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One dollar

Hard times bad for health

Report on county links recession to excessive drinking, mental crises, inability to pay for care.

By Tram Whitehurst

As the Teton County economy worsened in recent years, so, too, did the community's health, according to a report released Monday.

The 2011 Community Health Assessment found ill effects of the economic downturn showing up in measures of health. Mental health is a growing concern, alcohol abuse continues to be a problem, and access to care is a challenge as residents lose health insurance or ration care, the report states.

The assessment is the first confirmation of what health officials have long suspected. The previous assessment, published in 2009, was based on pre-recession data.

"Some Teton County health indicators have long shown positive trends but are now changing dramatically with the decline in the economy," the assessment states. "Employment, housing and the cost of health care have become significant factors in our ability to achieve and maintain good health."

Prepared every three years, the assessment is required of all county health offices and is intended to help guide public health initiatives. Consultant Susan Eriksen-Meier prepared the report.

The county's economic struggles
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▶ OUT OF THE HOLE



BRADLY J. BONER / NEWS&GUIDE

Jackson Hole serves as the backdrop Saturday for Brandon Kern's ascent of Rendezvous Mountain during the U.S. Ski Mountaineering Championships at Jackson Hole Mountain Resort. See the Sports cover for more on the race.

State aims at park wolves

Flawed Wyoming wolf law up to Legislature to change, senator says.

By Cory Hatch

A section of Wyoming's wolf management plan that seems to allow wolf hunting in Grand Teton National Park and the National Elk Refuge has local and federal officials worried.

Under the pending management plan in front of the Legislature, wolves would be considered trophy game in the northwest corner of the state. Elsewhere in Wyoming, wolves would be hunted as predators, meaning they could be killed at any time, by any means, without a license.

While a map in the plan excludes Yellowstone National Park and the Wind River Indian Reservation from the trophy game and predator areas, it includes Grand Teton National Park, the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Memorial Parkway administered by the park and the National Elk Refuge in the trophy game management area.

Grand Teton Superintendent Mary Gibson Scott expressed her problems with the wolf plan late last year, Sen. Leland Christensen, R-Alta, said.

"She had some real concerns about the plan as it describes the trophy area," Christensen said. "She said there may be a perception that people can hunt here, and that it's not consistent with the parks."

The worries arise as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is in its last days of accepting comments on a deal it forged with Wyoming to turn management of the species over to the state.

The state is striving to adopt a wolf law and Game and Fish plan that would mimic agreements made between Gov. Matt Mead and the U.S. Department of the Interior.

On the Wyoming front, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department presented a draft bill to the joint Travel, Recreation, Wildlife and Cultural Resources Committee during a meeting in Thermopolis just before Christmas, Christensen said.

"We looked over the bill and ... it became apparent there
See **PARK WOLVES** on 20A

Students: alcohol-detecting sensor no magic wand

Board to vote today on policy some call intrusive, others call matter of safety.

By Brielle Schaeffer

While parents and school officials seem in full support of the use of alcohol wands to detect student drinking at school activities, high school students are divided.

Some students are glad to see the board take action to stop teen drinking while others think being screened at dances is disrespectful.

Waved in front of a student, devices can detect if he or she has consumed alcohol, although it cannot determine the quantity a person has ingested.

The Teton County School District No. 1 Board of Trustees is set to give initial approval to a districtwide alcohol wand policy at its meeting tonight. Approval would launch a 45-day public comment

window before the policy would be adopted in March.

The draft policy outlines the steps that would be taken by school staff if a wand senses alcohol or if a student refuses to be screened. The wands would only be used at school-sponsored, after-school events, like dances, where mainly students attend, the draft policy states.

Students would be notified in advance of administrators' intent to use wands at certain functions. Wands could be used on or off campus.

Parents at a workshop on the policy and regulation last week spoke in strong support of the wands as an objective tool to bolster student safety. Trustee Janine Teske said at the workshop that deterrence and safety are the main objectives.

"We're not going to take a kid and turn them out on the street if we have any suspicion at all that he's been drinking or she's been drinking," she said.

Some students, however, don't see
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it that way. Others, adults included, are worried about penalties for refusing to be tested.

"The possibility of dancers using harder substances if the alcohol wands are implemented remains a major concern among students," student council co-president and Jackson Hole High School senior Alex Duncker said in an interview. "Since we already have capable law enforcement at all of our events and the abuse of alcohol at dances has greatly decreased, alcohol wands may have little to no effect on underage drinking at school events."

Duncker said high school students are interested in a "trial period" for the wands, to work the kinks out and see if they are still necessary.

"Undoubtedly, problems and complications will arise if and when wands are actually implemented," she said. "A

trial period would help to solve these problems and help the policy transition from a written document to actual use."

If the wands are not needed after the trial period, she said, they could be discontinued.

Another student called the institution of the policy "fascist."

"I don't think it is fair for the general mass of the school population to be punished by this policy because of the mistakes of a minority," junior Addie Henderson said. "All of us are now being submitted to an invasive process that the administration shouldn't have to conduct."

Junior Paige Johnson likened the policy to a dog on a leash. "Normally, when you do well or are respectful you get a longer leash," she said. "This policy doesn't really make sense to me, because at our last dance there were no incidents, and now the school is pulling us closer than we were before."

See **PUNISHED** on 21A



PRICE CHAMBERS / NEWS&GUIDE FILE PHOTO

Jackson Hole High School students groove at their homecoming dance in October. Parents largely support the school district's decision to use alcohol-detecting wands at school functions.

HEALTH

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have been well documented, but the assessment places them in the context of public health.

"This really is a public health assessment," said Terri Gregory, manager of Teton County Public Health. "It's looking at the conditions in which we live that affect our health."

For example, the county's poverty rate shot up from 4.4 percent in 2008 to 9 percent in 2010, jobs disappeared, and Food Stamp participation more than doubled, the report states.

Fewer folks have insurance

At the same time, the number of people without health insurance increased 10 percent from the previous survey, to 30 percent of county residents. Visits to the Teton Free Clinic doubled from 654 in 2008 to 1,219 in 2011, the report states.

A community survey included in the assessment found that residents think the lack of health insurance is the No. 1 health issue facing Teton County today. A quarter of survey respondents said they didn't see a doctor in the previous year because they couldn't afford it, and another 18 percent said

it was because they lacked insurance.

"The lack of health insurance and unemployment are big health factors, because they lead to lots of stresses," Gregory said.

She refers to what's taking place among some county residents as a "cycle." People lose their job, lose health coverage, and their health deteriorates. They are also putting off preventive care, she said.

Others who have never been unemployed or never lived in poverty — the "new poor" — don't have the skills or experience to deal with the added pressure, Gregory said.

"It compounds problems on both ends," Gregory said. "We'll be seeing higher rates of illness because of stresses we didn't have before."

As a result, the number of residents requiring mental health services and drinking heavily is a growing concern, the report states.

The number of mental health "assessments" at the Jackson Hole Community Counseling Center increased 25 percent between 2010 and 2011, a trend that's expected to continue, the report states. Officials conduct assessments when a person is found unable to care for him- or herself or is at high risk of harming him- or her-

self or others.

"We have a startling increase in people experiencing mental health crisis," the report states.

In addition, excessive drinking has long been a problem in the community but has been exacerbated by the weak economy, the report states. The binge and heavy drinking rate, at 23 percent, is three times the national average.

Heavy drinking is two or more drinks a day for men and one or more a day for women. Binge drinking is five drinks in a single occasion for men or four for women.

"A high percentage of us drink heavily," the report states.

Still No. 1 in Wyoming

Despite the decline in community health, Teton County continues to be ranked No. 1 in Wyoming — the 21st-healthiest state in the nation — in health outcomes and health factors, the report states.

Compared with the rest of the state, Teton County residents are better at maintaining a healthy weight, staying active and not smoking, the report states. For example, 44 percent of county residents are overweight or obese, compared with 62 percent in

Recession's ill effects

Economic indicators

- The poverty rate in Teton County jumped from 4.4 percent in 2008 to 9 percent in 2010.
- More than 1,000 jobs were lost between 2007 and 2010.
- The number of households receiving Food Stamps more than doubled between 2009 and 2011, from 61 to 140.

Health indicators

- Thirty percent of county residents are uninsured, up 10 percent from 2009.
- Mental health assessments increased 25 percent between 2010 and 2011.
- Excessive drinking is three times the national average, at 23 percent

Wyoming and 64 percent in the U.S.

Also, although cancer is the No. 1 cause of death in Teton County, overall rates are still below Wyoming and national averages. Rates are higher, however, for melanoma, breast and prostate cancers.

"We're still a healthy, active community and have lots of resources most communities don't," Gregory said.

PARK WOLVES

Continued from cover

were some changes that Wyoming Game and Fish Department felt like they needed," he said.

State legislators and officials are working to exclude Grand Teton, the parkway and refuge from the wolf hunt, Christensen said.

"They've got language that would be introduced in session to deal with those areas," he said. "It says the trophy areas would only be in areas of the state's jurisdiction. It would clear up questions about the refuge, Grand Teton National Park, and I think it would clear up questions about [the John D. Rockefeller Jr. Memorial Parkway]."

A 2008 version of Wyoming's wolf management plan used a similar map, said Jackson resident Franz Camenzind, a wildlife biologist and former executive director of the Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance. But it included language that made it clear wolf hunting was not allowed on land managed by the Park Service and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"I'm frustrated with that change," Camenzind said. "But I'm even more frustrated that the Department of Interior — the Fish and Wildlife Service — doesn't challenge that. ... The Department of Interior has been emasculated. They're not standing up for what the law says," he said.

The inclusion of the park, refuge and parkway in the trophy game area might be intentional, Camenzind said.

"The state is always making attempts to manage wildlife on these particular lands," Camenzind said. "They don't have jurisdiction. Why should the public have to go to court to get a result that should have been straightforward in the first place?"

A wolf hunt on the National Elk Refuge is un-

Wolf plan raises experts' hackles

A scientific review of Wyoming's wolf plan casts doubt on whether the species will remain recovered once the state takes over management of the species.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service released the Final Wyoming Gray Wolf Peer Review Summary Report on Thursday.

"The key over-arching issue for the panelists (and for the USFWS) is the extinction risk faced by the wolf population in the [Northern Rocky mountains], and its potential for recovery," report authors wrote. "One panelist was of the strongly expressed opinion that the Wyoming's plan is inconsistent with recovery goals. The remaining four panelists believe that the plan is, or could be, consistent with recovery."

The primary worry among reviewers was how Wyoming Game and Fish Department officials would manage for the 100 wolves and 10 breeding pairs outside of Yellowstone National Park required by the plan, according to the report.

Federal and state officials have signed off on management plans for Idaho and Montana, but approval of a Wyoming plan was

likely, refuge manager Steve Kallin said.

"We have the responsibility and authority to manage wildlife on the refuge," he said. "At this time, we're not proposing or even looking into a wolf hunt on the refuge."

Local Park Service officials referred questions to the Intermountain Region office.

"We're formulating our comments to the Fish and Wildlife Service right now," said James Doyle, chief of communications for the Intermountain Region.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is seeking scientific information and comments from the public about a proposed delisting rule and state management plan for Wyoming wolves. Comments must be received on or before Friday.

stalled until the summer, when Gov. Matt Mead and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar agreed to end federal protections in the state.

The Wyoming plan would deem wolves predators outside of northwest Wyoming. Predators can be killed by any means, at any time, without a license.

"[T]he plan, as written, does not do an adequate job of explaining how wolf populations will be maintained and how recovery will be maintained," the report says. "It is clear that more than one panelist believes that there is a need for explicit buffering and better explanations of the adaptive processes that will be used in managing down the wolf populations."

The strongest critic of Wyoming's wolf management plan among the panel of experts was Dr. John Vucetich, a population biologist from Michigan Technological University who studies wolves on Isle Royale National Park on Lake Superior.

In addition to worries about how the Wyoming Game and Fish Department would manage wolves, Vucetich wondered whether the plan would ensure enough genetic diversity among the wolf population.

— Cory Hatch

Comment deadline Friday

To comment on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wolf plan, you must reference Docket No. FWS-R6-ES-2011-0039.

Comments can be submitted at www.regulations.gov. They also can be mailed or hand-delivered to Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. FWS-R6-ES-2011-0039, Division of Policy and Directives Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 4401 N. Fairfax Drive, MS 2042-PDM, Arlington, VA 22203.

All comments will be posted at www.regulations.gov.