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Thermopolis  
Hot Springs

# Independent Record

SPECIAL INTERNET PREVIEW

VOLUME 109, No. 43, October 23, 2008

THERMOPOLIS, WY 82443

USPS 627-300

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## Community assessment process attracts over 1,000 comments; first draft reported

Pat Schmidt

Over 1,000 comments were received as part of the five-year follow-up community assessment of Hot Springs County that ended Thursday.

During the three-day visit, the assessment team received input from 206 people during 12 listening sessions. They received 918 verbal comments during the meetings, in addition to 125 written comments from people unable to attend the sessions.

Members were:

- Leader Pamela Downing, Wyoming Business Council, Cheyenne.
- Steve Sigler, USDA, Casper.
- Shannon Stanfill, Wyoming Business Council, Cheyenne.
- Liz Parks, WYMarketing Research Center, Laramie.

The community-based planning and assessment process consists of interviewing a large number of people, recording suggestions and having a team of experts write up implementation plans for community use.

The goal is to provide an affordable assessment process that opens communication, brings outside ideas into the community and attracts new resources.

Those attending the sessions were asked

to comment on three questions about the community:

- Problems and challenges
- Strengths and assets
- Possible projects

The quartet listened to the comments and then developed eight major themes with many sub-themes.

1. Community facilities: Centers for recreation, conventions, community, senior citizens and recycling.

2. Infrastructure: Annex land into town, provide water to surrounding areas, maintain or replace water and sewer lines.

3. Housing: Low income, affordable (\$150,000-\$200,000), renovate old housing, lower property taxes.

4. Health care: New hospital, recruit a second dentist and medical staffing including RNs, CNAs, etc.

5. Tourism: Promote tourism options, improve promotion of the hot springs, find evening entertainment for visitors, interpretive center, promote agriculture's involvement in tourism, rail or bus tours through Wind River Canyon/area.

6. Economic Development: Create jobs with livable wages, need for tradesmen, training and educational opportunities, pro-

mote and fill business park, continue EDC efforts, attract young families.

7. Community development: Junk yard cleanup, downtown beautification, improve communication efforts among citizens so they know what's going on in community to avoid conflicting events, smart growth, senior citizen transportation options including after hours or on weekends.

8. Youth input: Skate park (apparently enlarge the current one), recreation center, more activities, mall/Walmart, shopping, hangout, enforcement (drugs, alcohol, partying), everyone get along.

The final report, to be finalized in 4-6 weeks, will contain suggestions and recommendations from the committee and list possible resources. All those who attended a listening session will receive a report, and others will be available.

The team members are to return in two to four months to facilitate a priority-setting meeting. That meeting is regarded as an opportunity to set direction for the community.

Once priorities are set, assistance will be given to accomplish goals through agencies such as the Wyoming Business Council and the Wyoming Rural Development Council.



Becky Burrows shouts with surprise at the weight of the pumpkin she picked from among 500 given away by sheriff Lou Falgoust. --Jonathan Green photo

## Red Lane residents debate cost of draining slough

by Jonathan Green

Joined by about 25 landowners, the Red Lane Watershed Improvement District board heard from engineer Heath Overfield Oct. 14 before a series of disagreements drove the meeting off course.

Overfield discussed putting out the Cover Slough Rehabilitation Project for bids. The project would entail digging a ditch from the Red Lane subdivision to existing culverts underneath U.S. Hwy. 20, a distance of about 1,000 feet.

The goal is to lower the water level in the slough or marsh, reduce septic system backups in the development and reduce mosquito habitat, Overfield said.

There is already a ditch draining into the slough from the west and a canal leading to the Big Horn River east of the highway. The new ditch would connect the two.

How much help the ditch will provide remains a question. There is only a four-foot fall from the highway to the river and a new ditch would need to be cleaned with some frequency, Overfield said.

Overfield said a number of difficulties limit the options.

The boundaries of the watershed improvement district are ambiguous, and land beyond those boundaries is not eligible for the State Loan and Investment Board (SLIB) monies the district is seeking.

There are also ownership issues. While most of the land in the slough is privately owned, the water is held in trust by the state.

As a wetland, the slough is protected by the federal government, Overfield said, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would require a special permit for any work done on the slough.

A letter prepared by Larry Jones of Simpson, Kepler and Edwards of Cody concluded the slough is not within the district.

The planned route of the ditch is just south of the slough, Overfield said, within the accepted boundaries of the district. By digging the ditch adjacent to the slough no special Corps permit is necessary.

The heavy equipment which would be used to

form the ditch would also knock down Russian olive bushes, now regarded as a noxious plant in Wyoming, south of the slough and improve drainage. The weight of the equipment would also leave a somewhat serviceable road adjacent to the slough.

WHENBOARD chairman Carol Pickett asked for a break after Overfield's presentation, numerous voices registered protest, wanting to move the meeting along to a swift conclusion. No break was taken.

Ruth Blackburn asked Pickett how to add an item to the agenda. During the ensuing commotion it was unclear whether Pickett answered the question or not.

Pickett read a number of items from the consent calendar portion of the agenda. The vote to approve the consent items may have been the only vote taken, although it did not seem the meeting was ever even officially opened.

Blackburn then asked Pickett where the meeting had progressed to in the agenda. Pickett replied but was drowned out by the crowd.

Outgoing board member Liz Weed complained Pickett had overloaded the rest of the board with too much information.

"I've given you everything," Pickett said.

"We can't keep up with you," Weed replied.

Twice, two separate landowners admonished board members for squabbling. "I'm tired of getting in a pissing contest between the three of you," one man said.

A discussion that started during Overfield's presentation resurfaced as well. A letter from SLIB dated July 19, included in the packet provided by the district board, indicated funding of up to

\$40,000 contingent upon a 25% district match.

It was the understanding of several landowners attending the meeting the match was only 10%. Pickett said the match would only be 10%, but a new letter needed to be received by the Hot Springs County Commissioners, apparently from SLIB.

The difference between the two figures is \$6,000. A 10% match will be \$4,000, while a quarter of the total cost is currently estimated at \$10,000.

Pickett also told the group \$40,000 is the budgeted total for the rehabilitation project, so funding from SLIB would only reach \$36,000.

There was also concern expressed by some attendees over budgeting for the project. If the cost ended up less than the \$40,000 estimate, would the 90% (or 75%) be returned to SLIB?

A review of the grant agreement letter from SLIB indicated in bold face, "Disbursement requests submitted will be paid by percentage only, and not paid in full. The percentage of payment is based on the amount approved by the State Loan and Investment Board as a percentage of the total eligible project cost given in the application."

Several landowners were concerned about the consequences of the ditch project running over the estimated cost. Pickett said other money would be available in that case, through other grants. But she also said a local contribution is necessary.

The district "can't ask the government for 100% (of the money, but) can put together many small sources."

"We can't depend on our government anymore, people," someone quipped.

Around 9 p.m. the meeting began to disburse. No adjournment was heard.



Prank or mistake? No wonder visitors to Thermopolis have trouble deciding which way to turn at the traffic light. Instead of U.S. Highway 20, the sign (dated 2003) that is 500 feet west of the junction says an intersection with U.S. Highway 14 is approaching. That highway goes from Greybull to Cody and is never within 70 miles of Thermopolis.

## Outlaw Ride's new route to start, end in Thermop

by Breez Longwell Daniels

A new route is being planned for the 2009 Outlaw Trail Ride.

After 19 years of riding between the "Hole-in-the-Wall" and Thermopolis, trail boss Vince Hayes is spearheading the effort to establish a new route.

"With the cost of gas and diesel fuel and the overall logistics of putting together trucks and trailers to transport horses 124 miles on rough roads to the trailhead at Rough Lock Hill, we decided it was time for a new route," Hayes said. "Some of us (volunteers) are getting older and we need young blood."

The new route does not include a visit to the Hole-in-the-Wall. The total trail ride miles will be reduced from 110 to roughly 80 miles.

Hayes said the second day of the original ride has always taken its toll on horses and riders. The group would leave the Hole-in-the-Wall and have a steady climb, riding 23 miles in one day.

"This ride will be entirely in Hot Springs County; we've checked out the route and it will be a pretty ride," Hayes said. "It will involve fewer landowners and eliminates BLM lands."

"The landowners we are working with are very cooperative."

The 2009 trail ride will leave Thermopolis Aug. 2 with riders horseback from the start. The first two nights will be at Axtell's, according to Hayes.

On day two, riders will circle over the ridge of Wind River Canyon, returning to Axtell's. Day three will be a ride over to the Bloomquist Ranch on Bridger Creek, along the top of Copper Mountain.

Trail riders will set up camp for two nights at Bloomquists, with one evening including a live band and dance night.

On day five riders will pass through the old Hayes Ranch and the Reed place, camping in the neighborhood of Wild Horse Butte. On day six, Saturday, they will ride into Thermopolis just in time for the banquet and dance.

Hayes said the trail ride would continue to include all of the amenities that have made it famous over the years, including catered meals and nightly entertainment.

"The Outlaw Trail Ride has been a fun and successful event for 19 years," Hayes said. "We would like to see it keep going."

An organizational meeting for the 2009 trail ride is planned at Butch's Place in Kirby Thursday at 6:30 p.m. Anyone interested in volunteering and joining the ride should attend.