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Thermopolis
Hot Springs

Independent Record

SPECIAL INTERNET PREVIEW

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Temperature changes cause flooding

by Joe Sovia

There appears to be quite a contrast in terms of weather when comparing the first couple of months of winter for 2012-13 and 2013-14.

After temperatures as low as 35 below zero in Hot Springs County on Feb. 6, the mercury shot up to the high-50s last weekend—resulting in widespread flooding, including in the Black Mountain Road area north of Thermopolis and along Highway 20 on the south edge of town. A woman said there was floodwater on Highway 170 (Owl Creek Road) when she drove into town Monday morning.

Sandbagging was the order of the day Sunday afternoon at the Travis and Lisa Bomengen property on Highway 20 North, about seven miles north of Thermopolis. Lisa said she was overwhelmed by the response by neighbors and other friends who helped keep floodwater out of their home.

There was also flooding reported at the Frank and Robin Roling property north of Thermop, among other locations. Jim Skelton called in to say there was flooding on Skelton Road north of Black Mountain Road. A mobile home on the south edge of town, on the west bank of the Big Horn River, was totally surrounded by floodwater Sunday.

Melting snow also resulted in water flowing into some Thermopolis businesses.

During the three-day period of Feb. 5-7 (Wednesday-Friday) this year, the temperature dropped to a low of 23 degrees below zero, according to the National Weather Service's (NWS) reporting station at the Thermopolis water treatment plant. The high temperature Feb. 6 was just minus-2 degrees.

Bill Gordon, the Hot Springs County Emergency Management coordinator, forwarded a NWS email to the Independent Record the morning of Feb. 6 with a listing of the low temperatures in the Big Horn Basin. In Hot Springs County, the lowest official reading was 35 below zero. Fortunately, little wind

in the county meant the wind chill was not much colder than the thermometer readings.

In Washakie County, Ten Sleep reported a low of 41 below at 7 a.m. Feb. 6. Several readings in Worland showed 33 below zero. However, wind chill was 52 below zero at Ten Sleep and 40 below in Greybull.

During the first five days of February in 2013, the high temperature in Thermopolis was a balmy 48 degrees—much the same as what we experienced late last week and into this week. The high temperature reported at the water treatment plan in February was no lower than 40 degrees last year.

The unseasonably warm weather in February 2013 was a carryover from January, when a high of 52 degrees was logged on Jan. 26. The lowest recorded low temperature recorded at the treatment plant was 13 below zero on Jan. 14—after a high of 49 four days earlier.

Precipitation levels in the winter of 2013-14 continue to be impressive and favorable to help remedy the ongoing drought. We had about a half-inch of moisture in January this year compared to nearly an inch during the same period in 2013. That is misleading since the snowpack by the end of January this year was much higher than at the same time in 2013.

Snowfall in the lower elevations of Hot Springs County is off to a slow start in February, although the snowpack in the area mountain ranges are adding depth as the month goes on.

In which month in 2013 did Hot Springs County get the most moisture? It was September with 2.84 inches. That includes rain and the snow that was converted to the amount of moisture actually received. An inch of snow would compute to about a tenth of an inch of moisture. The driest month in 2013? It was August, during the “dog days of summer” when Thermop received just .09 inches of moisture. That was followed by two good months of precipitation.

Fireman's Ball



Lisa Blakesley and Jeffery Sherril danced up a storm Saturday night at the annual Fireman's Ball at the VFW. The event was well attended with the dance floor filled with fun for most of the evening.
— Cindy Glasson photo

Winters: Preschool funding fails introduction

by Cindy Glasson

Work during this 2014 Wyoming State Legislative session has been fast and furious with just 20 days to get through a plethora of bills.

A total of 31 bills have been handled in the last week including some that have been introduced to the House or Senate, failed introduction or placed on General File.

“What an astounding pace a budget session has,” said Nathan Winters, representative for House District 28, of which Hot Springs County is a part. “With the

consideration of a bill happening every 3-and-a-half minutes, it has been busy.”

Two bills of particular interest in this area include House Bill (HB) 26, the preschool funding bill, and HB 78, dealing with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its reach within the state.

Preschool programs

Hot Springs County is fortunate to have an excellent preschool system within the district headed up by Amy Ready.

Ready's program has been a premier

model for other districts within the state for the last few years with educators coming from all corners of Wyoming to learn how to create the same successful preschool program in their own districts.

The legislature failed to introduce HB 26, which would have provided funding to districts for preschool programs and given oversight of such programs to the Director of Public Instruction.

“This bill started off in a dangerous place with giving authority of the program to the now outgoing Director of Public Instruction,” Winters said.

“Again, I am for local control and feel that the daycares and preschools of our communities would suffer from this kind of legislation.”

EPA vs. Wyoming

HB 78 would authorize the state's attorney general to take action against the EPA when that entity begins making rules outside its authority.

The EPA and Wyoming have gained national attention of late with the EPA threatening to redraw tribal boundaries within the state, affecting not just Hot

Springs County but Fremont County and others as well.

According to Winters, the legislature created the Federal Natural Resource Policy Account to help county commissioners and local districts stand up to the EPA when it creates issues that could harm the tax base of a county.

This legislation, HB 78, would expand the account to allow the governor to have the attorney general pursue action when necessary.

See Winters page 10

Resolution to eliminate state superintendent fails

by Karla Pomeroy

Basin Republican-Rustler

Education issues have been the focus at the start of the Wyoming Legislative Budget Session with Sen. Gerald Geis (R-SD20, Worland) voting against measures relating to the state superintendent of public instruction.

The Senate failed to introduce a joint resolution that would have eliminated the state superintendent as an elected official starting in 2019.

“That's up to general public. It's not up to me to give that power to the governor. I want the public to have that authority. It's worked for 114 years in Wyoming so why change it,” Geis said.

The legislative leadership is working on getting approval for a special session

to deal with the State Supreme Court's decision regarding Senate File 104.

Senate File 106 initially failed and was then introduced on reconsideration. The education committee approved the bill last Thursday. The bill provides for a process to address the 2014 Supreme Court decision relating to the structure and oversight of the state's public school system; requires a legislative study; provides for the delegation of powers and duties relating to the administration of the state's school system and provides for an appropriation of \$20,000.

The bill would allow for a special session as well.

Geis said, “I voted against it. I don't know why the state doesn't just give it up and let it go.”

Another education issue is allowing school employees to have firearms in schools. There are two similar bills going through the legislature, one in the Senate and one in the House.

Senate File 109, “Freedom of teachers in protecting students,” was introduced unanimously on a 30-0 vote.

Geis said in his weekly Monday morning interview that he initially supports the legislation but would listen to debate on the floor. “We advertise to every kook that schools are a firearm-free zone. With this legislation they might think about it twice if they think there are other guns on the premises.”

The bill would allow each school board to decide if they wanted to allow employees to have firearms and to adopt its own rules

and regulations. The Senate File states that any “teacher” would be allowed to have a firearm. The teacher would have to go through an application procedure through the school district, apply for a concealed carry permit, complete a mental evaluation screening and complete 16 hours of firearm training.

Whether that bill will get through the Senate and House is unknown, Geis said, noting that there are more than 300 bills prefiled for the budget session. “The Senate is doing better that the House on bill introduction and a lot of those bills won't make it even if they are introduced.” (Introduction requires two-thirds vote for nonbudgetary bills.)

Bills must pass third reading by Friday in their House of Origin to move on. SF109

was not listed on General File Monday.

Land bill fails

While most of the ag committee bills and Geis' own sponsored bills are moving forward, the Senate did kill the agency land sale bill that would have required each state department to take any land acquisition or transfer to the State Land Board.

“Other departments that have state lands hit us on the floor. They want to keep control. We'll try it again next year,” Geis said.

Approved on third reading by the Senate already are SF0006 that would move groundwater-contested cases

See Geis page 10

Broomstick pool



It's a little tougher shooting pool with a broom than a cue, but that didn't stop Gary Evans from winning the broomstick pool tournament at Mac's Bar Saturday afternoon. It was a Bartenders Challenge event. - Cindy Glasson photo

Stars of Thermopolis program set Tuesday

Local talent will be in the spotlight the evening of Tuesday, Feb. 25 during the Stars of Thermopolis competition.

The talent show begins at 6 p.m. in the Hot Springs County School District auditorium.

Gottsche Rehabilitation and Wellness Center is the sponsor of the event, which succeeds the Kiwanis Stars of Tomorrow talent show.

According to organizer Lisa Bomengen, there are 11 acts scheduled to perform in a non-competitive setting.

“This is simply a showcase of some of our local talent,” she said.

Five divisions will be fea-

tured, including prekindergarten/kindergarten; first through fourth grade; fifth through eighth grade; ninth through 12th grade; and adult.

This is the first year for an adult division in the local talent show.

Entries for the Stars of Thermopolis talent show closed Feb. 17. Dress rehearsals will be held at 4 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 23 at the auditorium.

There will be a \$50 first-place award in each division.

Everyone is welcome to attend the talent show Tuesday evening.

There is no admission charge.

Winters

"As you know, the recent ruling by the EPA in regard to the Reservation took in over a million acres and touched so many counties that it is best to have the state coordinate the actions necessary to battle back," Winters said. "I applaud the EPA's decision to stay their previous decision regarding air quality."

"The sad truth is, I do not expect that that is the permanent

answer. We will have to stay prepared and vigilant to protect the economy of our state.”

Guns in the classroom

A bill was introduced Feb. 14 into the House, HB 111, the school safety and security bill, sponsored by Reps. John Eklund (R-Laramie/Goshen), Lynn Hutchings (R-Laramie) and Mark Semlek (R-Crook/

Weston), which would allow the possession of firearms by school district employees on school property.

The bill has been placed on General File within the House, awaiting further action. The Independent Record will watch this particular bill in the coming weeks and speak at length with Winters regarding the legislation.

Geis

to the courts instead of back to the state engineer's office and SF0007 that provides for brucellosis surveillance in an area of imminent concern.

Geis' bill allowing installation of light bulbs without a certified electrical contractor passed second reading on Tuesday.

Geis said the Senate was expected to work on the budget Monday and Tuesday with third reading on Thursday.

He said there would also be work on the omnibus water bill for construction projects, which includes a \$9.2 million project for the Big Horn Regional Water District to connect the new well near Greybull to the system.

Third reading

Other bills that have passed the Senate and are on the way to the House include:

- SF12 – State Education Program, clarifies authority of the state. It states in part, “The development and implementation of the uniform standards is the responsibility of the state board in consultation with school districts, and shall not require approval by or oversight of the federal government.”
- SF13– Enrollment expansion of Hathaway scholarship program that would allow Hathaway

from page 1

scholarships to be used during summer school. SF55 was also approved increasing amounts of the scholarships to \$840, \$1,260 and \$1,680, respectively, for the three levels.

- SF14 – Court Security Funding appropriates \$10 million for 50 percent matching grants to counties for court security.
- SF43 – Prioritization of


municipal solid waste facility projects that has Big Horn County as third to close the south landfill and make it a transfer station with \$1.5 million for the transfer station portion and \$2.5 million for closure. The town of Thermopolis is listed 24th on the list for transfer station and 30th for closure for total project cost of \$4.5 million.

ArtStroll attraction




Janet Chimenti looks over some of the paintings available at Flying Eagle Gallery during the 2nd Friday ArtStroll in downtown Thermopolis. Several local businesses were open for the monthly event, drawing folks downtown to enjoy the unusually warm evening.

— Cindy Glasson photo

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Quips & Health
By Tony Deromedi





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