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Thermopolis  
Hot Springs

# Independent Record

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## School district would lose \$152,000/year if HWI adopted

by Joe Sovo

Legislation will be considered for adoption during the 61st Wyoming Legislature Budget Session in Cheyenne that would eliminate the Wyoming Cost of Living Index (WCLI) used in the state's school funding model and mandate the use of a Hedonic Wage Index (HWI).

Wyoming is one of the few states that explicitly incorporates a regional cost index into its school finance formulas. The Regional Cost Adjustment (RCA) used in the funding model is designed to provide additional resources to school districts with higher labor costs.

The RCA is an amalgam of two alternative regional cost indices. The first is WCLI; the second is the 2005 HWI. Both are centered on 100 and have a similar interpretation. An index value of 100 indicates labor costs are equal to the state average.

Hot Springs County School District No. 1 Superintendent Dustin Hunt said business manager Lisa Pearce has determined the index value in the district is 92, which is 8 percent below the state average. The legislature decided each district's RCA would be the larger of the WCLI, the 2005 HWI or 100. Thus, the RCA only applies to school districts where labor costs are above average. Those would include Cheyenne, Laramie and Rock Springs, among others.

Hunt believes the Hot Springs district would lose about \$152,000 in funding beginning with the 2012-13 school year if use of the HWI becomes law

and replaces the WCLI.

While the larger school districts would benefit financially from the adoption of the HWI, the Teton County school districts could lose more than \$1 million a year in funding. Hunt estimates 31 of the 48 school districts in Wyoming would see a reduction in funding with the HWI.

"We want the best opportunities for our kids," Hunt said, and finding the resources to do that is a priority for the local school district.

However, Hunt voiced his support for the Wyoming Legislature.

"We appreciate the work they do. We hope they will continue to make education a priority," he said.

Use of the HWI is part of the school finance bill recently passed by the Wyoming Joint Education Committee. The bill must be passed by both the House and Senate before being signed into law by Gov. Matt Mead.

"The Wyoming Cost of Living Index assumes the cost for housing in the state is equivalent to metro areas like Washington, D.C., Philadelphia and Seattle," Rep. Matt Teeters (R-Lingle), House Education Committee chairman, said. "That's just not the case."

Currently, districts are allowed to choose either index.

"By allowing districts to cherry pick which benefits to pick, it is difficult to defend," Teeters said.

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### 100 smiles



Julie Johnson shows off her best smile in Mrs. Carswell's second-grade classroom to celebrate the 100th day of school at Ralph Witters Elementary. Students participated in a variety of activities to mark the special day. — Cindy Glasson photo

## 2012 HSC Hall of Fame announced

The 2012 class of the Hot Springs County Hall of Fame has been chosen by a panel of judges and affirmed by the Hot Springs County Commissioners.

This year the committee will honor Ruth Clare Johnson, Cal King, Dr. Ben Gitlitz, Alfred "Lefty" Graham and H.D. Curtis at the induction ceremony slated for Saturday, April 14.

**Ruth Clare Johnson**, a lifelong resident of Hot Springs County, has spent an inordinate amount of time preserving landmarks throughout the county, including Yates Ferry, Bicentennial Park, Glade Edwards projects and the Legend Rock Petroglyphs. From her time riding in rodeo horse races to representing the Fifth Judicial District with the Wyoming State Bar, Johnson has kept a busy schedule, citing her best memories are those of the hundreds of children she taught at

the Community Church Sunday School over a 20-year span.

**Cal King**, a former Wyoming Game and Fish Department game warden, was in the forefront in Wyoming using scientific methodology in the field and in the office. He has studied everything from ants to big game, donated land to the Nature Conservancy, has published several books and has contributed to educational institutions.

**H.D. Curtis** came to Wyoming after growing up in upstate New York, mining gold in Alaska and growing fruit in California. After learning about oil while working the oil patch in Casper, Curtis and his brother drilled deep enough in Hamilton Dome to strike oil, hence starting Empire Oil Company in Hot Springs County.

**Alfred "Lefty" Graham** started his career in Hot Springs

County delivering milk for his father in Gebo, Crosby and Kirby. In later years he mined coal, worked in the oil patch and followed construction work all over the west. Poor health and a series of accidents turned Graham from the construction industry to real estate, financing and business management. Because of his business sense and knowledge of how to meet problems with courage, he was elected for six terms in the Wyoming Legislature.

**Dr. Benjamin Gitlitz**, Man of the Year for 1972, was instrumental in his drive to combine federal funds, county taxes and Gottsche Foundation funds in order to build the combined rehab center and hospital complex. Dr. Gitlitz felt strongly that the hot springs are a great treasure and we needed to follow the lead of other countries in using them wisely.

## Shoshone forest plan meeting today

The Shoshone National Forest is holding a meeting to develop alternatives for revision of the forest plan. Forest Service specialists, district rangers, the forest supervisor and representatives of cooperating agencies will meet today (Thursday) and Friday in Thermopolis. The meeting is scheduled from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. today and 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday in the community room at Big Horn Federal.

The public is welcome to attend both days.

Using input from the recent public comment period, the working group will draw management area boundaries for several alternatives that will be analyzed in the coming months. Management areas are subdivisions of the national forest. Each management area emphasizes certain management activities for that piece of land. Management area types range from areas where natural processes predominate, such as wilderness, to areas where management is more active, such as to produce timber.

The effects of the alternatives will be analyzed in a draft environmental impact statement, which will be subject to a 90-day public comment period, beginning in June.

### 4-H & FFA weigh-in, tagging



Allen Hart prepares his steer for the weigh-in and tag for 4-H and FFA beef projects on Sunday afternoon. Sadina Hart is waiting her turn. — Donna Pennoyer photo

## Town votes down fireworks change

The Thermopolis Town Council voted unanimously against a proposed ordinance to change the distance fireworks could be sold from the town from five miles to half a mile from the corporate limits of the town.

Derrick Burrows requested the change in the town code at the council's Jan. 17 meeting because he had a buyer interested in purchasing a small amount of his property a half-mile north of town for setting up a fireworks stand.

After discussing the change, the council directed Town Attorney Mike Messenger to draft

the proposed ordinance allowing the sale of fireworks a half-mile outside the corporate limits, but also requiring the use, discharge or detonation of fireworks to remain limited to five miles.

During the discussion at the recent meeting, Mayor Bill Malloy said he had received some feedback from community residents worried about children riding bikes up the highway to the fireworks stand.

Councilman Al Braaten questioned where the half-mile limit would exist south of town, and received the answer it would

be near White Horse Feed and Country Store.

Councilman Dick Hall said he had received various comments from the community and he had three points he wanted to make about allowing the stand closer to town.

Hall's first point was that fireworks are illegal in town and the council should not make it more convenient for people to attain them closer to town.

His second point mirrored the comments Malloy had previously

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## Delisting of wolves and bears would impact HSC

by J.D. Stetson

If everything falls into place at the state and federal levels, there may be a hunting season for wolves in Wyoming as early as this fall.

Wyoming Game Warden Bengé Brown spoke to members of the Thermopolis Gun Club Thursday, Feb. 2, during the club's monthly meeting about the history, status and potential changes regarding wolves and bears in Hot Springs County.

Brown also gave short updates on the management of deer in and around town by the Thermopolis Police Department, and discussed the circumstances regarding hunting violations he observed during the fall.

The presentation pertained mainly to the possible hunting of wolves and bears as trophy animals, as well as some of Brown's personal encounters with the animals in Hot Springs County.

### Bears

Brown stated the bears were originally delisted by the Endangered Species Act in 2007, but were shortly placed back on the protection list as a result of lawsuits from preservation groups.

The courts determined the U.S. Dept. of Fish and Wildlife Service had not done enough

research regarding "white bark pine," prior to the delisting. Since then, the department has researched the issue and has found no correlation between the tree and bears.

Brown said in about six months the department expects a change in rules that would place the bear on the national registry and remove them from the endangered species list, but still providing them with protections. The bears have a potential to be completely delisted within a year.

Brown said the department is skeptical the change will result in a hunting season because there is concern about future lawsuits to keep the bears protected.

"We did get them delisted once, so we know it's possible," Brown said.

Brown stated the Fish and Wildlife Service had estimated the number of bears within Wyoming excluding national parks and the Wind River Reservation to be conservatively about 1,000. He said the conservative estimates are down in recent years and have been officially revised to about 600.

Brown proceeded to discuss

See Delisting page 12



Wyoming Fish & Game Warden Benge Brown discusses the status of wolves and bears in Hot Springs County and the potential for hunting seasons for both the animals during a meeting of the Thermopolis Gun Club. — J.D. Stetson photo

## Delisting

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some of the recent bear encounters within the past year. He discussed a bear that broke into a cabin along Grass Creek and was relocated outside of Hot Springs County.

Brown stated he set up a trail camera near a cow that had died of natural causes along a side drainage of Grass Creek where he determined at least four black bears and one grizzly stopped to eat the cow. Brown reset the camera on another cow further up the road and he was able to identify five grizzlies and one black bear. The second cow was almost completely gone within two days.

In an interview after the presentation, Brown also talked about an out-of-state hunter who claimed to have been bitten by a bear while hunting near Grass Creek. The man suffered three puncture marks to his hand.

### Wolves

Brown briefly discussed the quick delisting of wolves in 2008, which resulted in wolf hunts in Montana and Idaho.

The delisting was contested again by lawsuits arguing about the genetics of wolf packs in the area.

Brown discussed his experience with wolves recently in Owl Creek, where a group of wolves killed five dogs belonging to a landowner and about two head of cattle.

The Fish and Wildlife Service has estimated about 198 wolves in Wyoming, once again excluding the national parks and reservation. Brown said the numbers are conservative estimates.

Brown also discussed the importance of the Legislature to pass Senate File 41 in order for the dominos to fall into place for a possible hunting season in

the fall.

The bill establishes wolves as a “trophy game animal” within specific areas and dates, provides for management for a certain number of breeding pairs and individual wolves, amend management techniques for controlling wolf populations and limiting the authority for the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission to establish areas where the wolves may be taken as predatory animals. The bill also provides the necessary funding for the department to manage the animals.

Under the legislation, the dates intended for wolves to be hunted as trophy game animals would run from Oct. 15 to March 1 within the specific areas outlined in the legislation.

“If everything goes well, you’ll be able to hunt wolves next fall,” Brown said.

## School

from page 1

“We needed to pick one, sound system to use for all districts.”

Even though the cost of living differs in districts across the state and there are some districts that will be more diversely impacted than others, there are provisions that have been put into place.

“There is a four-year phasing plan for the switch to help absorb the difference in the costs,” Teeters said. “With that amount of time, hopefully districts will be able to see things like enrollment

growth and reduction of cost of living payment.”

Districts that do not have a cost of living high enough to meet the statewide average are also being looked out for, according to Teeters.

“All districts that receive less than the statewide average, as determined by the Hedonic wage index, will automatically be given at least the statewide average,” he said.

Mead has expressed his support for the Hedonic wage index and said it is fairer than the current wage structure.

## Fireworks

from page 1

given with regard to the safety of children and pedestrians wanting to ride or walk to the fireworks stand along the highway.

For his third point, Hall said the council should require any fireworks stand to post a \$1,000 bond for each time during the summer the Hot Springs County Volunteer Fire Department responds to a fire started by fireworks. He remembered one year in particular where the department responded to 14 fires on the Fourth of July started by fireworks.

Also in attendance was Councilman Tony Larson. Councilman Tom Linnan did not attend.

### Other business

During the meeting, the council also discussed two issues it will seek to address at the next town council meeting.

The council first discussed potential options the town may possess to address liquor license holders who continue to fail alcohol underage compliance checks performed by the police department.

Braaten brought the issue up for discussion because of the results of a recent check in which five of 12 businesses failed the check. Braaten said he wanted to see if town codes or state statutes establish specifically what

happens to businesses failing to comply with the underage drinking laws.

Police Chief Mark Nelson explained the employee who serves to the minor is ticketed and the fine is usually reduced if the employee seeks training.

He said the checks for a number of businesses with restaurant licenses take place less frequently than businesses selling package liquor.

Messenger stated the council may have options to set a minimum fine with the added incentive of reducing the fine after receiving education. He said it may also be lawful to fine the owner of the establishment if the owner does not provide the employees opportunities for alcohol server training within a reasonable amount of time.

Several of the council members stated the need for consequences against the establishment’s owner in order to reach the goal of the

# Coalition discusses bullying, drug incident within school

by J.D. Stetson

The Hot Springs County Community Outreach Coalition discussed issues involving bullying and drug use among the teenage population during its meeting Feb. 1.

The discussion was spurred by County Attorney Jerry Williams who stated he recently had a case come across his desk in which a student was bullied in class at Hot Springs County High School after the student had recently been ticketed for delivery of a controlled substance methamphetamine.

The student had revealed where she had received the drugs and the bully called the student a “narc” in the classroom situation as well as making other threats through social media, Williams said.

Williams was shocked that no one in the classroom chose to stand up to the bully and tell him they did not want drugs in their school.

He brought the issue to the coalition for them to discuss and to see about the status of the programs designed to address bullying and drugs in the schools and community.

Representatives of the school district in attendance shared with the coalition the benefit of the Rachel’s Challenge program and the Friends of Rachel, which they believe sufficiently address bullying situations and the bystanders of bullying within the school.

The representatives stated the program is designed to teach kids to get out of the situation and not to escalate it further. The program is still building itself within the middle school and high school and will need time before it can show results.

Younger students also have the D.A.R.E. program, which covers drugs, bullying and other illegal activities up until the fifth grade.

The coalition discussed the “bystander” factor, which is the observance of bullying and whether or not to make the hard choice to intervene in the situation. The coalition established the factor involves the fear of retaliation and the cultural attitudes toward the behavior. It is something that is very hard for an adult to do, and would be

even more difficult for a teenager because of the fears involved.

Sheriff Lou Falgoust also noted that in the example Williams chose to provide, there also was no one who jumped in to support the bully during the incident.

### Bullying

In a later interview, deputy Cameron Simeral, the school resource officer, further discussed the bullying incident. He said there were a couple of students who did feel strongly about the wrongfulness of the bullying incident when it happened.

Simeral said he didn’t quite understand the subculture among teens that use the mentality that telling the truth about illegal activity is “snitching.” He said the school is combating the issue and there are some students who have the potential to be leaders and stand up to the bully without escalating the situation physically.

Simeral also addressed the threats made on social media and cyberbullying in general. Many of the students he has talked to with regard to cyberbullying said they wouldn’t have said the same thing to their victim’s face.

Social media provides anonymity that hasn’t traditionally been available to students who use it to bully, but the issue festers longer between the victims and the bully compared to face-to-face bullying.

### Drugs

Many of the coalition members brought the discussion back to the struggles involved with prevention initiatives against cultural attitudes regarding underage drinking and addiction.

Regarding the drugs, Williams stated his disappointment in seeing methamphetamine within the school, especially with regard to the statewide advertising campaign regarding the drug. Many of the ads show negative effects of using the drugs meant to scare people from using them.

Hot Springs County Counseling Center Director Al Braaten explained the poor results involving campaigns choosing to use “scare tactics,” and he expressed the better results from having a consistent message over a long period of time.

“Kids don’t realize the long-term effects,” Braaten said, adding the message will eventually sink in after a long duration.

Williams ended the discussion on a positive note from his case. He said one of the parents of the students acted very appropriately and proactively with regard to the situation and required the student to participate fully with the investigation.