

This is KPTZ 91.9 FM in Port Townsend, Washington. I'm Diane Walker with your local news and commentary for Tuesday, September 29, 2026.

The effects of a low snowpack and a particularly dry summer had already forced the city of Port Townsend to start drawing water from the Lords Lake reservoir weeks earlier than usual. But since late last week, the city has begun drawing exclusively from the reservoir, as the Big Quilcene River water levels have dropped to the point where the river can no longer contribute to our water supply. According to interim City Manager Steve King, this has been the worst year for our water supply since 2015.

But no worries: we won't run out of water. Nearly 90 percent of the water from the Olympic Gravity Water System which carries water to the city goes to the Port Townsend Paper Company mill. If the water supply drops below a certain level, the mill will be required by contract to curtail its operations or shut down completely in order to ensure sufficient water supply remains for the city.

As wildfire season begins to wind down and Jefferson County fire danger has been lowered to moderate, the State Fire Marshal's Office has sent out an update on its All-Risk Mobilization program. The All-Risk Mobilization Program provides assistance to local fire jurisdictions when an incident exceeds local response capabilities. As of yesterday, September 28, the program has been authorized to support 46 incidents which have cost an estimated \$41 million, which is funded through the Washington State Disaster Response Account.

In total, more than 900,000 acres have burned in Washington this year, making 2026 one of the worst wildfire years in recent memory. The fires affected 17 different counties across the state. The worst hit were Benton, Spokane, Yakima, Grant, Franklin, and Okanogan Counties. According to the *Washington State Standard*, 649 primary residences were destroyed across the state, mostly in Spokane County, and some 2,500 more were damaged to some extent. The financial toll of this damage exceeds \$188 million, and in all, the total damage is estimated to be hundreds of millions more.

Washington has distributed over \$1 million of its own individual assistance to more than 600 households, and applications are still open, but Governor Ferguson has asked President Trump for additional millions in federal aid to help our fire-ravaged communities recover. The money sought could include grants for temporary housing, home repairs and low-cost loans to cover those recovering, and cost-sharing for emergency work public agencies undertook during the fires.

Senator Maria Cantwell has joined her colleagues in introducing bicameral legislation to protect voters and election workers from intimidation and threats of violence at polling places. The right to vote is fundamental to American democracy, but rising threats of political violence against voters and election workers are threatening election security. As of April 2026, 32% (<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/survey-finds-election-officials-remain-concerned-about-safety-lack>) of local election workers have reported experiencing threats, harassment, or abuse. Armed groups such as the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers who were involved in the January 6, 2021 assault on the U.S. Capitol have threatened (<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-election/proud-boys-claim-polling-places-trump-ups-violent-rhetoric-election-fr-rcna178386>) to patrol polling places in recent (<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-10-10/what-happens-if-armed-right-wing-groups-polls>) elections. While intimidation is illegal under existing

law, this new legislation is designed to provide a clearer standard and further ensure safety at election offices and polling locations.

The Freedom from Intimidation in Elections Act would strengthen existing anti-intimidation provisions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 by limiting the presence of visible firearms at locations where voters cast their ballot or election workers perform their official duties.

And finally, Port Townsend's annual Kinetic Sculpture Race will be held this weekend. Judged on their creativity, engineering, pageantry, and perseverance, teams will be piloting completely human-powered sculptural machines through town, around Point Hudson, into the bay, over sand, through mud, and back. On Saturday everything happens downtown within a few blocks of the American Legion at Monroe and Water Streets. On Sunday afternoon, the sand portion of the race will take place at the Fort Worden Beach, and the mudrace will move to the county fairground, finally ending near the Legion in the late afternoon. For more information about the race, visit <https://ptkineticrace.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/race-weekend-brochure-2026.pdf>.

KPTZ 91.9 FM broadcasts your local news Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday at noon and 5pm. You can contact us at news@kptz.org. I'm Diane Walker; thank you for listening.