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Focus shifts in battle against COVID-19

By Ryan Urban

Local public health departments, including Barron County's, are shifting in their responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the main priorities now are prevention and testing.

This week Barron County Public Health began offering free testing at 410 E. La Salle Ave. Wednesday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The PCR testing, with results back in 1-2 days, can be scheduled at cur.tv/barron.

"Local health departments will no longer be expected or required to follow up with every reported COVID-19 case. Wisconsin DHS now recommends that local health departments focus on activities that will help prevent severe COVID-19 illness and death," according to a press release issued Jan. 21 by Barron County Public Health.

Testing is in high demand now, corresponding with high case counts.

In its latest report, Barron County Public Health tallied 583 new cases in the week up to Monday, Jan. 24. That is down slightly from 617 cases the week before.

All age groups are being affected. Among those 583 cases, 131 were in persons 18 and younger; 189 in ages 19-39; 140 in ages 40-59; 103 in ages 60-79; and 20 in ages 80-plus.

COVID-19 is attributed to the deaths of 120 Barron County residents to date, six having occurred since the start of the year.

Right now, most COVID-19 cases are due to the Omicron variant. This variant is extremely contagious. The Omicron variant has a shorter time from when you are exposed to when you get sick. This makes it very hard to slow the spread of this illness down.

State Health Officer Paula Tran said "We need to focus efforts on empowering individuals to act when they think they may have COVID-19. People should get tested and immediately isolate away from others to prevent spreading it. They should talk to their healthcare provider about medical treatment if they are at higher risk for severe illness and notify their close contacts of the exposure as soon as possible."

As hospitalizations as a result of COVID-19 remain high.

"Our health systems are still under tremendous pressure due to the rise in cases and staff shortages," said DHS deputy director Karen Timberlake in

(See COVID page 12A)



Extrication necessary – A Boyceville driver, Hannah M. Johnson, was treated for "suspected minor injuries" following this crash Wednesday morning, Jan. 19, 2022, at Hwy. KK and U.S. 8 near Turtle Lake. Photo contributed

Area accidents make the news

Spotlighters' fund campaign raises more than \$17,000

Local theater group Barron Spotlighters recently held a fund-raising challenge of trying to raise \$3,000 by the end of November. A generous donor had agreed to match these funds on a 3-to-1 basis.

What ended up happening was that the theater group was able to more than double their goal, to the surprise of everyone involved.

"We thought that we were setting ourselves a pretty high bar to hit, and would be challenged to reach it," says Spotlighters board member Darren Kirby. "We knew that we had support in the area for live theater, but this blew everyone away with the

generosity of the community."

In the end, the generous donor matched the 3-to-1 challenge on the original pledge of \$3,000, plus added an extra \$1,000 to it. The final fund-raising tally was more than \$17,000.

The theater group has set aside these funds and will discuss how best to use them. Some of the funds will be used to upgrade their sound equipment to benefit all future shows and audiences.

The community can learn more about the Barron Spotlighters by visiting their brand new website at www.barronspotlighters.org.

Extrication required in crash

One person was treated at Cumberland Hospital after a collision between a sedan and a semi-tractor trailer truck shortly after 8 a.m. Jan. 19.

According to the accident report, a 2013 Ford Focus driven by Hannah M. Johnson, 20, Boyceville, was southbound on County Hwy. KK, near Turtle Lake and failed to stop at a stop sign at the intersection of Hwy. KK and U.S. Hwy. 8.

The vehicle then struck the trailer of a westbound 2022 Anthem tractor trailer rig driven by Jeremy R. Klimmer, 40, of Spencer, Wis. The Focus then spun into the westbound lane. Johnson had to be extricated from

the vehicle and was treated at Cumberland hospital for what the report described as suspected minor injuries. She was cited for failure to stop. Klimmer was reportedly uninjured.

Responding to the call were the Sheriff's Department, Turtle Lake Fire Department and Cumberland Ambulance.

Three hurt in Hwy. P crash

A two-vehicle crash north of Almena just after 7:30 p.m. Jan. 19 involved eight people, three of whom were taken by ambulance for treatment, according to the Sheriff's Department.

The crash took place along the 1600 block of Barron County Hwy. P, town of Clinton, about two miles north of

Almena.

According to the report, a 2014 Ford Escape driven by Kimberly Donica, 40, Almena, was going north on Hwy. P and pulled over into the southbound lane to retrieve mail from the mailbox. She then attempted to turn right into the driveway, and collided with a northbound 2008 Honda Odyssey driven by Lyndon Koehn, 76, Almena. Both vehicles ended up in the ditch east of the highway.

There were four passengers in Donica's vehicle. They include: Makenzie, Aiden, and Chloe Donica, ages 15, 13, and 6, respectively, and Lina Brunsman, 15, also of Almena.

(See Crashes page 12A)



Five escape serious injury – This Ford Escape was involved in a crash on County Hwy. P north of Almena on Wednesday night, Jan. 19, 2022. The driver and four passengers escaped serious injury, according to the Barron County Sheriff's Department. Photo contributed

Document plans timber harvests, multiple outdoor uses

Barron County Forest plan looks forward 15 years



1927, when counties were exempted from having to pay a tax on forest production.

According to the 15-year forest plan, the law was amended in 1963 to help compensate counties for the costs they incur for owning and maintaining forests. It also called for townships to get annual revenue of 30 cents per acre and a minimum of 10 percent of stumpage income from their County Forestlands.

According to the work plan, the county completed five sales for timber harvesting during 2021, and two more sales are expected this year. Income totaled \$216,519.19 from timber contracts last year. Four sales are

currently under contract.

The report predicts that County Forestland "will see a natural conversion of oak to northern hardwood. The county will continue efforts to maintain oak ... through ... regeneration harvest, fire and timber stand improvement."

Two areas were sprayed last year to control buckthorn, one at the Owen Anderson Rifle Range, the other in the Silver Creek forest south of County Hwy. D between Sixth and Seventh streets in the towns of Turtle Lake and Vance Creek.

The plan also forecasts a "bleak" future for ash trees in county forests, which are vulnerable to emerald ash

bores. The plan calls for the sale of "many ash trees" with each new timber contract.

Recreation

The county works with snowmobile clubs so that "trails are placed on existing forest access roads, (which) often eliminates the need for brushing." About nine miles of snowmobile trails are on county-owned forestland.

With the cooperation of the Cumberland Area Ski Touring Association, the county operates a half-mile lighted cross country ski trail near Upper Waterman Lake, about six miles northwest of Cumberland.

There are four and one-half miles of snowshoe trails in the county forests. Most county forest is closed to ATV use, but a two-mile trail was completed near the Loch Lomond development, near Birchwood, in 2021.

One of two county-owned rifle ranges is in a county forest. The Owen Anderson Rifle Range, near Arland, is on county-owned forestland surrounding the Hay River.

Portions of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail pass through County Forestlands, especially in the towns of Cedar Lake, Bear Lake and Maple

Plain. Equestrian trails are located in forestland in the town of Bear Lake, and fishing piers for the disabled are available on Turtle Creek in southwestern Barron County.

Mountain bike trails have been developed on county forestland in the Silver Creek area and the town of Doyle, east of Rice Lake.



By Bob Zientara

Administrator Jeff French.

Selling timber for profit, maintaining relationships with ATV, snowmobile and "silent sports" organizations, and fighting threats posed by pests and invasive species, will characterize work in Barron County's forests in the coming year, according to a program approved Monday, Jan. 17, 2021, by the County Board of Supervisors.

Forest activities will be financed in part with a state grant estimated at about \$16,000, according to County

The 2022 work plan is part of a larger document approved a year ago, which outlines goals, objectives and activities for the next 15 years in the county's more than 16,000 acres of forest, swamps, lakes, streams and other geographic features.

County Forester John Cisek said that this year's work plan calls for timber sales on 335 acres of county forestland in the towns of Maple Plain, Bear Lake and Cedar Lake.

The income-producing timber sales are based on state law dating back to

Barron County Forests fast facts

- Total acreage -- 16,288 in 14 separate units
- Most common trees -- Oak, 4,920 acres; Aspen, 4,740; Northern hardwood, 2,182; Other species, bottomland hardwoods, white birch, red maple, red and white pine, black and white spruce, tamarack, swamp hardwoods.
- Non-forest cover -- includes grass, shrubbery, 223 acres of muskeg bog, 838 acres "shallow lake," and 578 acres "minor lakes."
- An estimated 70 miles of trails and access roads.

Source: Barron County Forestry Office

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