THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2013

FRIDAY'S FORECAST

WEATHER INSIDE ▸▸ C5

50¢
VOL. 134 NO. 10

GUNNISON COUNTRY TIMES

Printing all the news we know about for more than 130 years

DAYLIGHT SAVINGS SPRINGS FORWARD THIS SUNDAY

OBITUARIES ▸▸ A2 BUSINESS ▸▸ A7 OPINION ▸▸ A1, A10-A11 SPORTS ▸▸ B7-B10 CROSSWORD ▸▸ C2 ONLINE ▸▸ GUNNISONTIMES.COM

The PRICE of PARADISE

Property owners, developer at odds in high-end Prospect neighborhood

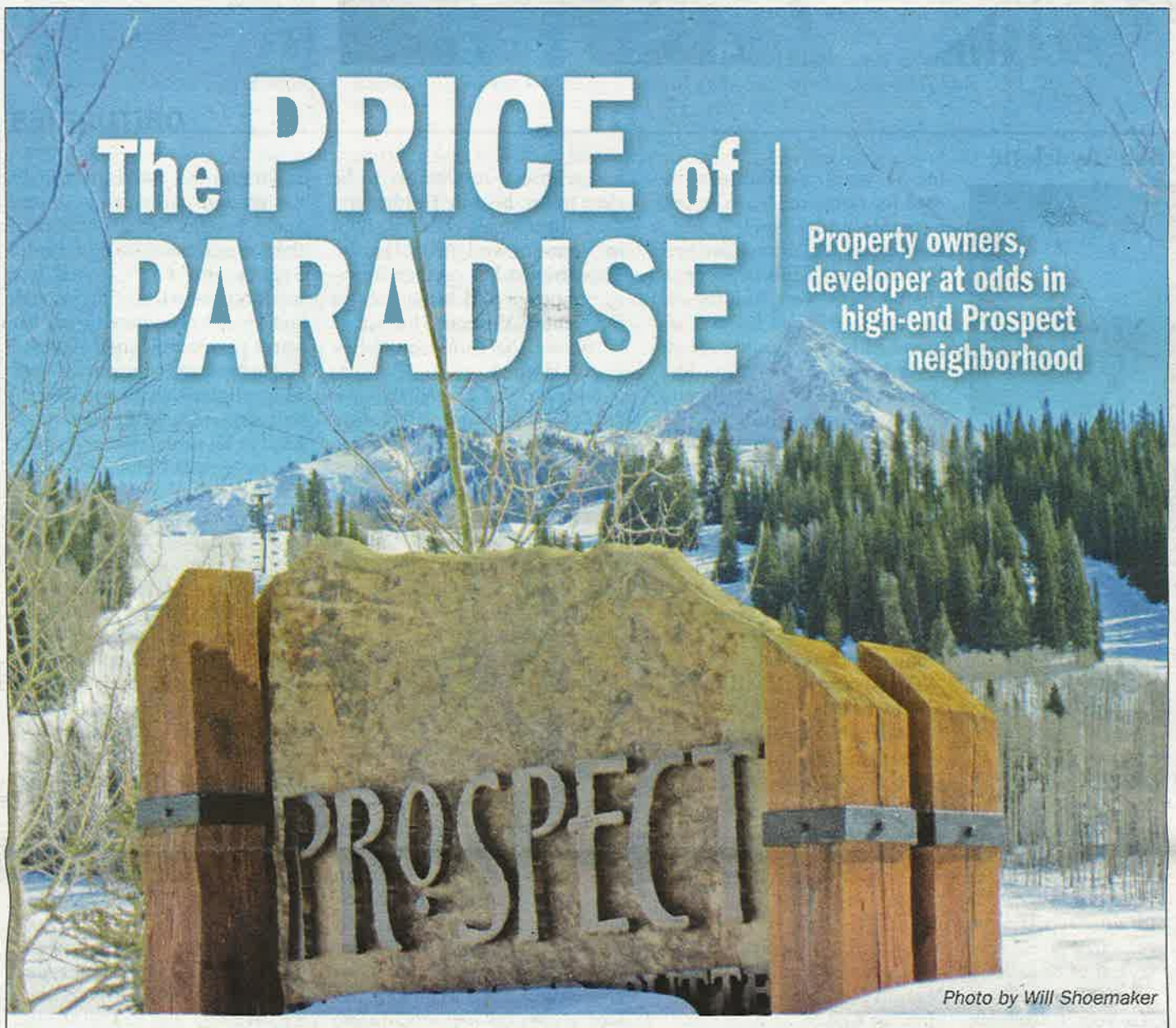

Photo by Will Shoemaker

Will Shoemaker
Times Editor

It seemed simple enough.

Long before any of the high-end homes in the 400-acre Prospect neighborhood of Mt. Crested Butte began going vertical, special districts were created to install infrastructure — as has been the case in many other large-scale developments in Colorado.

These metropolitan districts, as they're termed, allowed the developers to issue debt to pay for roads, sewer and water lines — not altogether different from the mortgage on a home. The intent was then to pay off that debt via a special assessment on future residents' property tax bills.

But any simplicity in such a scheme was complicated by a boom in the high-end real estate market in the mid-2000s that was followed abruptly by falling property values.

"I think that had there been good values and the economy stayed solid, people would have been happy," said Mt. Crested Butte Town Manager Joe Fitzpatrick. "We would have liked to have seen more sales and

Prospect ▸ A9

Last 'ditch' effort surfacing?

City considers delayed start to water season

Will Shoemaker
Times Editor

With the likelihood that drought will continue in Colorado into another summer season, local water watchers are already preparing for parched conditions.

And in the City of Gunnison, much-coveted ditch water may provide a means of easing the impact for water users elsewhere in the basin.

City Councilman Bill Nesbitt floated the idea last week of possibly delaying flows through the city's network of irrigation ditches — which provide water for residents' lawns and gardens — this spring to cushion against a basin-wide "call."

The Uncompahgre Valley Water Users Association (UVWUA) is already contemplating the need for such a call, despite numerous initiatives that entity is taking to avoid that outcome.

UVWUA diverts water through the Gunnison Tunnel. That diversion, from the Black Canyon, provides 60 percent of the irrigation needs for the Uncompahgre Valley.

"They are basically talking about putting a call on the river and we're trying to figure out a way to forestall that call," said Nesbitt, who's also a board member on the Upper Gunnison River Water Conservancy District (UGRWCD).

Local impacts of a downstream call would be numerous — from ranchers dependent upon water for irrigation to storage in Blue Mesa and Taylor Park reservoirs (both of which are junior to the Gunnison Tunnel), said UGRWCD General Manager Frank Kugel.

As of Tuesday, the snowpack in the Gunnison Basin was 79 percent of average for this time of year. Statewide, the snowpack was just 73 percent of average March 1. And that is just 83 percent of the snowpack from this time one year ago, according to the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Locally, Kugel said that it's estimated that

Ditch ▸ A8

TIMESOPINION

End the ESA madness

The science doesn't support it.

The community most impacted — ours — overwhelmingly opposes it.

And the efforts working toward a positive outcome will be severely jeopardized by enacting it.

We're talking, of course, about the Gunnison Sage-grouse. More specifically, about the federal proposal to invoke the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as a means of protecting the ground-dwelling bird that lives almost exclusively in the Gunnison Basin.

We think such a designation will backfire; that it will not help this bird in the least; and that it will cause significant hardships to a community — Gunnison — that has gone to extraordinary lengths to do the right thing when it comes to this species.

Therefore, we adamantly urge the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to, once and for all, remove the Gunnison Sage-grouse from ESA consideration.

Let's start with the science. Researchers tend to know what the grouse like — sage brush, obviously, but also meadows, access to water, grasses and forbs. What we don't have a clear handle on is what causes the birds harm.

Of course, the grouse have predators — nest-robbing foxes, birds of prey like falcons, and others. Of course they are negatively impacted by drought. There are loads of studies about habitat degradation.

But what the proposed listing is really blaming for the grouse's overall situation, and what new federal regulations would target, is development, recreation and, most directly, cattle grazing.

We believe the evidence suggests these targets are more of a scapegoat.

Why? Because the vast majority of the species' population — 87 percent — resides here, in the Gunnison area, and is doing quite well. Even by the feds' own

Opinion ▸ A10

MYVOTE

Where Gunnison Valley's voice is heard

Should the City of Gunnison delay turning on the ditches this year in order to help ease water curtailment elsewhere in the basin?

Eighty-four percent of last week's voters said they think Western State Colorado University should make changes to its current branding/marketing efforts.

Anonymous, easy voting at: **gunnisontimes.com**

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Publisher/Owner:
Chris Dickey
publisher@gunnisontimes.com

Editor:
Will Shoemaker
editor@gunnisontimes.com

Sports:
Matt Smith
mattsmith@gunnisontimes.com

Staff Writer:
Laura Anderson
laura@gunnisontimes.com

Advertising Manager:
Leia Morrison
leia@gunnisontimes.com

Production:
Jennie Wren
adbuilder@gunnisontimes.com

Billing:
Sandy Ayers
billing@gunnisontimes.com

Office Manager:
Larry Jensen
legals@gunnisontimes.com

Distribution:
Frank Vader

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Opinion

▶ from page A1

estimation.

"Thanks to collaborative conservation efforts, the largest remaining Gunnison Sage-grouse population has remained relatively stable over the past 12 years."

That's a quote from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's own press release this past January announcing the proposed listing.

We think the local population exceeds "relatively stable." Here's why:

State wildlife researchers estimate the current local population of Gunnison Sage-grouse to be 4,082. This is an 8 percent *increase* from 2001.

One might think that scientific data suggests there used to be many, many more birds roaming the local sage-covered hillsides historically. They'd be wrong.

Colorado Parks and Wildlife, the agency formerly known as the Division of Wildlife, has been tracking these birds since at least 1953. Their numbers estimate the local grouse population to be only 3,026 way back then.

This bears repeating: The available research shows that over the last half century the local population of this species has actually *grown* by more than a third.

To be clear, we recognize that estimating populations is not an exact science, and was surely even less reliable back in the '50s. Still, the research for the local sage grouse doesn't represent a "relatively stable" population. It suggests a stronghold.

Further, state biologists conducted a "population viability analysis" for the Gunnison Sage-grouse. What they found, and the Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes, is that a population in excess of 3,000 birds has an extinction risk of less than .5 percent within the next 50 years.

So, why enact a rather draconian measure like the ESA for a species that stands a *less than one-in-100 chance of becoming extinct?*

The only answer to that question that passes the straight-face test is this: Outside environmentalists.

It's no secret that WildEarth Guardians has cleverly backed the Fish and Wildlife Service into a legal corner by forcing them to make timely listing determinations on more than 250 species, including the Gunnison Sage-grouse, as part of a settlement reached in 2011. It's also no secret — we've heard it from one of the group's leaders, Mark Salvo, ourselves — that what WildEarth Guardians is really after is to end public-lands grazing.

While groups are free to pursue whatever radical agenda they want, it's not the federal government's obligation to help implement those agendas where they are overwhelmingly unwelcome and when they are legally unjustified. In our estimation, such an action would be nothing less than a travesty.

For more than a decade, the citizens of Gunnison County have come to the table in a good faith effort to protect the Gunnison Sage-grouse. Land use regulations have been enacted and enforced. Volunteer conservation agreements have been put in place. Evidence suggests these efforts are working, and legal precedent (think oil and gas oversight) strongly points to our county government's masterful ability to seal these protective ethos into law, in perpetuity.

Simply put, there is no way the feds can do a better job of protecting this bird than we have proven capable of. Not only have local efforts resulted in a stronghold population of this species, but given an opportunity, these same efforts can be extended to other jurisdictions — possibly with the help of local leaders. The Gunnison Basin is a model for a community's conservation-minded response to an imperiled species.

Lastly, because the ESA has been, over time, hijacked by extremists on both sides of the ideological spectrum, it's turned into a lightning rod of controversy. Its enactment here would undeniably transform what's been a widespread spirit of cooperation into an every-person-for-himself fight.

The final analysis, in our view, clearly shows everyone losing with an ESA listing of the Gunnison Sage-grouse, including the birds themselves. The only winner is an extreme environmental group that has no stake in our community.

That is not the ending to a long and arduous struggle that we deserve.

LETTERS

Times story failed to mention why USPS is in such a predicament

Editor:

I am writing to express my disappointment with the *Times'* reporting of the U.S. Post Office cutbacks which will impact many Gunnison County residents ("Local P.O.s facing reduced hours," Feb. 21.) If I recall my junior high school journalism class, a newspaper article should always explain the "who, where, what, when, why and how" of the story. The Times reporter omitted the "why."

The last line of the *Times* article reads: "According to a press release issued Feb. 17 by the USPS, 80 percent of Americans favor the new delivery schedule." I'm thinking that 80 percent of Americans do not know the big reason why the USPS is in such financial difficulty.

The agency's real troubles began in 2006 when Congress passed the "Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act." This act mandated the USPS to prefund postal retirees' health benefits for the next 75 years within a 10 year span. In other words, from 2006 to 2016 the U.S. Postal Service will have had to put enough cash into an account to pay benefits to people that haven't been born yet. No other entity — public or private — has ever been saddled with such a crazy requirement.

Rather than "enhancing" the Postal Service, it seems this 2006 legislation was attempting to put the Postal Service into a death spiral. Seven years out, it has almost succeeded. Due primarily to the mandate, the agency is deeply in the red. It is now halting or limiting service, which will likely lead to less revenue, further cuts, and then even less revenue.

Why a Republican-lead congress and a Republican president would pass a law that puts in jeopardy the existence of an entity which is mandated by the U.S. Constitution is baffling, until of course one is reminded of the Republicans' goal of shrinking government "to the size where we can drown it in the bathtub." Or, perhaps the Republican Party is looking forward to another 120,000 jobs lost in this fragile economy. That would certainly help their talking points for upcoming elections.

(As a disclaimer, neither I nor any of my family or friends work for the U.S. Postal Service. I do confess, however, that I wave to my postal carrier if I happen to see her at the corner. Come to think of it, she usually waves first.)

C.R. Wilkens
Gunnison

Longtime local resident in need of helping hand

Editor:

Dave and Lisa Mapes and family have resided in the Gunnison Valley for more than 33 years. They are reaching out for your help at this time. Lisa is suffering from a rare spinal medical condition called Tarlov Cyst disease. This disease is extremely painful, life altering and progressive, as the cysts erode sacral, pelvic and spice bones, nerves, as well as painfully altering multiple body organs.

There are only a few neurosurgeons in the world qualified to diagnose and perform this operation. Lisa now needs to (hopefully) halt the otherwise inevitable physical incapacitation that comes with Tarlov Cyst disease. Lisa has been struggling with this disease for eight years and in now unable to run her business of 20 years, Cosmic Cruiser Sled Dog Tours, as well as her counseling practice and horse adventures for locals and tourists. Dave and family continue to work very hard to keep tours going.

The specific operation Lisa needs is out-of-state and out-of-pocket, as the family cannot afford the operation. *Any* assistance you feel you could offer would be graciously accepted. Donations can be sent to the Lisa Mapes Medical Fund at Gunnison Savings & Loan.

Sincerely,
Dave, Lisa, Ayla, Merlin, 100 animals, Susan Gore, Spencer and Arlene Fickel, Cindy Smock, Mandie Little, Melody and Kenny Marks, Patrick and Judith Farrell

Family aims to raise awareness of 'preventable' newborn condition

Editor:

I am writing, as a former Gunnison resident for 14 years, in regards to the day that changed the lives of my son, his father, myself. On March 21, 2011 our son Vinny was airlifted to St. Mary's in Grand Junction. Vinny had newborn jaundice.

Vinny will be 2 years old on March 15. We are writing for two reasons:

We want to thank all of the community members who have unconditionally provided support for Vinny with fundraising, meals, cards, blankets, and, most importantly, love.

With great passion, we want to bring awareness to the preventable damage that newborn jaundice can cause. Within Vinny's first week of life he was diagnosed with Kernicterus, which has caused irreversible brain damage that will affect him and our family throughout his life.

Due to his newborn jaundice he developed Kernicterus. As a result Vinny has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy, hearing impairment, visual impairment, physical impairments and developmental delays. The hardest part of this diagnosis is that it is *preventable.* Vinny did not have jaundice as a result of genetic conditions or RH factor blood. He had a slow rising bilirubin that could have been medically alleviated had it been recognized and appropriately treated.

Please take the time to learn about the consequences of untreated newborn jaundice. If you know someone who is pregnant or has a newborn, take the time to learn and educate him or her about jaundice.

Since Vinny's diagnosis, we have had to leave the Gunnison Valley to receive extensive pediatric-focused therapy. While we are no longer residing in Gunnison, we continue to find great comfort and have an awesome support system from Gunny Folk. Thank you!

Sincerely,
Vinny, Alicia Pedroza and Paul Mannes

Why not open Cranor?

Editor:

Why not open Cranor Hill? Many people learned how to ski there. It is fun — better than the college hill. Gunnison is famous for its "White Gold," as it says at the Chamber.

Dave Klingsmith
Gunnison

LETTERS POLICY

All letters are subject to editing for space, grammar and, on occasion, factual accuracy. Letters will be published on a space-available basis. *The Gunnison Country Times* reserves the right to refuse publication of any letter. All letters must be signed and include a full name, address, occupation and daytime phone number. Full name and home town will typically be published. We do not accept anonymous letters. The preferred method of receiving letters is through e-mail.

Send us your opinions and share them with others.

E-mail Will Shoemaker at editor@gunnisontimes.com.