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Smoke prompts advisory

Chaffee County Public Health and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment issued an air quality health advisory for wildfire smoke at 5 p.m. Tuesday, effective until 9 a.m. today.

The affected area is northeastern Saguache, southeast-

ern Chaffee and northwestern Fremont counties, including Alder, Villa Grove, Salida, Cleora and Wellsville.

"The increasing smoke in the air has been a concern for Chaffee County Public Health, especially over the past 24 hours," Andrea Carlstrom, Chaffee County pub-

lic health director, said in a press release.

"We encourage all Chaffee County residents and visitors to take the (health advisory) recommendations seriously. For more urgent respiratory health matters, please contact your primary care physician." See PUBLIC, page 2



Photo courtesy U.S. Department of Agriculture
 The Decker Fire in the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Area burns in grass under an aspen stand.

Decker Fire grows

by Sam Klomhaus
 Mail Staff Writer

The U.S. Forest Service is monitoring a 98-acre fire in the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Area, which is sending smoke into Salida, Forest Service spokeswoman Judy Perez said.

The fire, called the Decker Fire, was first reported Sunday afternoon and was caused by lightning, Chad Lewis, interagency fire management officer, said.

The Decker Fire is entirely within the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Area in the Rio Grande National Forest, Perez said, and has not spread to the Pike/San Isabel National Forests.

The fire is just smoldering in the grass, Perez said, and is meeting a lot of resource objectives such as reducing fuels, removing dead trees

and helping aspen regeneration.

A Forest Service press release said the fire is burning on a south-facing slope in grass under an aspen stand.

As long as the fire continues to do that and doesn't hit a trigger point, such as a change in the weather, the Forest Service will continue to monitor it but not take direct action.

Perez said smoke in Salida could also be a trigger point for the Forest Service to go out the fire.

Lewis said the Forest Service will post notices for local hunters, but currently there are no structures threatened, road closures or forest closures.

Three other, smaller fires are burning in the area, the release stated, and also are being monitored.



Courtesy photo

Wise old owl stares back

Perched on a limb a great horned owl stares back at Salidan Audrey Hannifin. Hannifin said she took the shot near CR 160. Photographers can share their photos by emailing them to pgoetz@themountainmail.com or clicking the "Submissions" tab at themountainmail.com. Be sure to include when, where and by whom the photo was taken.

CMC, BV schools clarify how impasse came to be

by D.J. DeJong
 Mail Staff Writer

Negotiations between Colorado Mountain College and Buena Vista School District that resulted in an impasse regarding the fate of the CMC building in Buena Vista prompted both entities to issue press releases to clarify their positions.

Following the Aug. 28 publication of an article in the Chaffee County Times headlined "CMC bails on BV, surprises school board," Colorado Mountain College assured the public that the college still

has a presence in the northern Chaffee County school district. (The same article by Max Smith ran Aug. 30 in The Mountain Mail under the headline "Colorado Mountain College moves out of Buena Vista facility.")

CMC's response

In a Sept. 3 letter from CMC President and CEO Carrie Besnette Hauser, addressed to the Chaffee County business community, media organizations and interested residents, the college traced its timeline of negotiations between the

school district and the college:

- In spring 2018 Lisa Yates, superintendent of the Buena Vista School District, requested use of several classrooms at the CMC Chaffee County Center for the district's preschool programs. After determining the feasibility of the request, CMC agreed to allow BVSD to use the requested space for the 2018-2019 school year at no charge. In addition, CMC helped retrofit three classrooms, also at no cost to the district.
- On Nov. 1 Colorado Mountain College received a letter from the school district

requesting initiation of formal negotiations for acquisition of the CMC campus in Chaffee County. In that letter, Yates suggested that the CMC campus is "attractive for ownership" by BVSD, and the district's programs "could be well served by the location."

After receiving that request, CMC staff consulted with BVSD staff to prepare a recommendation for presentation to the CMC board of trustees at its next official meeting in January. The CMC trustees instructed CMC management to offer use of the CMC-Chaffee

County campus at no cost to BVSD, as it believed that enabling early childhood education slots in Buena Vista was a greater benefit to the community than maintaining an underused building for college-level education only.

A Feb. 6 letter directed by the CMC trustees states that items such as insurance, maintenance and utilities would be the responsibility of the school district as part of its lease with CMC.

Soon after, the college sent a draft three-year lease agreement to Yates, to begin

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