

# Community divided over HSSP master plan

by April S. Kelley  
The Hot Springs State Park Master Plan public input open house meeting held on Monday evening divided the community on many key issues.

The initial release of the draft document on April 18 included a chart with existing facilities and proposed facilities. Originally the chart included the two existing outdoor pools and the existing two indoor pools in the park with a proposal for only one indoor pool and one outdoor pool in the draft master plan. This would mean that one of the already existing facilities would be eliminated. However, the chart was revised on April 29 to include both existing facilities in the proposed draft master plan.

This revision did not stop people from the community from believing that the Star Plunge — the existing facility without a long-term 20-year lease — would be eliminated from the park.

Planning Coordinator for Wyoming State Parks Historic Sites and Trails Todd Thibodeau said that not including the Star Plunge in the original plan was an error.

“We heard loud and clear that no one wants to see the Star Plunge go, so we added it back into the plan,” he said. “It’s [the master plan] still a rough draft at this point.”

Star Plunge owner Roland Luehne said he wanted to be partners with the Wyoming State Parks and Natural Resources.

“We want peace in the park,” he said. “We want things to run smoothly. We want advancements in the park. We don’t want to fight. We want a better park. We want a better facility. I want expansion and you guys want more attractions, let’s do that. I’d like to be a partner with you guys, not your enemy.”

Several members of the community seem to want the master plan, while others seem to not want a plan at all or they want a plan explaining in more detail the plans for facilities like Star Plunge and Tepee Pools.

After explaining that the Star Plunge was added to the



photo by April S. Kelley

## Facing off

Star Plunge owner Roland Luehne stresses his concerns regarding the Hot Springs State Park Draft Master Plan and the future of his business with Director of the Wyoming Department of State Parks and Natural Resources Milward Simpson.

draft of the Hot Springs State Park Master Plan, Director of the Wyoming State Parks and Natural Resources Milward Simpson explained what’s been happening regarding the reduction of the mineral spring.

“The big spring is reducing rapidly,” Simpson said. “It has been going down for many, many years. It has reduced by about half of what it was in 1965. We have to deal with that decline. I think we need a plan right now more than ever.”

Citizens expressed concerns about the pools becoming cold and chlorinated over time because of the reduction of water.

Resident Gail Schneck said she had brain surgery in 1984 and that Star Plunge was the only facility in the park with water deep enough to help her rehabilitate after surgery.

“After my surgery, I went to Star Plunge because it was the only facility with a deep end where I could soak and do my exercises,” she said. “That was the first place I could turn my head and not feel sick. If you turn that into a cold-water pool, not only have you created something that you can find any place in the world, but those of us who are absolutely needing a therapeutic place to be, to do

the exercises and to get some of our use of our bodies back will have nowhere to go.”

Simpson said there are a lot of people who use the pools for their health benefits. He explained that there is a balance of mineral water and potable water the pools have to use to preserve the resource.

“Many people use the pools for their health benefits,” he said. “That’s one of the main reasons that since the big spring is going down, we have to preserve the hot water and for some things, we will have to use cold water.”

Daniel Bleak, a resident of

Thermopolis and manager of the Best Western inside the state park, echoed Simpson’s explanation.

“The point is the mineral spring is declining — we don’t have a choice over that,” he said. “In 1995, we had a minor earthquake which rendered the high school unusable. We got a new high school out of that, but the flipside of that is we lost some flow from the mineral springs. It’s geological. It’s a natural formation. We can’t control how much water comes out of that. We can’t control how much water we get to use out of that. What the master plan

does for us locals is it provides us with an alternative. We aren’t talking about getting rid of the hot water, we’re talking about revitalizing the park.”

Hot Springs State Park Superintendent Kevin Skates said the draft master plan gives the park many opportunities.

“We’ve put \$7.1 million into the park during the ten years that I’ve been here,” he said. “The master plan is a \$25 million plan over the course of 20 years. Let’s work together and bring some of that money into our park. We’re not trying to

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## Travelers in Wind River Canyon can expect delays during emergency rock scaling project

An emergency rock scaling project will focus on removal of 6-7 large rocks from a hillside above U.S. 20/Wyoming 789 and is scheduled to begin as soon as Thursday, May 5 in Wind River Canyon.

The \$41,000 rock scaling project, located about 10 miles south of Thermopolis at milepost 121.9, is dependent upon favorable weather, according to Wyoming Department of Transportation area maintenance supervisor Clint Huckfeldt of Thermopolis.

The highway curve where the rocks are located inside Wind River Canyon is known locally as Big Windy; it is the same curve where WYDOT has a live web cam stationed providing real-time information to travelers at [www.wyoroad.info](http://www.wyoroad.info).

The rocks were exposed through erosion and associated rockfall during April rain and snow events in Hot Springs and Fremont counties.

GeoStabilization International of Grand Junction, Colo., is the contractor on the rock scaling project. The GSI project involves moving 6-7 rocks to edge of the highway. WYDOT workers will break the large rocks into smaller rocks, and remove and haul the rocks out of the canyon.

Huckfeldt said the project is tentatively scheduled to begin Thursday, and it should be complete by Wednesday, May 11. “Travelers should expect delays of up to 20 minutes when the

rock scaling project begins,” he said. “Depending on the weather, the project could start next week.”

In the meantime, WYDOT’s Thermopolis maintenance crew is working this week in the Big Windy curve area, attempting to clear some recent rockfall so the contractor may access the work area and complete its work. “Traffic delays are expected,” Huckfeldt said.

National Weather Service officials in Riverton called Huckfeldt Monday with news about an upcoming storm event this coming weekend. NWS is forecasting weekend rains that could bring 1-2.5 inches of rain to Fremont and Hot Springs counties between Friday and Sunday, May 6-8.

“Rain volumes such as these could cause problems for the contractor and WYDOT,” Huckfeldt said. He plans to continue monitoring the weather forecast through the week as it is updated.

WYDOT Public Relations Specialist Cody Beers encourages Wind River Canyon travelers to buckle up, slow down through the canyon and be prepared for rocks of all sizes in the roadway. Beers warns that with the additional rain planned for the weekend the likelihood of rock slides or possibly even mud slides will be high.

Digital-message signs have been placed at both ends of WRC to provide additional information for travelers.



photo courtesy of WYDOT

The rock scaling project will involve removal of rocks exposed at Big Windy in WRC.

## Town council takes first look at budget

by Mark Dykes

Tuesday evening, the Thermopolis Town Council reviewed the budget for 2016-17. No motion was made to approve the budget at this time, as it was noted information regarding depreciation was currently not part of the document. The Council is expected to approve a first reading of the budget at their May 17 meeting.

According to the information presented last night, there is:

- \$101,250 for Legislative/Executive
- \$181,600 for Clerk/Treasurer
- \$10,800 for Judge
- \$58,200 for Law
- \$85,900 for Town Hall
- \$752,050 for Police
- 265,235 for Dispatch Department
- \$61,000 for Corrections
- \$32,175 for Codes Administration
- \$4,800 for Fire Department
- \$630,686 for One Percent Sales Tax Projects
- \$583, 400 for Streets and Alleys
- \$35,350 for Parks

- \$38,480 for Animal Control
- \$227,540 for Other General Accounts

Also during the meeting, Park Superintendent Kevin Skates spoke about issues facing the big spring. He noted that a sign at the spring states it was at 3.6 million gallons a day, but is currently at about 2.2 million gallons per day.

Water is provided to the three pools, both hotels get a portion and the rest goes over the terraces. Skates noted it’s mandated that so much can be used for recreation and so much has to go into the river.

State Engineer Dave Deutz noted five factors that are causing the decline: lack of recharge due to long-term drought, shifting of the recharge area, migration of flow away from the big spring vent, drilling of oil and gas wells within the aquifer area resulting in removal of production water and the fact that there are 10 other permitted wells drawing from the same aquifer.

Deutz noted the reduction of

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