

County valuation drops for 2017

by Cindy Glasson
Hot Springs County Assessor Shelley Deromedi released the final county valuation numbers on June 23 for 2017, and at best, the numbers are bleak.
The current locally assessed valuation for homes and land within the county is \$50,297,835, up 1.3 percent from 2016.
State assessed utilities for Hot Springs County are up 2.79 percent from last year at \$6,847,812.
Unfortunately, that is the sum total of the good news.
The smallest drop in valuation is seen with

railroads, dropping just 4.03 percent from 2016 to \$3,947,918.
Hard minerals, like construction materials, sand, gravel and industrial materials fell 30 percent. Final valuation came in at \$1,785,752.
The two items most residents of the county are interested in are oil production numbers and gas production.
Oil production is down 23 percent for the year with a valuation of \$58,639,432.
Natural gas production is down a full 50 percent from 2016, amounting to \$109,630.
The final 2017 valuation for Hot Springs

County is down 12.74 percent at \$121,628,379.
Speaking of oil and natural gas production, nationwide, May's numbers show 758 active oil rigs in the U.S. and 183 natural gas rigs.
In Wyoming there are just 10 active oil rigs and nine gas rigs currently in production.
At the height of the last oil boom in 1981, there were 4,530 active oil rigs pumping in the U.S. It all busted with only 404 rigs in service across the country in May of 2016.
As of June 26, reports are crude oil prices per barrel in Wyoming are \$43 while na-

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Flight of a lifetime for veterans



photo by Cindy Glasson

Ageless Aviation

Bob Keith is all smiles after landing at Hot Springs County Airport in the 1940s Boeing Stearman bi-plane on Saturday. Keith was one of a number of veterans from the Wyoming Pioneer Home who got to take the flight provided by Ageless Aviation Dreams Foundation. Keith even got to take the "stick" for a while, adding to his flight log book.

by Cindy Glasson
How many times in your life have you thought to yourself, "I wish I could go back"? Eight gentlemen from the Wyoming Pioneer Home had a chance to go back for a little while on Saturday morning as they participated in the Ageless Aviation Dreams Foundation's flight of a lifetime.
The former military veterans were treated to a free flight from the foundation whose mission is simply, "Giving Back to Those Who Have Given."
Captain Mike Winterboer was pilot for the day, taking the veterans up in a vintage, 1940's Boeing Stearman bi-plane. The Stearman was used during WWII for training pilots, and Winterboer said if a man could pilot the Stearman, he would have no problems flying anything else, as visibility in the Stearman isn't the best, requiring the pilot to use peripheral vision more than anything to fly it.
Winterboer is a board member of the foundation as well as a commercial pilot for United Airlines, doing these flights in his spare time. His wife, Diane, comes along to interview each veteran and snap a few photos of the event.
Outfitted with vintage head gear, each veteran was helped into the open cockpit, taking the front seat and a few instructions before taking off for the 15 minute flight. They were able to see much of the surrounding area, even creating a bit of a stir at the Cowboy Rendezvous Rodeo Parade downtown as they flew over.
The smiles on their faces and the light in their eyes after they

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School district explains cuts

by Cindy Glasson
Hot Springs County School District #1 held a public informational meeting on Monday evening to explain recent cuts the district has had to make and what we may be looking at for the future.
Superintendent Dustin Hunt began the public meeting by explaining the district had created a budget task force that met throughout the course of the spring to come up with ideas and solutions because of the downturn in Wyoming's revenues that are affecting districts across the state.
In some ways, Hunt said, we have been fortunate in that our student numbers have remained relatively even over the last 10 or so years. Larger schools are suffering larger cuts. Unfortunately, with smaller schools, a single cut can mean the loss of a program entirely, whereas larger schools have the flexibility to cut, say, a single coach from a program and the program will continue with the remaining coaches.
The legislative representatives were invited to attend the meeting, however, none of them were in attendance. Hunt

said he had wanted to give them background on where the district has been and where we are now as well as open the conversation about finding additional funding streams for schools as a whole.
In 2010, an external cost adjustment (ECA) was built into state statutes that are to account for inflation. The ECA has largely been ignored by the legislature, adding to the problems we are in now.
According to Hunt, there has been a 12 percent level of inflation, yet the district has not received the 12 percent ECA to correct the inflated amount.
To that end, the district has eliminated 19 programs or positions over the last seven years to make up for those shortfalls, including:
• Family and Consumer Science Program
• Business education program
• Alternative School program for students struggling to graduate
• Elementary technology special
• Community job coach
• Dropout Prevention Specialist (student advocate, court liaison for students in trouble with the law, family contact,

liaison with community resources such as DFS)
• Food Service Director (job duties compounded on business manager, lead cooks in the buildings)
• Curriculum Director (job duties carried by superintendent and administrative team)
• Federal Funds Coordinator (job duties carried by business office)
• Elementary Reading coach (job duties to teachers and principal at RWE)
• Moved from three Instructional Facilitators to one (last one is being eliminated this year)
• Eliminated one Counseling Administrative Assistant
• Eliminated Indoor Track (two other running sports opportunities for students in the year)
• Reduced Professional Development to national conferences that are only funded by federal funds and not state funds
• Drastically reduced Lights On After-school program offerings for students

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Grizzlies to be managed by state

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) announced Thursday that grizzly bears in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem (GYE) have sufficiently recovered and will be returned to state management. According to a release from Wyoming Governor Matt Mead, there are approximately 700 bears in the GYE which includes Wyoming, Montana and Idaho.
The Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation (WyFB) is pleased to see the FWS take this action.
"The number of grizzly bears have long since reached recovery goals in the area and by taking this action we feel it will provide the management flexibility that can help ranchers in the area better cope with the impacts of these large carnivores," said Ken Hamilton, WyFB Executive Vice President. "Wyoming will now be able to provide state management over wildlife that is impacting our state."
"I'm sure there will be legal challenges which will be unfortunate since the goals and numbers have been reached and surpassed to delist the species. But we recognize there are some well financed groups who are not necessarily interested in seeing the species delisted but are instead still anxious to preserve the federal agency's control of state wildlife."
Mead also praised the decision,

and said "Grizzly bears have met or exceeded recovery objectives since 2003 and have long warranted delisting. In 2013, I asked Secretary Salazar to delist the grizzly bears and much work toward this end has been done. I appreciate that the FWS is proceeding now with the delisting. The Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team, which includes the FWS and Wyoming Game and Fish, must be commended for its years of great work."
In 2007, the FWS delisted grizzly bears in the GYE. A federal judge reinstated protections in 2009 after finding that the FWS did not adequately consider the impacts of the decline of whitebark pine nuts - a grizzly bear food source. In 2013, the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team determined that the reduction in whitebark pine nuts did not significantly impact grizzly bears and again recommended delisting. In March 2016, the FWS published a draft rule to delist grizzly bears in the GYE. States gave additional assurance regarding long-term viability.
Wyoming has adopted a Grizzly Bear Management Plan outlining how management will occur after the bears are delisted. That document is available on the Game and Fish website, wgfd.wyo.gov.

Got stuff? Pickers coming to Wyoming

Something that has raised a bit of excitement in the past few weeks is the show American Pickers coming to Wyoming to do some filming in July.
The show follows Mike Wolfe and Frank Fritz, as they travel and around the country trying to hunt up valuable antiques. Those with collections, or who know a collector, are encouraged to contact the show to let the Pickers know about it.
Mary Weaver, who is part of the production company for the show, noted as of Wednesday afternoon she had received one call from someone in Thermopolis. She noted that's not enough to draw the show here, so as of now she's not promising Thermopolis will be a definite stop.
Weaver added they are still just in

the preliminary stages, and filming is not expected to be until July 10, so they are still looking for collectors. Those who want to pass on information can email americanpickers@cineflix.com or call 855-OLD-RUST (653-7878). Information to have ready to share includes: name, phone number, location and description of the collection, and any photos.