



Oil and gas revenues continue to fall

by Cindy Glasson

As anticipated, oil and gas production numbers and the money that production will bring into Hot Springs County is lower than it's been in years.

The value per barrel pulled from the ground is down \$12.14 from 2015, coming in at \$24.28 for 2016 and \$36.42 per barrel in 2015.

Nationally, we hear oil is coming in at \$50 or so per barrel, however, in Wyoming it costs more to pump out and more to refine, keeping our gas prices higher than other areas of the country, and our price per barrel about half what states like Texas and Oklahoma are getting for their oil.

That creates a problem with severance taxes. The six-month estimate for taxable value on oil for Hot Springs County for 2015 was \$42,760,678. For 2016, that same six-month estimate is just \$24,942,844.

That boils down to a 54% decrease in oil revenues for the county, even though the volume of oil coming to the surface was down just 146,872 barrels from the previous year.

Gas production is, unfortunately, in the same boat.

Estimated gas production for the first half of 2015 showed natural gas prices at \$2.89 per million cubic feet, with price estimates for the first half of 2016 showing \$1.94 per mil-

lion cubic feet.

Those numbers put our taxable value for natural gas at \$53,361 for the first six-months of 2016 compared to \$118,339 for the first six months of 2015.

The estimated county valuation for 2016 currently sits at \$139,392,004, much lower than 2015's valuation of \$230,839,867.

Statistically, this is the lowest valuation for Hot Springs County since 2005.

Hot Springs County has been able to continue to pay bills through the leaner years, 1987-2004, and even in the toughest of times like 1977 when the valuation was just \$86.5 million.



photo by Mark Dykes

Pick of the patch

Sheriff Lou Falgoust visits with Braydon and Kadon Pyle as they choose the pumpkin they want to take home. This year is the 14th that Falgoust has provided a pumpkin patch for children.

County roads need some work

by Cindy Glasson

In 2014, the Hot Springs County Commissioners, in conjunction with the Wyoming County Commissioners Association, Wyoming Department of Transportation and the State Transportation Innovation Council, authorized a study of county roads across the state.

The results of the study have been recently released and our county roads in Wyoming are in pretty poor shape.

Hot Springs County has 32 segments of paved county roads totaling 77 miles. We have just three percent of the county roads in the state.

One of the issues the study looked at was rutting. When the study began in 2014, 78% of the roads in the county had rutting of less than three-tenths of an inch. By 2015, that number had dropped down to 63%.

However, in 2014, 22% of the road surfaces were rutted more than three-tenths of an inch but rose to 37% in 2015.

Compared to the rest of the state, we're just about in line with the three-tenths or less, but the deep rutting, three-tenths of an inch or more, we are way above the state average of just 9%.

Asphalt thickness is an issue across the state, too. Locally, the thinnest asphalt overlay can be found on Sand Draw with just 1.2 inches. Sunnyside Lane has the thickest asphalt at eight inches.

The asphalt of course goes over the top of the base layer. Lane 12 has just 3.2 inches of base compared to Owl Creek Hill Road's (old Cody Highway) 12.8 inches.

With all of this in mind, the study proclaimed 100% of Hot Springs County's roads are in poor condition.

Road and Bridge director Dave Schlager said the county is "in Band-Aid mode, holding things together as best we can with what we have."

Schlager indicated chip sealing has been one of the things they've been doing to keep the roads in serviceable condition.

"Most of our roads are serviceable," he said. "Some need some work, but chip sealing and overlays are the best right now."

"Money is the biggest issue we have. Its tough to throw money at any one spot."

Road and bridge overlaid about 20 miles of county roads about six years ago and are currently in a study with WYDOT to see what can be done about the condition of Black Mountain Road.

Schlager said the state's study used a special machine that allows them to drive over all the roads in the state and take photos of cracking, roughness and rutting. It also uses some type of ground penetrating radar to determine the base layer. When it comes to our roads, though, the machine had to make a guess.

"We don't know what a lot of our roads are made of," Schlager said. "Our roads are so old we're not sure what's actually under there."

All is not lost, however. The study creates a database of roads across the state and allows the counties to have solid information regarding their road conditions in order to seek funding. With the current financial cutbacks on the state level, its not going to be a quick fix.

Contract extended to keep Youth Alternatives program

by Cindy Glasson

The Hot Springs County Commissioners had a brief meeting on Tuesday evening covering program funding for Youth Alternatives, sage grouse issues, the status of hangars at the new airport and a discussion regarding Gooseberry Road.

Barb Rice, director of the Youth Alternatives program approached the commissioners regarding an extension of the contract between the program and Volunteers of America (VOA) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

VOA and OJJDP are asking programs nationwide to sign a contract extension with them that will basically make the county responsible for approximately six months of funding until the two entities can get their grant money in order from the Federal Government.

The original contract was to run through Oct. 31, but VOA/OJJDP have asked for an extension through March 31, 2017.

According to Rice, she has some funding left over from this round of grants, but foresees an approximate \$3,000 shortfall if she has to stretch it through until the end of March.

She offered to cut her expenses with the program by \$500 each month and take a cut in her own pay in order to cover the shortage.

"We want to see this service continue for the kids," commission chairman John Lumley said. "Its proven minors should not be housed with adults. We've proven it for years."

Commissioner Tom Ryan was very upset that the program was "messaging around with us like this."

The commissioners voted to extend the contract with VOA/OJJDP in order to remain in the loop for next years funding, but also agreed to pick up the costs of the shortfall, telling Rice she was not going to take a pay cut to make up for the financial crisis caused by another entity completely out of her control.

The commissioners also voted to sign a letter created by the Natural Resource Planning Commission (NRPC) to be sent to the Bureau of Land Management Sage Grouse Studies office in Cheyenne.

The NRPC is asking for regular updates on the Hot Springs County Sage Grouse monitoring data saying they believe there has been an over-emphasis on increased habitat as the solution for declining populations.

In addition, they would like to be assured that ongoing studies of sage grouse populations include external factors, such as other species using the same habitat and depredation from predators.

Seven of the eight hangars at the new county airport have received permits to be re-constructed on the property.

The eighth hangar, however, is proving to be a bit of a problem.

In a conference call with GDA Associates, the commissioners discussed moving that particular hangar back further from the others and extending the apron to accommodate the move.

Initially, GDA had looked into a variance for the hangar, but were denied. GDA would like to continue tow work with the state to get the

See Commissioners on page A6

Tire dumping at landfill cut off until November

by Mark Dykes

The public will not be allowed to dump tires at the Thermopolis landfill for the next couple of weeks.

Mayor Mike Mortimore, speaking at Tuesday night's Town Council meeting, explained there have been issues regarding tires over the past several days, such as them being found in ditches. However, he said, a couple "entities" took out something to the equivalent of 1,000 tires each to the landfill.

Council recently approved an ordinance that created a fee schedule for tire dumping, and were expecting people to bring out small loads to avoid those fees, as the ordinance does not take effect until Nov. 1. The massive amount that has come in, however, resulted in tire dumping being cut off until November. Tires will still be accepted from tire vendors, Mayor Mike Mortimore said, as they've been very reasonable in dealing with the

Council, and they are working on factoring the dumping fees into their costs.

Mortimore said it would be best to have the tires shredded, but to take care of all of them it would cost over \$27,000. Mayor's Assistant Fred Crosby pointed out bringing equipment to the landfill would be expensive, and require some electrical upgrades as well. Crosby noted Liberty Tire would accept tire shreds for \$125 per ton and full tires from \$150 per ton, or come and take them away and process them for \$275 per ton.

Mortimore said another company with shredding capabilities could come out to take care of the tires possibly in the next week.

Also during the meeting, Council approved the first reading of an ordinance regarding fire pits. According to the ordinance, no fire permit is required for outdoor fireplaces, fire pits and other recreational fire appliances,

provided they meet the ordinance guidelines.

The guidelines included in the ordinance state solid fuel burning appliances may only be fueled by cut or split firewood. A recreational fire is an outdoor fire with a total fire area of three feet or less of diameter and two feet or less in height for pleasure, religious, ceremonial, cooking, warmth or similar purposes. Outdoor grills, barbecues and charcoal grills are exempt.

Materials such as rubbish, construction materials, paper products, yard debris, branches, leaves, garbage and similar materials cannot be burned unless a written permit is obtained from the fire chief or his designee.

Fires in outdoor fireplaces should be no closer than 15 feet to a building or combustible materials, and an appliance must have a screen or spark arrestor in place

See Town on page A6