



July 1, 2022

THE CONEJOS COUNTY MESSENGER

Published Quarterly on April 1, July 1, Oct. 1, and Jan. 1

In this issue:

- Feature Article—The Menkhaven Fire
- Commissioner Scholarship Recipients
- Romeo Sand & Gravel Pit Purchase
- Dept. of Social Services: Prepare for SNAP and Medicaid Changes, Pg. 3

Welcome to our **second year** of the Conejos County Newsletter! As elected officials and county department directors, our goal is to inform our citizens of news stories, information and data through the periodic publication of a newsletter. The previous editions of newsletters are archived on the county website, www.conejoscounty.org.

In an effort to gain more exposure, we are posting this same file on Facebook and the Citizens for a Better Conejos County page.

Scan QR code with your smartphone



The Menkhaven Fire

The **Menkhaven Fire** was declared contained on June 8th. Crews will continue to patrol and monitor the fire on an as-needed basis.



A Bird's Eye View

The incident commanders and agency leadership from Conejos County, the Colorado Division of Fire Prevention & Control and the Rio Grande National Forest would like to thank the community for their graciousness and commitment to the management of the fire and their contribution to handling all of the other ways that it affected our community. Our Lady of Guadalupe Church for allowing the shelter to be opened there for fire evacuees. The community really shined and brought numerous donations of

water, snacks, hand wipes, chap stick, sunblock and eye drops. It was really amazing how our great community responded with thoughtful help. We also want to thank of all the firefighters, responders, victim advocates, ambulance, and law enforcement for their hard work. We are so proud of how our county came together in this time of need. There are so many people to thank that we couldn't list them all but know if you had any part in helping our appreciation runs deep.



The Natural Response

Menkhaven Fire Facts:

- ◆ Reported: 3:15 pm on Saturday, May 28, 2022
- ◆ Size: 242 acres
- ◆ Cause: Tree on a power line
- ◆ Location: Approx. 7 miles west of Fox Creek, CO on Colorado Highway 17
- ◆ Fuels: Ponderosa, mixed conifer (Douglas Fir, White Fir), Aspen, timber litter

Recently, crews have photo documented the natural recovery process that begins immediately after a fire. We invite you to take a look at the recent photos that show new growth in the midst of the fire's footprint. We also have included pictures throughout the duration of the fire.

(There are more Menkhaven Fire pictures on the last page of this newsletter.)

Sanford High School Students Awarded Commissioner Scholarships



Comm. Jarvies, Dailin Estrada, Comm. Baroz, Cheyenne Caldon, Comm. Garcia, and Haley Faucette

At the May 26 Commissioner’s Special Board Meeting, Commissioners Joseph Baroz, Carlos Garcia, and Mitchell Jarvies presented \$1,000 scholarships to Cheyenne Caldon, Dailin Estrada, and Haley Faucette, Sanford High School Class of 2022 graduating Seniors. All three students’ post-secondary educational plans are to pursue degrees in the medical field. The commissioners thanked the students for applying for the scholarship, commended each student for their involvement in activities at Sanford High School and their outstanding academic achievements, and wished them well in their personal and career goals.

CONEJOS COUNTY GOVERNMENT PURCHASES ROMEO SAND & GRAVEL PIT



Nick Sarmiento, County Attorney, Comm. Baroz, Gale Gallegos, Elliott Salazar, Tressesa Martinez, Comm. Garcia

On June 2, 2022, The Board of Conejos County Commissioners, representing Conejos County, a political subdivision of the State of Colorado finalized the purchase of the Romeo Sand & Gravel Pit from Ms. Gale Gallegos. During the process, which began several months past, the Commissioners, Nick Sarmiento, county attorney, Donnie Martinez, Road & Bridge Director, and Linda DeHerrera, Land Use Administrator toured the pit and the total parcel of land, began the work of transferring the mining permit and other important tasks to complete the sale and purchase.

The County Road & Bridge Department has many plans for the uses of the road based materials that can and will be crushed and spread on our county roads from the new pit. The La Florida gravel pit does not have a material base of large enough rock to make it cost

effective to crush and convert the material to gravel. The new pit will allow for the crushing of appropriate sizes of gravel and road base, perhaps contracting with companies to set up temporary asphalt making plants to decrease the cost of asphalt the county will pay, and a more centralized road material/gravel pit—reducing fuel and the wear and tear on county equipment to improve and maintain county roads. With our most sincere appreciation and gratitude we thank Ms. Gale Gallegos for selling the gravel pit to the county!





CONEJOS COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Greetings,

The Conejos County Department of Social Services wishes all a happy and safe summer.

Congratulations to our scholarship recipient:

Dailin Estrada (Sanford)

We wish you the best in your future endeavors!

The CCDSS scholarship is announced annually at each of our school districts. Upcoming seniors, we encourage you to apply next school year!

Be on the lookout for our annual back-to-school backpack/school supply giveaway which will occur in August.

Prepare for SNAP and Medicaid Changes:

Why is this change happening? This change is happening because the State and Federal Public Health Emergency declaration that was in place due to COVID-19 will eventually end. When that declaration ends, SNAP households will see a reduction in monthly benefits to the pre-pandemic amount. Medicaid members will need to complete renewals based on their renewal month to find out if they still qualify. Members need to respond to all the information requested in the renewal by the timeframes noted in the official letter.

When is this happening? We don't know. The Federal Government will give us 60-day notice and we'll notify you right away.

What actions do I need to take? Update your mailing address, phone number and email to make sure you get your renewal letter at [Colorado.gov/PEAK](https://colorado.gov/PEAK). Be on the lookout by mail or email for your renewal. You need to respond to see if you still qualify for health coverage. Those letters go to your mailing address or email, so it is important that your contact information is up to date. After the public health emergency ends if you no longer qualify for Medicaid, get coverage through Connect for Health. Medicaid members: SNAP households: Unfortunately, there is no action you can take. SNAP benefits will decrease for everyone at the end of the public health emergency.

Why is this change happening? This change is happening because the State and Federal Public Health Emergency declaration that was in place due to COVID-19 will eventually end. When that declaration ends, SNAP households will see a reduction in monthly benefits to the pre-pandemic amount. Medicaid members will need to complete renewals based on their renewal month to find out if they still qualify. Members need to respond to all the information requested in the renewal by the timeframes noted in the official letter. **PREPARE FOR SNAP AND MEDICAID CHANGES!** What To Expect: SNAP households will see a reduction in monthly SNAP benefits and Medicaid households will need to complete renewals when due

What Can I Do To Help My Family Through This Change? If you are able to, you can roll over your EBT benefits to the next month. This may help cushion the impact of the reduction in benefits. You can stock up on non-perishable items now, while you have the additional benefits. This helps to save money and reduce food waste. Consider freezing your produce to make fruit and vegetables last longer.

Visit <https://www.foodpantries.org/st/colorado> to find the closest food pantry to you.

Nicholas Barela, Dept. of Social Services Director

**They can't.
You can.**
Be their voice. Make the call.
1-844-CO-4-KIDS
1-844-264-4267





Conejos County Sheriff's Office
14044 Crd G.5
Po Box 37
Conejos Co. 81129
PH# 719-376-2196

With the warmer weather happening in the county, people are beginning to take vacations and extended trips away from their homes. Unfortunately when people leave their residences it is a prime time for thefts and break-in's to occur. Therefore we thought it would be a good time to share a few pointers on how to keep your home and

property safe.

In today's world we are more connected with each other than ever before, which is a good thing but can also be a bad thing. Announcing you are leaving for a vacation on social media could invite unintended guest/s to your residence while you are away. Remember, the bad guys are always trolling for opportunities and announcing you are leaving or posting pictures showing you are gone is just what they are looking for.

Another idea is to make it look like someone is at the residence, either through frequent visits from family or close friends or having your lights and sprinklers set to a timer. Frequent activity for normalcy will hide your being away.

Make sure all items of value are out of sight and locked up. Not having a target will cause the bad guys to lose interest and hopefully continue on down the road. A good security system and door locks are a good investment as most generally our local thieves are in hurry and a locked door may keep them moving. Door bells with cameras installed along with alarms have helped deputies stop and apprehend violators before they were able to get in the residence.

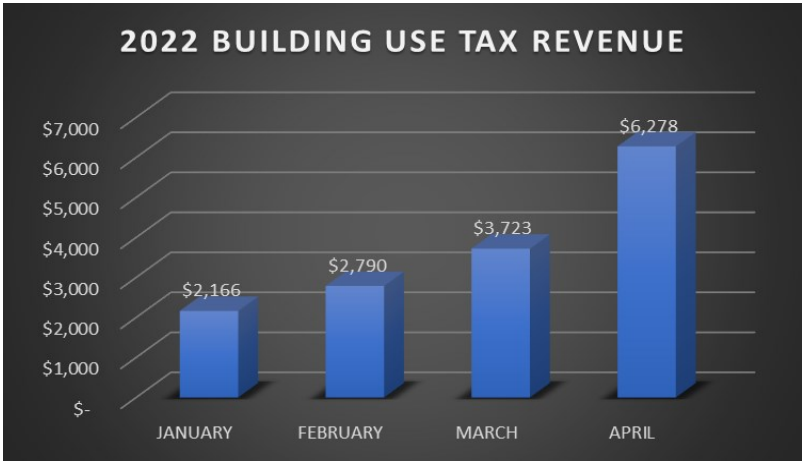
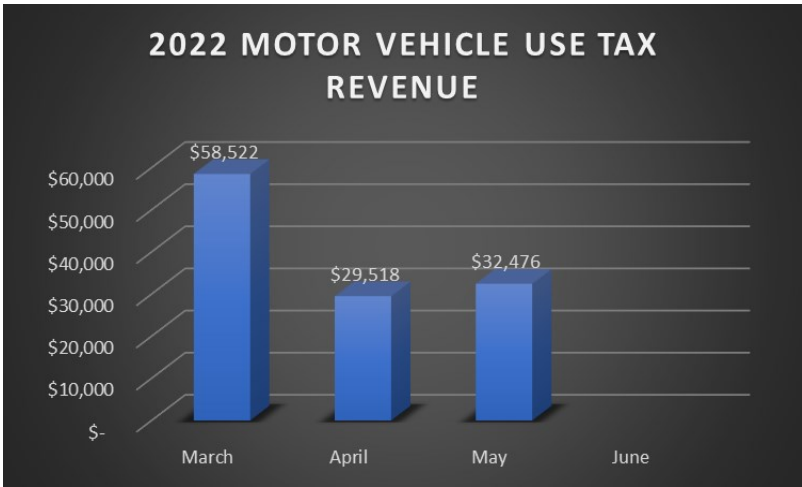
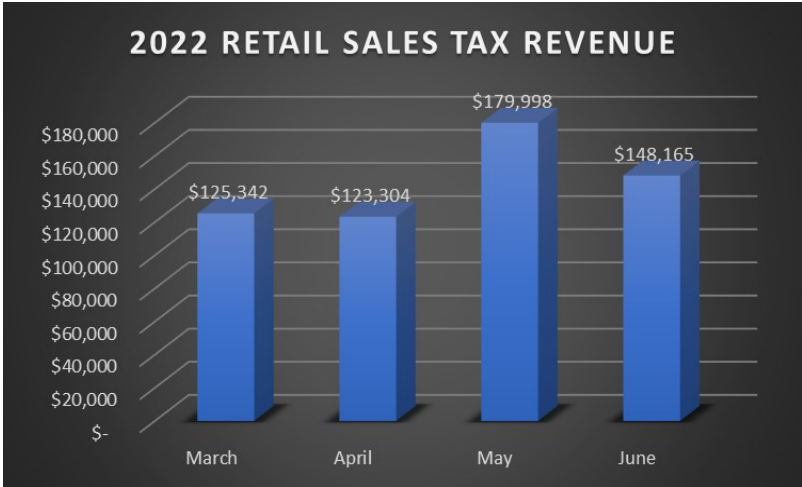
Developing a good relationship with your neighbors and looking out for one another is always a good way to keep the bad guys on the run. With that said, the Sheriff's Office is currently working with our members at the community meetings to launch a Neighborhood Watch Program throughout the county. The key to all of this is If You See Something, Say Something. We have to get in the habit of taking care of one another and be willing to help out when we can.

The Sheriff's Office would offer a word of advice to those who witness or are witnessing a crime. Make yourself the best witness you can be. Write down notes if you can. Describe clothes, hair, height, weight or anything to identify the bad guy. Take note of the vehicle if there is one, the make, model, color and how many occupants are inside. Anything that can or will identify the person will help us in our investigation. We do **NOT** recommend or advocate you approach the perpetrator. Instead call 911 and let the police do their job. Remember it is most likely only property they are after and property is not worth risking your life. The people committing these crimes are usually desperate and unpredictable and no one knows what they may do if they are confronted.

In the end, if we all work together and look out for one another we will never completely stop crime but we can definitely slow it down. Always be aware for yourself and your neighbor and always take the safest route.

Garth Crowther, Conejos County Sheriff

Commissioners



Commissioners Baroz, Garcia, and Jarvies

Treasurer's Office

Greetings from the Treasurer's Office! As summer begins, the Treasurer's Office has just completed the 2nd half payment collection which was June 15, 2022. Thank you to all those who have paid their taxes in full. Upcoming delinquent tax notices are scheduled to be mailed July 1, 2022. Real estate taxes need to be paid by September 30, 2022 to avoid advertising charges. For mobile homes and personal property taxes, please pay by August 31, 2022 to avoid advertising charges. Our annual tax lien sale is currently scheduled online for Wednesday, November 16, 2022.

A reminder you can still make online payments until October 31, 2022 at our county website at: conejoscounty.org Please note this year we are in the process of a computer conversion and do appreciate your patience. If you have any questions regarding your taxes, please call our office at (719) 376-5919. Thank you and have a great summer 2022!

Mack Crowther, Conejos County Treasurer

Emergency Management Office



San Luis Valley Hazard Mitigation Plan Public Input Survey

The San Luis Valley (Alamosa County, **Conejos County**, Costilla County, Mineral County, Rio Grande County, and Saguache County) is updating its Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan in 2022-2023 per the five year update cycle required of FEMA and the Federal Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000.

The Regional Hazard Mitigation Plan analyzes each county's vulnerabilities to natural and human-caused hazards and identifies mitigation actions that can be taken to minimize property damage and reduce the loss of life by lessening the impacts of disasters.

The purpose of this survey is to collect information from the public and stakeholders to better understand the vulnerabilities within each of the six participating counties, as well as solicit input on needs to best mitigate, or reduce, the impacts of hazards before they occur.

The survey should take around 5 minutes to complete. Please complete this survey by **August 8, 2022**. Thank you for your participation!

The survey is open till August 8, 2022. PLEASE Click ON THIS LINK:

<https://forms.office.com/r/Sz8md8Z2vX>

Rodney King, Conejos County Emergency Manager

Conejos County Public Health Dept. CCPH)

With the onset of summer, our county is seeing yet another surge of COVID 19 cases. All six counties in the San Luis Valley currently meet the criteria to be listed at COVID-19 Community Level High by the CDC (Alamosa, Conejos, Costilla, Mineral, Rio Grande, and Saguache counties). There have been 202 cases reported in the past week. COVID-related hospitalizations are also on the rise. Conejos County has an average of 25 active reported cases daily with an average of 42 reported new cases over a week's period. CCPH recommends wearing a mask in public, continued hand washing and please STAY HOME if you have any symptoms, are asked to isolate and/or quarantine.

One way to protect yourself is to get vaccinated and/or get "boosted". A COVID booster shot is an additional dose of a vaccine given after the protection provided by the original shots have begun to decrease over time. Remember, you'll need at least three doses for the highest level of protection. Currently Conejos Public Health is offering all levels of COVID vaccines, including the "Fourth" shot (second booster).

Talk with your health care provider about when to schedule your or your child's second dose.

Some people should get their second dose three weeks after their first. This is the recommended schedule for people who are moderately to severely immunocompromised, adults ages 65 years and older, people who may be at high risk of getting very sick from COVID-19, and others who need protection quickly.

Some people may get their second dose up to eight weeks (two months) after their first. Waiting up to eight weeks between doses may reduce your risk of a rare side effect called myocarditis, a type of heart inflammation.

You should receive the same type of vaccine for your second dose that you received for your first dose.

The timing of your third dose depends on your age and whether or not you are immunocompromised.

Children aged 6 months through 4 years should get their third dose **at least eight weeks after their second dose.**

People aged **5 years and older** who are not immunocompromised should get their **third dose at least five months after the second dose.** This is also called a booster dose. Adults aged 18 and older can get either Pfizer or Moderna for their third dose. Children aged 5 to 17 years can only get Pfizer.

People aged **5 years and older** who are **moderately to severely immunocompromised** should get their **third dose at least four weeks after the second dose.** It should be the same type of vaccine as your first two doses.

Some people should receive a fourth dose.

If you are **moderately to severely immunocompromised** and aged **5 years or older**, you'll need to get a **fourth dose at least three months after your third dose.** This is also called a booster dose.

If you are **not immunocompromised**, but you are aged **50 years or older**, you should receive a **fourth dose** (second booster) at least **four months after your third dose** (first booster).

Some people should receive a fifth dose as well.

If you are **moderately to severely immunocompromised** and aged **12 years or older**, you should get a **fifth dose** (second booster) at least **four months after your fourth dose** (first booster).

Adults aged 18 and older can get either Pfizer or Moderna for their fourth and fifth doses.
Children aged 12 to 17 years can only get Pfizer.

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPT. (Continued)

Lastly, there will no longer be free COVID testing sites in Conejos County or the SLV. Instead, you can pick up free at homes tests to have on hand. Beginning July 5th, you can pick up tests at no cost from CCPH between 9am and 1:00pm.

Please call us at 719-274-4307 for questions regarding all vaccines and testing. To see other options for Vaccine providers or test distribution sites in the SLV, please visit the SLV Public Health Partnership at <https://www.slvphp.com/>

Please follow us on Facebook for updates

Denise Jiron, Conejos County Public Health Director

MENKHAVEN FIRE PICTURES



Evening Retardant Drop



Mop Up Operations



Incident Command Meeting



South Conejos Fire, North Conejos Fire (Romeo) Trucks Respond

The latest and most updated news stories can be found on the county website: <https://conejoscounty.org> All offices and departments have a link to their individual web page and some have a Facebook page with very useful information.