cecere said county officials would prioritize public education and voluntary compliance. Cecere said, "Public awareness is to be used first before an infraction."

The new regulations also provide a means to challenge infractions through the Hearing Examiner's office. The moderate designation does not put any additional restrictions on fireworks, which are only allowed during certain hours around the New Year and Fourth of July holidays. The next level up, however – "high" – does prohibit the sale and discharge of fireworks. A note here, that fireworks are completely banned in Port Townsend City limits at all times.

The regulations apply only to areas of unincorporated Jefferson County and not to state, federal, or tribal lands in the county. Fire forecasts from the National Interagency Coordination Center show elevated risks of wildfire in Western Washington, including Clallam and Jefferson counties, beginning in July and continuing through September.

And this morning there was this from the *Washington State Standard*: Washington State Ferries leaders on Monday highlighted some ways the troubled agency is moving in a better direction as of late, but also acknowledged there's more work to do. Hiring is outpacing retirements and other employee departures and a process to purchase five new hybrid-electric vessels is finally underway. Cancelled sailings dropped from 1,128 in the first quarter of 2023 to 493 in the same period this year. And, two weeks ago, the system went a week without a canceled sailing due to a lack of crew, which had not happened in months, ferries officials said.

Steve Nevey, the new assistant secretary for Washington State Ferries, said, "A year ago we were in crisis. Now, we're in recovery." He continued, "None of the challenges we face are easy. It's going to take time to get

the system where it needs to be.” Locally, on Sunday there were disruptions on the Port Townsend – Coupeville route due to lack of crew, but they got back on track when one (that’s right, ONE) crew member was brought in.

Public meetings about the future of The Washington State Ferries happened yesterday and are happening today as well, at 6pm. Anyone may attend via Zoom but you must register. Go to wsdot.wa.gov and look up Ferry Meetings (<https://wsdot.wa.gov/travel/washington-state-ferries/about-us/community-participation>).

And a quick note on the Race to Alaska: Team Malalo pulled into Ketchikan after 5 days, 3 hours, and some minutes. Their journey included 15 hours on a stationary bike to get past a windless portion of the trip. They won the first prize of \$10,000, and they were followed by Team Brio at “zero dark thirty.” Team Brio finished just this morning. And they won steak knives.

KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news Monday through Friday at noon and 5pm and at noon on Saturday. You can reach out to us at news@kptz.org. This is Jim Burke. Thanks for listening.