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Train derailment clean-up complete

by Cindy Glasson

The sound of grinding metal filled the air at 12:33 p.m. Wednesday, May 12 as a Burlington Northern-Santa Fe train locomotive pulling 65 cars hit an enormous boulder lying on the tracks approximately one mile into Wind River Canyon.

The wreck

Wyoming Highway Patrol Trooper Sam Donahue had noticed the limestone rock sitting on the tracks while patrolling the canyon and called his dispatcher to contact BNSF to shut the line down.

According to Donahue, his dispatcher was put on hold by BNSF several times before they finally answered the call.

"I told them, 'You're too late, you've got a derailment' when they got on the line," he said.

The trooper's dashboard camera caught the entire crash.

"It was like watching something in slow motion," he said. "I could see the headlight on the first engine coming down the tracks, then when it hit (the rock) it got brighter.

"It looked like they were slowing down so I would say they hit the rock at around 25 mph. It actually moved the rock quite a ways down the tracks."

All Donahue could do was watch as the first engine slid into the Wind River, the second engine stopping on its side part way down the river bank — the impact so severe it ripped the rear casing off the back one-third of the engine.

The first railcar, filled with bentonite, tipped into the water head first, spilling much of

its contents into the river. The second car, filled with barley, came to rest on its side down the bank, its load dumped among the rocks.

A third railcar was hanging by its left-side wheels, tipping toward the river, but not completely off the tracks.

The engineers, 29 and 49 years old, were in the first engine, partially submerged in the river.

Donahue's first thought was to make sure the two men were all right and able to get out of the engine.

As the men crawled out one of the engine's windows into the pouring rain, the trooper called across the river to them to make sure neither man was injured.

They were able to escape the engine, swim to the shore and crawl up the embankment to safety.

In all the chaos, the pair had the presence of mind to walk down the tracks about 25 yards and start a small fire using a road flare in an attempt to get warm and dry after their dip in the freezing water.

Contamination

Both engines were leaking red-dyed diesel fuel into the Wind River, along with oil.

BNSF spokesman Gus Melonas said a total of 6,800 gallons of diesel and 60 gallons of oil spilled from the engines into the water.

A call to the Thermopolis Water Treatment plant had crews immediately shutting down the intake from the river, according to plant manager Don Rood.

"We went immediately to our



Seven cranes were used to lift railroad cars back onto the tracks after the derailment of a Burlington Northern-Santa Fe train last week. There were no injuries in the accident

that leaked diesel fuel and oil into the Wind River. A large rock had fallen onto the tracks and the train was unable to stop in time. --Tom Burkindine photo

alternative water source," Rood said. "Even though the river was running high and the diesel would have been really diluted, I didn't want to take any chances."

The DEQ and Region 6 Hazmat team for the Big Horn

Basin were both notified of the spill.

Emergency management used the Code Red system to send out a countywide phone call to residents at 1:18 p.m., less than an hour after the accident.

The call informed residents

there had been a diesel spill into the river and that the two main ditches and the water plant had been secured.

Bill Gordon, emergency management head, said their aim at that point was to inform anyone who independently pulls water

from the river so they could take their own precautions.

A second phone call was sent out at 1:49 p.m., assuring folks Thermopolis tap water was safe to drink and water usage was normal.

See Train on page 5

Snowstorm bumps up snowpack

by Tom Burkindine

A snowstorm late last week increased the snowpack and reservoir levels in Hot Springs County.

The Wind River Basin is well above average numbers and the Big Horn Basin is nearing average. The storm delivered nearly three inches of precipitation in an icy rainstorm between Monday and Wednesday last week.

As of Monday, the Wind River Basin was listed at 139 percent of average when factoring in snow water equivalent figures by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. The Big Horn Basin has also steadily risen and was listed at 90 percent of average with snow water equivalent.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation Wyoming Area Office in Mills announced a forecasted increase for Boysen Reservoir for the April through

July period at an increased 570,000 area-feet, 103 percent of average. Of that forecast, 67,000 area-feet was received in April.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Hydrologist Jim Fahey said the percentage of average numbers looked positive and had jumped significantly from April 1 to May 1 — even before two recent storms.

The fact that the runoff is proceeding slowly should prevent any flooding problems, according to Fahey.

"We're going to go back and forth, warm and cool over the next few weeks so the runoff should be slow but steady," Fahey said.

The average numbers were taken between 1970 and 2000, prior to the drought that affected Wyoming earlier this decade. Those numbers will be reassessed to include this decade's levels later this year.

Bid for wax museum approved

by Tom Burkindine

The Thermopolis Town Council accepted a bid for the building that formerly housed the Old West Wax Museum.

The town opened bidding last month with a minimum bid of \$150,000. Louie Sedmak entered a bid of \$160,050 Tuesday morning and the council accepted the bid during that evening's meeting. Sedmak also enclosed a down payment of \$8,500 with the bid.

Assistant to the mayor Dan Stansill said he felt it was a fair bid and suggested the council accept it. Stansill said Sedmak

owns a construction company in Casper and several properties in Thermopolis.

Council member Dick Hall reiterated his displeasure with the sale of the building during further discussion.

"I've been opposed from the beginning and I'm still opposed," Hall said. "I haven't seen anything to change my mind."

Approval of the bid passed with Hall casting the only dissenting vote. Tom Linnan and Alan Braaten voted to approve the bid and Toni Casciato was not present.

A request for a hearing on an allegation of public nuisance and assessment of costs against local resident Kevin Taylor was brought before the council. Taylor states in the request he had been issued abatement due to his inability to properly connect a sewer line at his property at 230 Warren St.

Taylor had previously appeared before the council and

requested assistance with the sewer line. In the request notice, he states it has not been possible to properly connect the line and has been given no alternative solution by the town.

Town attorney Mike Messenger told the council their options were to hold a hearing before the council or hire a hearing officer. Mayor Bill Malloy said his preference was to bring in a hearing officer to avoid bias.

"He has talked to the council," Messenger said. "So that is probably the most equitable solution."

Stansill asked the council for permission to submit a SLIB grant for state funding to construct water mains on 14th between Broadway and Fremont and Arapahoe between Eighth and Ninth. The town would be responsible for 25 percent of the funding, which is estimated at more than \$300,000. The council voted to approve submission of the request.



Earlene Shelton washes a 6-year-old gelding Beau Friday prior to the Bill Smith Quarter Horse Sale last weekend. This was the 27th May sale.



Craig Devearux, of Newcastle, takes a bid during Saturday's sale. Overall, 93 horses were sold and \$956,150 was raised. The high purchase was Wyo Yellowstone for \$75,000.

Smith horse sale brings in nearly \$1 million

by Tom Burkindine

The 27th annual May Bill Smith Quarter Horse Sale was held Saturday at the Hot Spring County Fairgrounds and just under \$1 million was grossed.

Bidders from 18 states and Canada made the sale its biggest success in history with 93 horses selling for an average of \$10,282. Geldings sold av-

eraged \$13,552.17. Overall, \$956,150 was brought in.

Wyo Yellowstone, owned by Bill Smith, drew the most interest as two bidders continually raised the stakes. Charlie Walker, of Salina, Kan., was victorious in the end with a bid of \$75,000, the high purchase of the day. Walker was also the volume buyer after successfully bidding on four horses.

Carole and Bill Smith partnered with family and friends to hold the sale and said the introduction of new marketing techniques led to this year's success. Videos of the horses were broadcast on the Internet and RFD-TV.

"I think that had a big effect," Carole Smith said.

The second bi-annual sale will be held in September.

Suit withdrawn by Sandra Baker

by Cindy Glasson

A suit filed in District Court against the County Commissioners and the County Clerk has been withdrawn.

Sandra Baker filed the court documents on April 27, alleging that actions by the commissioners during their April 20 meeting violated state statutes with regard to designating the office of County Attorney as either a full-time or part-time position.

A state statute declares that counties with fewer than 9,000 population may designate the office as a full-time position. It goes on to say the designation

of full-time or part-time will be made by resolution at the time salaries are set.

The salary for a part-time county attorney was set at the meeting, totaling \$76,500 for the coming fiscal year.

Judge Robert Skar declined to sign the documents and made no comment.

Baker filed a motion to dismiss the case on May 6 which Skar signed before the day was out.

"We're just glad it's been dropped," commission chairman John Lumley said.

Further comment from the commissioners was declined.