

\$3.65 million mistake

County, town to pay back funds

by Cindy Glasson

A \$3.65 million mistake may end up costing Hot Springs County and Thermopolis an unknown amount of money over the next four years.

The state treasurer's office overpaid towns and counties in Wyoming millions of dollars in severance taxes in 1995, a mistake that is just now coming to light.

Discussion in the State Appropriations Committee determined the monies needed to be returned to the state through a series of lower distributions over the coming years to create as little impact on the entities as possible.

The suggestion to allocate and repay the liability through the use of reversions to the general fund rather than seeking repayment from the towns and counties was soundly rejected by the committee.

The overpayment was not discovered earlier due to a series of events.

At the time, the state's accounting system would not allow accounts to go negative, thus creating the need to borrow from the general fund.

The shortfall then occurred each year and was never repaid. It was then considered a permanent loan as agreed between the state auditor's office and the state treasurer.

The overpayment was not discovered until 2004, some nine years later.

At that time, it was thought to be simply a "timing" issue, one that would correct itself in the coming year.

As the negative balance con-

tinued to appear in the severance tax fund, the auditor's office began questioning what the real issue was and discovered the overpayment.

Counties and municipalities were made aware of the overpayment the last week in June, a full 15 years after the fact.

The decision when to begin the repayments has apparently not been made yet, according to state treasurer Joe Meyer.

The Hot Springs County Commissioners discussed the turn of events during their meeting on Tuesday.

"I think we need to draft a letter to the Wyoming State Treasurer's office asking how much we'll owe, how they're planning on taking it back and when they plan to start," said commissioner Brad Basse. "I think the town should be doing the same thing."

"This is the most bizarrely obscure thing I've ever seen," commissioner Mike Baker said. "I've never seen spreadsheets like this."

The commissioners—as well as county clerk Hans Odde—agreed none of them can figure out what the spreadsheets say.

There is no total amount due listed for any of the towns or counties, nor do the amounts listed add up.

"None of these amounts add up," Basse said. "It looks like they've added on interest."

The commissioners agreed to draft a letter to the treasurer's office in an attempt to find answers to their questions, hopefully before the final budget hearing July 19.

“None of these amounts add up. It looks like they've added on interest.”

Brad Basse
Hot Springs County Commissioner

Fourth of July celebration



Hot Springs County was alight with the “rocket's red glare” on the 4th of July as fireworks were set off from T-Hill by volunteer firefighters. Fire Department Sgt. Major Jim Cowger and Sgt. Major Nels Goarley fired off 327 shells of the 3-inch, 4-inch and 6-inch varieties during the display. Both have been working the fireworks display for about 30 years.

— Cindy Glasson and J.D. Stetson photos

Lions Club Ranch Rodeo adds mini-chuckwagon races, dinner

This weekend's 20th annual Ranch Rodeo, sponsored by the Thermopolis Lions Club, will have some twists that you don't usually see in a common rodeo.

Featured will be mini-chuckwagon races before Saturday's performance at the Hot Springs County Fairgrounds.

A calcutta will be featured at 6:30 p.m. to see who will be the favorites in the races. When the calcutta is completed, the races

begin.

Rodeo action, featuring lots of local talent, begins about 7:30 p.m. Saturday, or right after the mini-chuckwagon races.

This year, a chuckwagon dinner will be in the spotlight from noon to 2 p.m. Saturday at the fairgrounds.

On Friday, the arena gates open at 5 p.m. With a high enough

bid, you can stake your claim to rodeo cowboys and cowgirls in a calcutta at 7 p.m. Rodeo events begin about 7:30 p.m.

Tickets for each performance are \$5 for adults and \$3 for seniors (age 60 and up). Kids under 7 are admitted free.

Saturday's chuckwagon dinner is \$25 per person or \$45 per couple. Included in the cost is

New airport land in sight

by Cindy Glasson

GDA Engineers from Cody gave the Hot Springs County Commissioners an update on the airport's progress during their meeting on Tuesday.

Dusty Spomer and Rick Patton with GDA told the commissioners they had attended a meeting with the landowner and his attorney recently to discuss options in acquiring the desired land west of Thermopolis.

Patton said they talked with the landowner about his ranch operations and what impact the proposed new airport would have on those operations.

The landowner was concerned where the beacon, or light, for the airport would be located, wondering if it would be shining through his house with each turn.

GDA said they haven't deter-

mined where the beacon would be located at this time, but assured him there were steps that could be taken to prevent that from happening.

Another area of concern was what kind of impact there would be to his current structures and usage of pasture land.

There are smaller pastures the landowner rotates his livestock through and the concern was the runway would cut through the middle of the pastures, rendering them unusable.

The landowner suggested a complete buy out of the land and buildings with the option to move the buildings to another location approximately a mile away.

Patton said they were pleased the landowner had suggested this route as it would make things much easier for everyone.

"That would have to be worked out with WYDOT," Patton said. "But it would be much better for the county."

The commissioners agreed purchasing the entire property would be best now rather than purchasing a portion now and having to expand later. In addition, some of the surrounding land could be leased back to the landowner for pasture.

"We just need to make sure it's all part of the negotiation process," commissioner Brad Basse said. "It would be a win-win for everyone involved."

The next step is getting permission to go onto the land and mark out the runway with survey flags.

GDA is also working on another draft layout of the plan, saying it is now much different from the original master plan.

More than a mouth full

Anthony Vargas shows unusual form at the hot dog eating contest sponsored by Dairyland. Dave “Deputy Dog” Larson chewed through the competition, eating 14 dogs to be declared this year's winner of the annual contest.

— Cindy Glasson photo

Thermopolis PD getting canine officer

by Tom Burkindine

Community businesses and residents turned out in a big way to assist the Thermopolis Police Department in acquiring a drug detection dog.

Throughout the month the department has been accepting donations on behalf of the National Association of Chiefs of Police. The funds accrued would then be matched by NACOP and used to purchase a K-9, have it trained and train an officer to handle the animal.

The goal was set at \$2,500 but the community donated approximately \$4,300, which should completely cover the cost when matched by NACOP. A rescue dog has now been ordered from Midwest

K-9 in Iowa and the animal will be trained by the end of July.

Officer Mandy McDonald will meet the trainer in South Dakota in early August to take possession of Maris, a female chocolate lab that is believed to be 2 years old. The new partners will spend a few weeks getting to know each other before traveling to Des Moines, Iowa, later in the month for final training and certification.

Maris' prime responsibility will be searching for illegal drugs. She will be trained to sit when she detects narcotics.

Dr. Dan Miller of Cloud Peak Veterinary Clinic in Worland has donated Maris' vaccinations for life.