

Town council hears turkey concerns

by Mark Dykes

During their Tuesday, Nov. 20 meeting the Thermopolis Town Council, with Mayor Mike Mortimore absent, heard from Kevin Simpson about his concerns of the mess turkeys are making on a property he is caring for on Cedar Ridge.

Game warden Benge Brown provided some history of turkeys in the area. In the winter of 2007 or early 2008 the Game and Fish Department put turkeys in the lower part of Owl Creek but those animals later moved into town.

Regarding the property for which Simpson is caring for, Brown said about three years

ago he received a call about turkeys roosting in the trees and defecating on the property. There is no responsibility of the department to respond to a personal property issue like that, Brown said, but staff do if they feel they can help someone out.

A trap was set up, Brown said, and they caught three turkeys. There was a lot of ruckus under the roosting trees when this was going on, which seemed to frighten the birds away until recently, when Simpson called him about turkeys damaging the roof. Brown noted people were upset, thinking they had trapped all the turkeys, but they only took three of 18 at the time.

The Game and Fish Department has a regulation regarding the legal take of wildlife, Brown said, but turkeys don't fall under it. A permit could be issued to take turkeys if there is property damage, though such instances are primarily for crop damage.

Brown suggested ideas such as getting on the roof and throwing tennis balls at the turkeys, or using bottle rockets or other loud explosive devices to bust the turkeys out of their roost a few days in a row. The department, Brown said, allows for people to take measures to mitigate wildlife on their prop-

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photo by Mark Dykes

Clearing a path

The weekend brought plenty of snow to Thermopolis, as well as massive piles around town after the plows made their initial pass. Monday morning, Jim and Christine Joiner, along with Brenda Lajeunesse, were among those who got their workout clearing sidewalks with shovels. Though temperatures are warmer this week, drivers are advised to be careful, watch for slick patches and allow for extra time to get to their destinations.

Options for bringing more visitors to town

by Mark Dykes

During the Nov. 27 meeting of Hot Springs Travel and Tourism, the board discussed ways that more tourists might be drawn to spend to more time in Thermopolis.

The discussion was spurred by a report from the Wyoming Economic Analysis Division, which showed Hot Springs County had a -0.7 percent change in lodging tax collections for the 2017-18 fiscal year. The tax collected dropped from \$182,218 to \$180,918, and Travel and Tourism Director Amanda Moeller pointed out Hot Springs was the only county that declined in lodging tax revenue.

"If you look at our neighbors," Moeller said, "Big Horn County went up 12.3 percent and theirs is considering only Lovell and Greybull." None of the other smaller communities are counted. Park County also went up 12 percent and Washakie County went up 0.1 percent. Moeller noted that 0.1 percent may not seem like much, but it's quite significant compared to the loss in Hot Springs County.

During the discussion, it was suggested that the decline in lodging tax receipts is due to there not being as many sports tournaments in town, as such tournaments would draw several teams and thus increase revenue at hotels. It was further suggested that updating hotels would also draw more people.

Concern was expressed about the number of properties for sale in town, though it was pointed out that an empty building doesn't mean its run down, but rather there's an opportunity for a new business. Other concerns raised were irregular business hours and how quickly negative comments travel

by mouth and online.

It was also suggested there needs to be more late-night activities to keep people here, rather than heading home when an event ends mid-afternoon or early evening.

One point brought up during the discussion was that there was a lot of dancing around, rather than addressing, the

and Travel and Tourism utilizes the side westbound travelers see. For those traveling east, the board advertises a museum and that side has been deteriorating. Travel and Tourism rents the board out for the other advertising, and Moeller recently received an email stating the desire was to paint it over.

The board approved a \$1,200 donation to the Thermopolis-Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce to replace Christmas decorations around town.

Also during the meeting, the board elected new officers for 2018-2019. Board president is Carl Leyba, vice president is Bob Spain, treasurer is Troy Dorman and secretary is Kevin Skates.

Moeller also presented information on upcoming 2019 Governor's Hospitality and Tourism Conference, January 27-29 in Cheyenne. Among the information that will be presented at the meeting is about leveraging resources from other state agencies, opportunities with international markets and employment challenges. Moeller noted much of the information will focus around online resources and social media.

Board members Troy Dorman, Matt Hughes and Bob Spain expressed interest in attending the conference.

Moeller also shared with the board a recent news clipping that reflects how lodging tax money cannot be used to keep a visitor's center open. She said there's been some discussion about whether there will be a Travel and Tourism office, noting there can be an office, they just can't use lodging tax to pay for a building, so they have to be careful with what the lodging tax is used for.



big issues.

Also with regard to lodging tax receipts, Moeller said there was a good increase for November, which actually reflects the September receipts. The total was \$33,134.87, compared to \$26,823.64 last year, an increase of \$6,311.23, or 24 percent. Moeller added this was a record high for the month compared to previous years.

In action, the board approved painting over one side of a billboard in Waltman. Moeller explained the board is two-sided,

Commissioners updated on repeater, security issues

by Cindy Glasson

Emergency Management Coordinator Bill Gordon let the Hot Springs County Commissioners know there is a problem with hospital employees hearing the pages that come through dispatch.

Apparently, the repeater between the hospital and dispatch is out of service and they aren't really sure how long it has been that way.

The hospital has been using cell phones to talk back and forth between the ambulance crew and the emergency room in order to be prepared if victims are being brought in.

Until the repeater is repaired, Gordon suggested the hospital use an analog scanner as the ambulance service and the fire department are both still using analog service. In the meantime, Gordon is going to be looking into grant monies that may be available to do the repairs.

Gordon has also sent in the paperwork to the state regarding the exercise that was done in September.

As soon as the exercise was completed, those who participated sat down for a few hours and discussed everything, both good and

bad, so plans can be made to fix anything that went wrong.

The main issue appeared to be communications, and come February, Gordon plans on starting to work on those issues so they won't be a problem in a real-life situation.

The commissioners discussed court security with police chief Steve Shay, sheriff elect Jeremie Kraushaar, Gordon and the head of IT, Dean Peranteaux.

There is a \$30,000 grant to be used for court security, but the main question is who, now, is going to be in charge of it all.

Some of the items are district court and some are circuit court, things like security cameras, but they are wanting to determine who should be in charge of things like monitoring the cameras while the courtrooms are in use.

Gordon provided a list of things for all the entities to think about and then they will meet in January to determine how its all going to work. At that point, there will be new judges, a new county attorney, new sheriff and new

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