

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Simon Jaynes with local news for September 23, 2021.

Happy first day of fall, everyone. The autumnal equinox occurred just after the noon hour yesterday, September 22, and the Full Harvest Moon was two days before that on Monday. Along with these celestial signs of fall, you have probably noticed a few earthly hints of the changing season – perhaps using the windshield wipers in your car one of these past few mornings, wondering where you might have put that one rain coat you really love, or maybe just inspecting the thermostat levels in your house when you woke up this morning. There are a lot of little things that show us time is passing and the weather is changing here on the North Olympic Peninsula. We are going to check in on a few of the ways those things impact us, as part of our news today.

To the relief of many, Jefferson and Clallam Counties lifted their recreational burn bans on Monday, effective immediately. A recreational fire, for those keeping score, is defined as being smaller than 3 feet in diameter and 2 feet in height. Meanwhile, the ban on land clearing and debris burning will remain in effect until October 1 when it will be reevaluated. It is important to remember that while lower temperatures have reduced the fire danger to “moderate” in both counties, Jefferson fire chiefs were quick to point out that, “Though there has been some precipitation, the county has not seen any significant wetting recovery....The majority of Jefferson County has received under 2 inches of rain over the last three months.”

This past week may have brought the first significant precipitation in months, but it's hard to know what effect, (if any) this will have on the ongoing drought situation in this part of the state. In July of this year, almost every county in Washington was placed under an emergency drought declaration. And as of today, the Washington State Department of Ecology still classifies the geographic area around Port Townsend as being in a “moderate drought” condition. They define a drought emergency as when water supply is projected to be below 75% of average and there is a risk of undue hardship to water users. This means that low snowpack and stream flow levels are causing state agencies to see signs of stressed fish. It means that farmers and ranchers are being asked not to irrigate. And, as we all know, it means wildfires will burn unchecked through dry vegetation.

KPTZ spoke with Jefferson Land Trust Executive Director Richard Tucker on the subject of drought, and he highlighted a climate resilience study they have been working on over the last year. He says this study shows significant changes are on the horizon with regards to snow pack, freezing elevation, and a trend toward longer warmer summers on the North Olympic Peninsula. Tucker recommends people do simple things such as conserving water wherever possible, planting drought-resistant species in their yards and gardens and, very importantly, staying informed. He says, “We are definitely seeing changes to our climate....The severity and impact in this area are still somewhat unknown...but we do know that change is happening.” There are excellent resources at the websites <https://www.drought.gov/states/washington> and <https://ecology.wa.gov/> for anyone who would like to learn more about the details surrounding drought and water security issues.

Another familiar fall character who is on its way, is the cold and flu season. With it, health care officials in the region fear we will see already over-burdened hospitals and testing facilities reach their absolute breaking point. 8 new cases of COVID-19 were reported in Jefferson County yesterday bringing the total case count to 949. On Monday, the Washington State Department of Health requested federal resources to support current hospital surge efforts in the state. In a letter to the US Department of Health and Human Services, the Washington State Secretary of Health wrote, “This request would augment efforts we are already making in Washington state to

procure much needed staff. For example, we have requested 1200 clinical and non-clinical staff through the GSA contracting process and FEMA. We are also actively recruiting retirees, volunteers and students to join our health care provider pool.” DOH is currently working to fill more than 900 requests for volunteers in 15 counties.

In fall sports news, The East Jefferson Rivals Football team had their game cancelled last Friday due to the windstorm that hit the Puget Sound shortly before kickoff. The Rivals (Port Townsend and Chimacum High Schools’ combined team) stand at 0-2 heading into this week’s road game in Silverdale against the Klahowya Eagles.

On the national level, the Seattle Mariners currently sit 2.5 games out of the American League wild card spot – remaining relevant deep into September for the first time in recent memory. Meanwhile, Seattle’s perennial playoff contenders, the Seahawks, suffered a lackluster performance in their home opener on Sunday, losing to the Tennessee Titans 33-30. The Hawks look to get back into the win column with a couple of road games against conference rivals in the coming weeks.

And that’s it for today’s local news. KPTZ 91.9 FM brings you local news at noon Monday through Saturday and at 5pm Monday through Thursday. You can contact us through news@kptz.org. I’m Simon Jaynes. Stay safe out there, thanks for listening, and have a great day.