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See **SPORTS**, Page A8

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Idaho gas prices
bump up again

The cost of gasoline is up again in Idaho. According to AAA, the average price for a gallon of regular is \$4.35 this week, which is 5 cents more than a week ago, 34 cents more than a month ago, and 82 cents more than a year ago. The national average fell by 9 cents this week to just above \$4 per gallon, which is 12 cents more than a month ago and 86 cents more than a year ago. Idaho moved all the way up to seventh for the most expensive gas prices in the nation. Coeur d'Alene was averaging \$4.15, but some stations were near the \$4 mark. "The Rockies region is slow to react to price changes in other parts of the country, but the good news is that if pump prices keep dropping elsewhere, we might be next in line for some savings," said AAA Idaho public affairs director Matthew Conde.

See **GAS**, A2

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Emergency declaration OK'd for Merritt Bridge

By CHLOE COCHRAN
Staff Writer

PRIEST RIVER — Bonner County commissioners declared an emergency and voted to at least partially close the Wisconsin Street Bridge, also known as Merritt Bridge, after a safety inspection revealed significant infrastructure failures. Bonner County commissioners unanimously approved the request Tuesday by the Road and Bridge Department to allow for the appropriate closure of the bridge, either partially or in its entirety, until repairs have been made. "The failure will necessitate either a significant reduction in access or closure of the Wisconsin Street Merritt Bridge. Wisconsin Street Merritt Bridge is a critical public corridor serving the residents and businesses of Bonner County," Road and Bridge director Jason Topp said. "This bridge is not only a significant economic corridor for commercial, public, and private use. The loss of access to this bridge poses a critical threat to life and property for

See **MERRITT**, A2

MICHAEL GALLUS COMPLETES EAGLE SCOUT PROJECT



Audrey Herrin/Hagadone News

Michael Gallus with his Boy Scout sash and handbook.

With sister in his heart, teen refurbishes Pinegrove Cemetery

By AUDREY HERRIN
Staff Writer

Michael Gallus often visits Pinegrove Cemetery to keep quiet company with his sister, Dorothy, whose grave has rested there since 2020. That's how the 15-year-old noticed the cemetery's directory building was weathered and fading. For his Eagle Scout project, Michael came up with a plan to refurbish the directory building and improve the cemetery where his family visits Dorothy. "We wanted to do something in the cemetery because it's close to her," Michael said. Michael has nearly reached the highest rank in Boy Scouts as a member of Troop 911 out of Hayden but had to complete his Eagle Project. His parents helped him brainstorm ideas in July 2025. They initially wanted to replace the flag poles at the cemetery's war memorial, but the Parks & Recreation Department informed them it would be too expensive. Michael has planned this project since the Boy Scouts council approved it in November with the assistance of Rathdrum Parks & Recreation Director Eric Singer. On Sunday, he sanded, stained and painted new wood for the directory building with the assistance of 20 other Scouts. "It will make it more welcoming compared to how it is right now," Michael said. "There will be maps there to help people find the way around the cemetery." On a later date, Michael will add an informational sign for the oft-overlooked

See **CEMETERY**, A2

Crews making gains on area fires

By CAROLINE LOBSINGER
Staff Writer

BONNERS FERRY — Firefighters are working to battle the Upper Smith Fire via the air, ground and cliffs as rappel crews are again took to the hills to help contain the fire's edge near Parker Ridge. Aerial water drops were used to cool the fire's southeastern perimeter Monday to protect homes, agricultural fields and other at-risk values in the Kootenai River Valley. Eight rappellers were inserted onto Parker Ridge by helicopter, working in tandem with the aerial water drops to contain the fire's edge and mop up hot spots, Northern Rockies crews are patrolling and mopping up along the northern containment line, working south into and along the Smith Creek drainage to extinguish hot spots. Northern Rockies crews are patrolling and mopping up along the northern containment line, working south into and along the Smith Creek drainage to extinguish

See **FIRES**, A2

Ponderay discusses possible data center ban

By MAKEILAH LAW
Staff Writer

PONDERAY — Following in the wake of other cities in the region, the Ponderay City Council discussed the possibility of adopting an ordinance to ban data centers in the city at its Aug. 3 council meeting. The discussion was prompted by Councilor Rick Larkin after he noticed that the Sandpoint City Council unanimously approved a motion to define and bring forward an appropriate code to prohibit larger scale AI data centers in Sandpoint last month. "It's becoming a major issue throughout the United States," said Larkin, adding that after collecting data, he found that the one of the most significant problems concerning data centers are extreme power demands. "They use as much electricity as thousands of homes, which puts a lot on all of us because it's going to cause brown outs and all kinds of things," said Larkin. Larkin refuted claims that data centers produce more job opportunities. "No, it doesn't," said Larkin. "They're limited permanent jobs. A small permanent staff of 20 to 50 people maximum." Other problems Larkin said he found include high water consumption, noise and light pollution, an increase in power costs, and concerns of systems being hacked by other countries. With access to water being an ongoing issue in the city, Larkin said the water being used to cool down a data center would be harmful. "I would like to see us move to ban any coming into the city of Ponderay," said Larkin. While Councilor Brenda Thompson agreed, Council President Phil McNearney did not.

See **DATA**, A2

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