

Thermopolis  
Hot Springs

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## Census says county population decreases

by Cindy Glasson  
A recent report from the U.S. Census Bureau shows Hot Springs County is one of only two counties in the state to show a decrease in population over the last decade.

Hot Springs County declined 1.4 percent in population, approximately 70 people, over the last 10 years.

Platte County showed a decline in population of 1.6 percent.

Hot Springs County Clerk Hans Odde said the decline has not had an effect on the county coffers.

"Since I have been clerk (eight years) our assessed valuation has doubled but that is due to the price of oil," Odde said.

The treasurer's office hasn't seen much of an impact with the population loss, either in registration of vehicles or monies collected according to treasurer Mickeyjean Ford.

"There have been so many changes over that time period," Ford said. "Companies leaving the county, lack of jobs for our young people, an aging population, a major recession as well as a decline in mineral production. At the same time, (you have) ramped inflation."

Ford said gold on March 1, 2000, was \$292.90 an ounce, whereas gold on March 1, 2011, was \$1,420.75.

"An increase in grants has colored our collection, making it look like we have millions of ex-

tra dollars to spend when actually our buying power has dropped," she said.

Population in the county has gone from 4,882 people in 2000 to 4,812 in 2010, according to the report.

Breaking the numbers down shows East Thermopolis lost 20 residents over the 10-year period, going from 274 residents to 254, a 7.3-percent drop.

Thermopolis actually lost 163 people taking the population down to 3,009 from 3,172 in 2000, a 5.1-percent loss.

Evening things out was the town of Kirby with an increase in population of 35 people, going from 57 to 92 residents over the past decade, a 61-percent increase.

Amy Bittner, an economist with the State of Wyoming's Economic Analysis Division, said Wyoming actually ranked at the top in the nation for annual job growth between 2006 and 2008.

"The population loss from rural areas is not unique to Wyoming," Bittner said. "Other rural areas in the U.S. are also experiencing an out-migration of people seeking job opportunities and lifestyle attractions from bigger cities and towns."

As a whole, Wyoming experienced the strongest increase in population over the last 10 years than has been seen since the 1980s. Total Wyoming residents rose 14.1 percent to 536,626, according to the census.

### Celebrating Dr. Seuss' 107th birthday



Dr. Seuss' 107th birthday was celebrated at Ralph Witters Elementary School on March 2. A number of high school students, including a group from Rhonda Stryker's Adult Living class, read Dr. Seuss books to RWE students. Above, Dr. Seuss character Cat in the Hat, portrayed by paraeducator Madyson Dreiling, reads to kindergarten student Kallie Van Heule.

—JoeSovaphoto

## Town utility rate increases head toward second reading

The Thermopolis Town Council approved on first reading three ordinances to raise utility rates for water, sewer and sanitation services at its March 1 meeting.

The town is in need of raising the rates in order to close a \$326,000 deficit projected for the 2011-12 fiscal year.

If the council passes all three ordinances, the increases should raise an additional \$362,400 for the enterprise funds to eliminate the deficit.

Mayor's assistant Fred Crosby said he would have preferred smaller increases over the past few years instead of the larger increase at this time.

He said the town put off raising rates until the last possible moment and it has already taken all of the steps it can to cut costs from its end, including cutting three positions within the past year

to attrition.

Much of the projected increase in cost is due to an electrical rate increase. All of the town services use an abundance of electricity to provide the services 24 hours a day.

The water rate increase creates a monthly base charge for water service depending on the size of tap used. The sewer rate increase raises the base rate and adds a usage fee based on the amount of sewage used in the low-water months of December, January and February.

The second reading of the ordinances will take place during the council's next regular meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday at town hall.

### Commercial sanitation rates

Residences currently pay a flat rate for sanitation service of \$14.50 a month. The new ordinance would raise the rate to \$18.30 a month. Under the new ordinance, the town has raised the rate for commercial solid waste collection proportionally for the number of containers a business fills on average each month. The number of containers are not determined by how many times the containers are emptied, but the actual number of containers located at the business.

Currently, one container is \$75; two, \$140; three, \$180; four, \$250; and more than four, 75 percent of \$75 per container.

Under the proposed ordinance the new rates would raise the charge for one container to \$96 a month; two, \$180; three, \$230; and

four, \$320. More than four would be 75 percent of \$96 per container.

Most businesses around town share containers and the rates are currently divided by the number of businesses who share a container. If two businesses use one container, each business pays the \$37.50 rate for 1/2 of the container. If three businesses use one container, each business pays the \$25 rate for 1/3 of the container. If four businesses use a container, each business pays the rate of \$22 for 1/4 of the container. If more than four businesses use a container they pay the minimum rate of \$22.

Under the new ordinance the rates for fractions are brought in line so the total cost of the container equals \$96. The rate for 1/2 the container will be \$48; 1/3, \$32; and 1/4, \$28. The minimum rate to use a container would be \$28.

The new rates are intended to help the town bridge the gap between projected costs of the services, which is anticipated to be about \$139,000 for the sanitation fund in next fiscal year.

The rate increase is expected to bring in about \$103,200 for the fund next year, which will not completely close the gap in the budget.

Town engineer Heath Overfield of Engineering Associates said the town could make up the difference when it renegotiates landfill-use contracts with other governmental and business entities for the next year.

### Shopping for treasures



Louise Odde and Rose Andreen sort through the various treasures at the annual Rummage and Pie Sale at Holy Trinity Episcopal Church last Saturday.

— Cindy Glasson photo

## Wyoming Legislature approves 204 bills

### Concealed carry bill becomes law

by Joe Sov

Rep. Lorraine Quarberg (R-HD28) stood at the podium at the state capitol in Cheyenne last Thursday and commended Gov. Matt Mead for signing legislation that makes it legal for a person age 21 or older to carry a concealed weapon without a permit. Quarberg also gave thanks to Sen. Kit Jennings, the sponsor of Senate Bill 47.

"This is a culmination of seven years' worth of work for me," Quarberg said Monday. "This is a very, very big deal for me."

She showed her appreciation for support of the bill by the governor.

"He restored some rights to American people," Quarberg said.

She added the need to keep proper permitting for ownership of guns "on the books."

The law will go into effect July 1.

Moments after Gov. Mead signed SF47 into law, he put his pen to House Bill 167. That is a castle doctrine modification that in essence defined the

word "habitation," according to Quarberg, sponsor of the bill. It modifies presumption related to self-defense and defense of another "wherever you're staying overnight," she said. That now includes a home or habitation, including a trailer, camper or tent.

Quarberg was a co-sponsor of HB152, very rare or uncommon area designations. It was signed by the governor last Thursday as well. The legislation related to the Environmental Quality Act, which prevented multiple use of some state land.

"It wasn't in the best interest of Wyoming," Quarberg said, and she supports changes made in the act via HB152. It eliminated the authority of the Environmental Quality Council to designate lands as "very rare" or "uncommon."

The new law states, "In no event shall privately owned lands be newly designated as very rare or uncommon on or

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### Economic analysis key legislation

by Karla Pomeroy

The 61st Wyoming Legislature approved 204 bills during the recent session in Cheyenne, with Gov. Matt Mead already signing a plethora of them. They include economic analysis legislation, allowing the state Administration and Information Department to provide economic analysis for each of the 23 counties. The counties can then use the information to show economic impacts on local, state and federal project proposals including BLM and Forest Service management plans.

The bill was vetoed last year by then-Gov. Dave Freudenthal.

Sen. Gerald Geis (R-SD20, Worland) said at the start of the session he was confident the bill would be passed. He said funding stayed intact for the project but it would take a while for the department to begin the work and about two years or more before information would be available for counties.

Geis said in a wrap-up interview Monday that the bills he wanted to push did go through, both Agriculture Committee and individually sponsored bills.

"Some of the bills I introduced I knew wouldn't go anywhere, but it got the topic out there," Geis said. One such bill, Senate File 8 on elections for special districts, will be looked at during the interim by the Corporations and Elections Committee. "That's great, that's who should be looking at it," he said.

Geis said he was pleased to see SF100 Cruelty to Animals approved, although it was amended from its original version. The act establishes a "cruelty to household pet animals protection account, to be used by the attorney general to reimburse county law enforcement agencies for eligible expenses regarding household pet animal cruelty cases" that fall under section p of the new

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# Quarberg

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after July 1, 2011.”

Bark beetle infestation in a number of national forests in Wyoming is an ongoing concern and the legislature addressed the issue by passing Senate Joint Resolution 7. It was signed by Gov. Mead on Thursday.

SJR7 allows state and local authorities to take action to mitigate damages caused by bark beetles and to prevent future damages and epidemics.

## Focus on public education

Education was at the forefront during the Wyoming Legislature and two major bills came out of it. SF70 and SF146 passed the Senate and House and were awaiting the governor’s signature as of Tuesday.

Quarberg said there were a number of amendments to SF70, education accountability, before it went to the governor. The detailed bill creates the Wyoming Accountability in Education Act and establishes a statewide education accountability system. It focuses on performance-based standards and Quarberg supports the details of the bill.

“We have a lot of work to do on education accountability,” she said.

SF146 establishes the teacher accountability act, “requiring school district teacher performance evaluations to be based in part upon student achievement; directing the state board of education to establish performance criteria based upon educational accountability measures to be established by law; establishing performance as a basis for contract determinations...”

“It was a big year for education,” Quarberg said of the legislature, mentioning recalibration was also needed.

She spoke about the \$1 billion a year the legislature devotes to public education.

“We want to better determine how our students are performing. We all want the same thing,” Quarberg said. “We (Wyoming) can have the best education system in the United States and we now have statutes in place to develop that framework.”

## Supplemental budget, health care

“There were a lot of bills dealing with economic development,” Quarberg said of the 40-day session. “That’s always important to Wyoming.”

Of the \$256 million supplemental budget, \$15 million will go to recruit mega-data centers in the state. Quarberg indicated the target is the city of Laramie.

“We want to stay focused on staying impact-friendly,” she said, with money being provided to counties for roads and other projects.

Towns and counties will receive \$10 million from the supplemental budget and there is \$35 million in a consensus revenue block grant.

The legislature directed Gov. Mead to devote \$125 million for towns and counties for the next biennium (2013-14).

“They (towns and counties) want a guaranteed revenue stream,” Quarberg said. “They want money earmarked for them.”

The Health Care Exchange Act cleared the Senate and House and went to Gov. Mead for his endorsement. An amendment to the Affordable Care Act was signed by the governor. It allows options for the Medicaid program, with money set aside, and sets up a committee.

Wyoming’s Legislature meets for a 20-day budget session early next year.



**Rep. Lorraine Quarberg speaks after Gov. Matt Mead, in background, signed the concealed carry bill. Sen. Kit Jennings, sponsor of the bill, is also behind Quarberg. — Jonathan Green photo**

# Supplemental budget signed

With the sound of a gavel, the 61st Wyoming Legislature wrapped up the 2011 General Session Thursday at the State Capitol in Cheyenne.

At the start of the session on Jan. 11, a total of 432 bills were introduced. The Legislature passed a total of 204 bills. The Senate introduced 160 pieces of legislation and 101 of those bills passed in both the House and Senate. The House introduced 272 bills with 103 garnering the approval of both bodies. Legislation that passed both

houses has either been signed or is waiting to be signed or vetoed by Gov. Matt Mead.

In addition to those bills, the state’s supplemental budget bill was signed by the governor last Wednesday. The bill includes \$255,999,860 in new General Fund (GF) spending, \$221,374,714 in federal funds and 243,568,839 in other funds for a total of \$720,943,413 in state spending through June 30, 2012.

Both the House and Senate have addressed a broad range

of issues affecting Wyoming residents and while some of these laws will take effect immediately, many will not go into effect until July 1 of this year. Lawmakers will begin their interim committee work in the coming weeks. The Legislature’s Management Council also finalized interim committee topics last week, which can be found at <http://legisweb.state.wy.us>. Wyoming’s Legislature will convene again beginning Feb. 13, 2012, for a 20-day Budget Session.

# Geis

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act. Section p states that “a person commits household pet animal cruelty if he/she keeps any household pet in a manner that results in chronic or repeated serious physical harm to the pet or keeps the pet confined in conditions that constitute a public health hazard.” The bill allocated \$100,000 for the account.

The governor signed the bill last Thursday.

Geis said he was also pleased to see HB8, the Wyoming Traditional Food Act, approved that grants church socials, bazaars and other gatherings where food is being served but not sold an exemption from a health license. The governor signed the bill Thursday.

He said he did not support the concealed weapons bill because it would be tougher on law enforcement. In the past if an officer pulled someone over and called in a plate, it would show if the owner had a concealed carry permit. Now there will be no way of knowing who is carrying a concealed weapon.

## Impact of approved bills

Of the 204 bills approved by the Legislature, Geis said maybe 100 would impact the majority of the residents in Wyoming. The other legislation impacts certain sectors. HB202 affects only those with property along railroads and involves proper fencing; SF58 on wind energy landowner rights impacts only those areas where wind energy development is going on.

HB151 on hydropower development authorizes loans for hydropower development to municipalities, irrigation districts and special districts.

Geis said a canal company in Heart Mountain received a loan for a hydrogenerator and contracted with an electric company for the power generated. The debt was paid off in about three years and revenue now can be used on operations and upgrades of the canal.

The bill provides funding for loans through the State Loan and Investment Board for more hydropower projects, Geis said.

There were some feel-good veteran legislation bills passed including designating March 30 as Wyoming Veterans Welcome Home Day and designating Highway 14A between Cody and Powell as the Wyoming Veterans Memorial Highway. Geis said why the entire 14A was not designated he does not know, but that stretch does include the Heart Mountain Relocation Center.

Geis said topics for the interim were set, with the Ag Committee assigning four topics:

- Pesticide law, animal damage and update of ag statutes, which includes researching the statutes on use of pesticides and consistency in licensing; study animal damage and what authority is under the Animal Management Damage Board; and general review of ag statutes.
- Mitigation of bark beetle.
- Study specific aspects of irrigation districts.
- Emergency topics as necessary.

Geis said with next year being a 20-day budget session the interim topics likely won’t result in many bills being prepared for the budget session, unless there are emergency issues that come up that need to be addressed right away.

# Mead: progress in core areas

In separate speeches to the Wyoming Senate and House of Representatives, Gov. Matt Mead thanked lawmakers for leaving their homes and families to come to Cheyenne and work on behalf of the state.

Mead said with the Legislature they made a lot of progress in addressing core areas. Those included jobs and economic growth, technology, infrastructure, supporting communities, streamlining state government, education and seeking Wyoming solutions.

“I am pleased that you all tackled so many of those issues and did it so very well. I

am pleased as we look at the bills that come down that I have signed that the State of Wyoming should rightfully be proud of its Legislature,” Mead said in his speech Thursday, the final day of the legislative session.

The highlights Mead pointed to were the passage of bills enhancing the contractor preference law, the manufacturers’ sales tax exemption, incentives for data centers and money to improve infrastructure. The Legislature appropriated \$45 million for highway projects and \$45 million for local governments.

“This is a way to further

spur economic development and in part that is because 75 percent of that \$45 million will go to capital projects,” Mead said. “Such projects help lay the groundwork to attract new businesses and employers. We need to have the infrastructure in place that will bring in new businesses and help our companies grow.”

Mead also thanked the Legislature for the hard work on improving education. He said that the bills passed this year show Wyoming wants to have the best schools in the country and will not settle for poor performances.