

by Zachary White

In order to give community members a chance to voice their concerns about the future of Hot Springs State Park, there will be an open house Jan. 26 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. in the Fire Hall, 400 South 14th St.

This open house comes following a meeting of the Hot Springs State Park Master Plan Steering Committee, who are in the process of crafting a new master plan for the state park.

Community members are encouraged to bring forward any ideas they have for improvements or changes to the park

they believe should be included in the master plan.

The steering committee is still in the early stages of creating the master plan, which includes possible improvements to the park's paths and trails, parking areas, signage around town, and countless other changes that have not yet been refined down to a single list.

Hot Springs State Park Superintendent Kevin Skates said he hopes people share their concerns so that the steering committee knows what the community wants from their park.

"We feel it's important to have local and regional support from people who are visitors to the park — who use the park," Skates said.

Skates also pointed out that although surveys are given out throughout the year, and those are helpful, they also want people to come out and participate during the open house.

The current master plan is more than 30 years old, drafted in 1984, which was made as a guide for the long-term physical improvement, use, and management of the 1,100-acre park.

Officials said that although some things would change in the new document, the old plan is still being used as a template to create the new document.

Monday is the first of three open-house-style community workshops aimed at getting public opinion of changes to the park. The next meeting will be in May, with the final meeting set for September.

Anyone interested in more information, or those unable to attend the open house, can go to [hotspringsmasterplan.com](http://hotspringsmasterplan.com) to provide feedback and stay informed.

## Winters defends HB0083

by Cindy Glasson

The Wyoming Legislature got underway last week with their oath of office on Tuesday, jumping right into things with 228 bills officially listed.

According to Representative Nathan Winters, there may be many more bills that work their way to the floor before final bill drafting day, Feb. 2.

**Backlash**

Winters said one bill he is co-sponsoring with fellow representative Cheri Steinmetz and senator Dan Dockstader is creating some backlash, mostly due to miscommunication he feels was created through an article printed recently in the Casper Star Tribune.

The bill, HB0083, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, is designed to protect an individual's right to a clear conscience in their private business without the fear that government may force them to close if they turn down a job that would violate their conscience.



Nathan Winters

"Let me clarify an issue being miscommunicated by a few in the media," Winters said. "The bill does not prohibit County Clerks from issuing marriage licenses to same-sex couples if that becomes Wyoming practice."

"While it would provide a clerk in a large office an extra measure of protection, there would have to be someone who could sign. In a small county clerk's office where there may be only one signer, a court would, most likely, find that the government has a "compelling interest" in making sure that the County Clerk, in their official elected capacity, would have to be able to sign a marriage license."

As we have seen with many publicized instances across the country, small business owners are facing fines, the loss of business opportunities and some are being forced to take classes on "remediation" for turning down jobs that violate their conscience.

One well-known case involved a bakery on the east coast that refused to bake a wedding cake for a same-sex couple.

While they graciously offered information on other bakeries that would be more than willing to create the cake, a law suit was filed against the bakery for discrimination.

Since 1993, 19 states (Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia), the District of Columbia and the Federal Government have passed the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) with tremendous bi-partisan support.

The courts of 6 other states have given the same protection as the RFRA, and a 7th state, New York, is almost-as-good as the RFRA.

Winters' bill would close this particular gap in Wyoming law.

"Private citizens of Wyoming should not have to live with the fear that government could force them, under the threat of punishment, to give up their individual rights of conscience (freedom)," he said.

HB0083 (RFRA) also makes it clear that if someone claims a religious exemption so that they can try to do something that is contrary to the laws of the state of Wyoming they will not be able to do so.

Winters has received a plethora of backlash regarding the bill because of the miscommunication presented in the media about it. With the Associated Press picking up the story, Winters has been inundated with hate mail from across the country.

"I am honored to carry a bill that protects the rights of individuals in the communities I represent," Winters said.



## Snow isn't hampering fun

First grader Destiny Abrams doesn't let a little snow keep her from swooshing down the slide during the bustling recess at Ralph Witters Elementary School Wednesday. The children were swinging, sliding and chasing one another like it was a summer day.

- Dennis Nierzwicki photo

## First same-sex marriage licence issued



Karen Hitchens helps Denise Dozan and Maureen Stanton fill out paperwork for their marriage license.

-Zachary White photo

by Zachary White

Hot Springs County joined counties across the state by giving out its first same-sex marriage license.

Last Friday, the Hot Springs County Clerk's office issued the county's first same-sex marriage license to a couple from Natrona County.

Maureen Stanton and Denise Dozan applied for their marriage license on their way to visit family.

"We never thought we'd see the day," Dozan said, reflecting back on the state of public opinion since the two started dating in 1991.

Although they said they love one another, Stanton said they are getting married in order to have an easier time filing for benefits and being seen as a couple in the eyes of the state.

"I feel like we've been accepted as a couple for a num-

ber of years," Stanton said.

They said that their families have accepted them for who they are, and the marriage itself is more of a formality.

"We made a commitment to each other a long time ago," Dozan said.

And even though they have had some of their friends, those who are in a same-sex relationship, get married in other states where public opinion is more open to same-sex marriages, the women said they thought it was important to get married in their home state.

Following a federal court ruling last October where the court found that Wyoming's ban on same-sex marriages was unconstitutional, the state started issuing licenses.

Wyoming is one of 37 states that currently recognize same-sex marriages.