

County Connection

September 2026

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Looking back

Our fiscal year is almost over.

We are always planning for the future, but in doing so, it is sometimes nice to look back and see what we have done to get this far. You only have to look back at the previous month's newsletters to see that every department and every employee, while not necessarily featured in a photo here, has contributed to the success of running this County for its residents.

The greatest success is the daily effort that you bring to the job. We provide consistent and quality government services to our residents and visitors every single day. That is no small task.

This has led to some notable accomplishments this year. This includes the completion and subsequent celebration of the County's portion of the Southwest Crestview Bypass.

We have also transitioned to a new, streamlined transit service, stood up two new divisions within Public Safety, made significant progress on the Shoal River Water Reclamation Facility, and maintained a robust tourism industry and healthy partnerships with our military entities.

We have done all of this while keeping property taxes low for our residents and taking great strides to provide the best benefits possible to our employees.

We are fortunate to have the opportunity to live in an enviable part of the country. We also have the benefit of being able to contribute to this way of life and our community through the work we do.

Thank you.



John Hofstad
County Administrator

In the News

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Okaloosa County to begin developing a regulatory framework for data centers



A staff report prepared by Deputy County Administrator Jason Autrey noted that data centers are not specifically addressed in either the Okaloosa County Comprehensive Plan or its Land Development Code. [READ MORE>>](#)

Cinco Bayou advisory lifted; Okaloosa cites low oxygen, algae bloom as likely causes



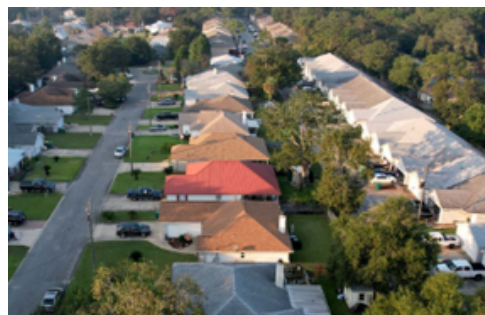
In a separate release detailing the initial incident, the county pointed to low oxygen levels in the water and a dying algae bloom as the likely causes. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County paramedic Andrew Kindle named national Community Paramedic of the Year



"I am truly humbled by this recognition and am proud to serve Okaloosa County in the role of a Community Paramedic," Kindle said. [READ MORE>>](#)

Okaloosa County, municipalities launch joint effort to educate voters on property tax amendment



"Having all of the necessary information ahead of the upcoming election is important for all voters," said Okaloosa County Administrator John Hofstad. " [READ MORE>>](#)

HOW I WORK: An inside look at how Okaloosa Beach Safety's lieutenants keep beachgoers safe one shift at a time



Three lieutenants with Okaloosa County Beach Safety - a lifelong local, a Tennessee transplant, and a South Florida native - share what a day on the shoreline really looks like. [READ MORE>>](#)

First scallop evidence found in Choctawhatchee Bay in years



The annual Great Scallop Count turned up the first confirmed evidence of bay scallops in Choctawhatchee Bay in years, but no live animals were found. [READ MORE>>](#)

Many New Beginnings at Corrections



Pastor Jonathan King (First Apostolic Church) and Pastor Grady O'Neal (Calvary United Crestview) along with volunteers from both churches hosted a special baptismal service Monday, Aug. 17, at the Okaloosa County Jail in Crestview, offering inmates an opportunity to take part in an important step in their personal faith journey. A total of 45 inmates—both men and women—participated in the voluntary service, which provided an opportunity for reflection, renewal and hope



Okaloosa County Department of Corrections congratulates Cadets Bethany Roughton and Skylar Gatlin on their successful completion of George Stone Training Center Corrections Class #131. Officer Douglas Black (OCDOC) opened the ceremony with a National Anthem solo. Cadet Roughton the Class Captain delivered a powerfully encouraging speech.



Okaloosa County Department of Corrections Command Staff presented Officer Dalton Bliss with a well-deserved P.R.I.D.E. award for his swift and decisive response to an inmate in crisis. Okaloosa County commends Officer Bliss for his vigilance, and dedicated service. The PRIDE award recognizes exceptional staff through its Public Recognition Involving Dedicated Employees

National Recognition, Well Deserved

Okaloosa County EMS Community Paramedic Andrew Kindle is the recent recipient of the 2026 National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians (NAEMT) Community Paramedic of the Year Award.



"We are very proud of Paramedic Andrew Kindle," said Okaloosa County Board Chairman Trey Goodwin. "Our Community Paramedicine program has led the state of Florida in excellence to reduce fatal overdoses, patient care and unnecessary ER visits. Andrew is a shining example of how to lead by example, showing passion for his work and empathy for his patients that truly changes lives."

This award is part of the National EMS Awards for Excellence by NAEMT and EMS World. The awards will be presented during NAEMT's General Membership Meeting on Wednesday, Sept. 30, 2026, and at the opening ceremony of EMS World Expo in Orlando, Florida.

The award recognizes Kindle for his outstanding contribution to the EMS profession and the patients he has served in Okaloosa County. Kindle has helped build and lead the Community Paramedicine Team for the past 18 months.



We Remember

Okaloosa Director of Public Safety, Patrick Maddox, paid tribute to the victims and first responders of 9/11 by participating in a 9K ruck in full special operations kit at Camp Bull Simons with members of the 7th Special Forces Group.



Out With the Old

The old and dilapidated signs in front of the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Convention Center and the Destin-Fort Walton Beach Rigdon Center (formerly the NWF Fairgrounds) were removed this month to make way for new digital signs that are expected to be installed at both locations in the coming weeks. Revenue from visiting tourists paid 100% of the costs for the new signs and the demolition of the old ones.



Easygoing!

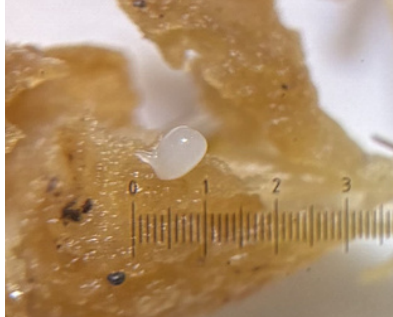
Traffic is flowing smoothly over the new bridge on Enzor Road near the intersection of U.S. Highway 90, part of the recently opened Southwest Crestview Bypass. Be safe on the new road and remember to abide by posted speed limits. This project had multiple funding sources that include the voter-approved infrastructure surtax.



Let Nature Find You

Okaloosa County Facilities and Parks Maintenance crews pressure-washed the pavilions, got new trash cans, brought in a new portable restroom and had the new sign installed at Laurel Hill Park.

Laurel Hill Park, located at 7651 County Road 393 just south of Laurel Hill and is one of more than 60 County-maintained parks in Okaloosa County. County staff has been working with local residents to make this already beautiful park better, with future improvements and amenities.



Root knot nematode female under a microscope

Do you know about nematodes?



Jennifer Bearden

We've been getting a good bit of questions about nematodes. Nematodes are microscopic round worms. There are many types of nematodes.

The first nematodes I learned about were ones that infect animals. Pinworms, hookworms, ascarids, and even dog heartworms. People can contract certain nematodes too. You probably deworm your pets and livestock for these parasites. Well, hopefully you do.

Next, I learned about plant parasitic nematodes. These infect plants. Sometimes they are plant specific and other times they infect a wide variety of plants. We break these up into categories such as root knot nematodes, sting nematodes, reniform nematodes, cyst nematodes, and even foliar nematodes. All these except the foliar nematodes attack the roots of plants. Foliar nematodes attack the leaves.

Then I learned about beneficial nematodes. These nematodes feed on pests. Grubs, caterpillars, root weevils, molecrickets and other insects can be controlled by these beneficial nematodes. Just like insects, we have good bugs and bad bugs. Well, we have good nematodes and bad ones.

We don't want to indiscriminately kill all nematodes. We want to control them by using resistant plant varieties or by strategically deworming our animals.

If you suspect you have a nematode problem, you can give us a call at the extension office. We can help you diagnose problems and advise you on treatment options. For plants, common options are limited to resistant varieties and solarization.

Solarization is the controlled heating of the soil to kill pathogens in the top layer of soil. This will kill most microbes in the top layer of the soil so we only want to do this if we know we have a problem that we can't fix with plant or variety selection. Sometimes, you may be able to plant things that repel or decrease the number of nematodes in the soil. This will be dependent on the type of nematodes present.

We're here to help. Give us a call or send us an email.

Recent Milestones



Congratulations to these County employees who are celebrating career service milestones! Pictured with County Administrator John Hofstad and the County Commissioners are:

- Ronald Downey, Jr. — 10 years with Public Works Program Support Manager
- Dylan Schroeder — 2 years in the Engineering Division
- Christopher Richardson — 2 years with Facilities & Parks Maintenance
- Sean Donaldson – 5 Years with Code Enforcement

Thank you all for your dedication, hard work and service to Okaloosa County!

In Case You Missed It

Regular Board Meetings

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Sept. 3

- Board voted to direct staff to create guardrails for any potential data centers that may approach the County.
- Board voted to accept an agreement with Niceville Animal Clinic for animal services.
- Board voted to allow Water & Sewer to self-perform the construction of a lift station on 4th Avenue in Fort Walton Beach.

Sept. 15

- Board voted to ask staff to approach HCA Healthcare to expand services to include hyperbaric treatments for emergency diving incidents.
- Board voted to amend ordinances related to upcoming animal control efforts.
- Board conducted a public hearing to review the County's surplus land inventory.
- Board voted to enter an agreement with FDOT for improvement to the Poquito Road/Lewis Turner intersection.
- Board approved a \$1.5 million grant for the Millside Road improvement project.

TIDBITS

Did you take any cool nature photos this summer? Enter them into this contest and be featured at the America 250 Heritage Festival and Scout Expo in October. To enter the photo contest, please visit the contest website for rules and to submit your photos at <https://gulfcoastcouncil.org/america-250-heritage-festival>

CELEBRATE AMERICA IN NATURE

PHOTO CONTEST

GULF COAST COUNCIL

1776 2026

250 HERITAGE FESTIVAL

SCOUTING AMERICA

PATH OF THE PATRIOT

CELEBRATE AMERICA'S 250th BIRTHDAY
BY CELEBRATING AMERICA'S NATURAL BEAUTY