



Photo by Peggy Fagerstrom

SIGNS OF SPRING — A flock of seagulls sit by the mouth of Nome River by Fort Davis anticipating spring.

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Photo by Diana Haecker

SOUPERMAN— DAWN supporter Todd Hindman was dubbed “Souperman” during last Friday’s SouperBowl fundraiser at the Elementary School for having prepared most of the 10 delicious soups. The SouperBowl is an annual fundraiser for Drugs Aren’t Wanted in Nome.

Backers keep Nome at the trough

By Sandra L Medearis

City administrators are applauding regional state representatives, lobbyists and themselves for making the rounds in Juneau to see important capital projects through the legislature, ensuring that Nome’s straw got a good pull from the fat reservoir of record state oil revenues to pay for roads, power, public buildings and essential services like water and sewer.

Pending approval by Gov. Frank Murkowski, local capital improvement projects through city and state agencies affecting quality of life in the Nome area received more than \$20 million in state dollars and federal money out of \$2.5 billion-\$2.7 billion divvied up by the Legislature through the capital budget, putting a smile on those who plan for public infrastructures.

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BLM issues Western Alaska land use plan

By Sandra L. Medearis

What weighs over five pounds, is three inches thick and chock full of information that should be very interesting to the residents and users of abundant subsistence, mineral and recreational resources on the Kobuk-Seward Peninsula? It is the two-volume Kobuk-Seward Peninsula Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement, updated from the 1982 plan by fed-

eral mandate. The draft determination will come up for public review and comment at a public meeting in Nome on May 24 at the Aurora Inn conference Room from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. The public hearing will begin at 7:15 p.m. The Bureau of Land Management released the work May 5. It is available for public comment until Aug. 4.

Putting forth four alternatives, beginning with Alternative A,

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Owens files appeal

By Diana Haecker

On April 28, lawyers for Matthew Owens filed an appeal of final judgment with the Alaska Court of Appeals.

The appeal lists five points, stating that the Nome trial court committed error by refusing to change venue to Anchorage, Fairbanks or any other large community outside of northwest Alaska; for erring when the court restricted Owens’ right to cross-examine Nome police

department officer Byron Redburn; and for allowing the introduction of what Owens lawyers called unreliable hearsay by Mike Eaton.

Other points the appeal lists are that the court refused to recuse itself. “The court committed error for not declaring a mistrial in Kotzebue when there were two jurors who had been consuming alcohol during the trial and by the end of the trial. Only one would be

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Windblown waste litters tundra around dump

By Diana Haecker

Landfill operator Gary Hart can’t hear it anymore. “The plastic bag problem is like a broken record,” he said in response to the evergreen-question of what to do about flying garbage and plastic bags, littering the land and tundra around the city’s landfill storm after storm.

The question has come up in numerous City Council meetings and work sessions, but so far no alternative solution to the present practice has materialized. For the second time in three years, an ordinance to ban plastic bags was voted down by city council members on February 27.

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The appropriation even includes money for a public safety building. Last Friday City Manager Randy Romanesko was pinching himself to see if he was dreaming.

“I’m ecstatic,” he said. “It’s unbelievable.”

Romanesko praised regional representatives and the lobbyists working on Nome’s behalf with state legislators. “Richard (Rep. Foster D-Nome) was a great help with his seniority and effort. His support is integral to getting resources for this region.”

The top projects on the wish list the Nome Common Council handed legislators and lobbyists received funds, the new power plant and water and sewer upgrades. The state

capital projects budget holds \$4 million for the power plant under construction on Port Road, money from bond sales based on anticipated revenue from a tobacco suit settlement with Philip Morris and other companies. For replacement and extension of water and sewer mains, the City received \$2.207 million.

On top of that, the City got \$2.7 million for the long-awaited, long-desired public safety building to house the ambulance, police and emergency services. According to Romanesko, city administrators are in the process of selecting an architecture and engineering firm, for which the City has design money through a community block grant program.

“Now we have some money to

build it!” Romanesko said.

The City is in negotiations with Alaska Gold for land for the public safety building in the north of town near the Alaska Commercial store.

The list goes on, with \$3.0 million for improvements to the Nome Bypass Road and \$1.275 million for dust control. The City has flexibility with application of the dust money, as it can go wherever Nome has dust, for which most streets are eligible.

Again, pending the governor’s signature, there is more money on the way to enhance the arrival and departure from Nome. An appropriation to the state Dept. of Transportation provides \$7 million for federally mandated improvements to Nome Airport, and more

money for permanent repairs for the Nome-Teller (Blodgett) Highway.

Still further, the City received money to help cover increased costs of employee benefits, and, to help with the high price of utilities to light City offices, another \$170,000 for the City’s general fund.

Nome Joint Utilities Manager John Handeland said the \$4 million for the power plant will come in handy to make up the \$13 million needed for the project, which will require additional money to string feeder lines and when the Rock Creek gold mine opens, to buy another generator to supply its power. NJU is still working to secure an additional \$4 million from RUS. Handeland praised Foster and Sen. Donny Olson for helping to

secure the \$4 million from the tobacco settlement.

In other areas of the region, Bering Strait School District has money in the state capital budget for two new schools—for Savoonga, \$31.6 million, for St. Michael, \$22.5 million—and to build a long-hoped for dormitory for its NACTEC vocational education program next door to Nome’s high school.

The governor could still exercise his line item veto on some of the projects. Some funding may tie to getting an oil tax bill passed, Romanesko cautioned. “I’m not counting my chickens,” but I’m happy,” he said.

•BLM

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which would leave management the same, of the three remaining comprising various changes, the BLM comes out in favor of Alternative D. Reading out of the introduction to the presented options, this alternative emphasizes a moderate protection, use and enhancements of resources and services, based on consideration of a balanced use and protection of resources and the extent of environmental impacts, which means:

- This choice would designate one Research Natural Area for education, five Areas of Critical Environmental concern needing more attention to use, and two Special Management Areas.

- This alternative would revoke most ANCSA (d)(1) withdrawals, leaving the majority of the planning

area open to mineral entry and location.

- The research area and three anadromous rivers (where fish return to spawn) would be withdrawn from mineral entry. Protections for resources would cover some areas.

- No rivers would be recommended to go under the American Scenic Rivers Act.

Prepared by the Fairbanks field office of the Bureau of Land management, the two-volume work reflects input from federal and state agencies as well as the public in drawing up four alternatives that when final will govern land use on 31 million acres of federal lands for some years. In specific, the plan addresses, for example, alternatives for use of areas of critical environmental concern including the Kigluaik Mountains, Mount

Osborn, Kuzitrin River, Nulato Hills, and special recreational management areas like Salmon Lake and Squirrel River. More information will be available at the May 24 meeting.

The planning process that drew from nine public scoping meetings in March and April 2004, assigns four major issues to the project, which try to harmonize possibly conflicting uses of the vast lands:

- How can recreational use of public lands be managed to reduce conflicts between sport and subsistence hunting and to prevent negative impacts on subsistence hunting opportunity?

- How to maintain and protect subsistence opportunities—determine how management actions, guidelines, and allowable uses prescribed in response to other issues will affect both subsistence opportunities and resources and the social and economic environment.

- Determine which areas should be made available for mineral exploration and development (mining).

- Provide access to BLM man-

aged lands for various purposes, including recreation, subsistence activities, and general enjoyment of public lands, while protecting cultural and natural resources.

Ideas the Resource Management Plan does not address are wilderness inventory, land conveyance (which the plan will not retard or speed up), existing BLM regulations on fee structures and permitting for commercial activities including grazing permits, hunting and fishing regulations, which are the territory of state Department of Fish and Game and the state boards of game and fisheries. Decisions made in the RMP will not affect state or federal fishing or hunting regulations.

Additionally, the plan does not take up the State of Alaska’s say over guides, outfitters and transporters, and decisions on the federal subsistence program will continue to come from regional advisory councils and the Federal Subsistence Board with input from state ADF&G, the public and federal staff. The RMP does consider impacts and access to subsistence

resources and subsistence opportunities from proposals associated with the four alternative plans of action in the Environmental Impact Survey. Subsistence uses and needs are considered according to ANILCA. According to the plan book, valid existing rights will be recognized and protected.

Information on the Seward Peninsula-Kobuk Draft Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement can be found at the library and BLM office in the post office lobby. Or, find it online at www.blm.gov/ak/ksp under “documents.” Aside from land use issues, the study holds a treasure of information on Western Alaska plants, animals, scenic wonders and wilderness nooks and crannies, with many informative maps.

Following the 90-day public comment period, the BLM staff will designate one of the alternatives, possibly make revisions based on public input and issue a final plan, followed by a 30-day “protest” period. Then following possible changes, the plan will go into law.

Nome Board of Equalization declines property assessment appeals

By Laurie McNicholas

The 2006 Nome Board of Equalization met May 9 to certify decisions made at their meeting May 3 on appeals filed by individuals who disputed the City of Nome’s assessed values of their properties. The Nome Board of Equalization is comprised of members of the Nome Common Council.

At their meeting May 3, the Board unanimously declined to accept a late filed appeal by Leo Rasmussen. They also voted down motions to approve appeals by Rose Ann Timbers of value assessments of two of her properties—Block 70, Lot 1 & 2 (which has been combined into one tax lot number) and Block 91, Lot 2A. The following information is derived from minutes of the May 3 meeting.

In her appeal letter to the Board dated April 12, 2006, Timbers wrote: “I am contesting the value of my lots assessed at \$46,900.00 description Lot 1 & 2. If the Nome Joint Utility Board and Manager John Handeland filled my lots with gravel like they promised my lots would be of full value at the taxable value of \$46,900.00. The last offer I received was \$35,000.00 unless the property was filled with the gravel that should have been put on my property.”

In discussion of this issue, property assessor Russell Farrington recommended that the value of the combined Lot 1 & 2 be reduced from \$3.35 per square foot to \$3.00 per square foot for a total of \$42,000 to reflect a somewhat undesirable location adjacent to a 29-plex. He also said he had heard Timbers had tried to sell the lots without success. In response to a question from Councilwoman Mary Knodel, Farrington said that last year the Board had reduced the assessed value of Lot 1 & 2 from \$50,400 to \$46,900. The Council discussed the possibility that lack of for sale signs and effort to sell the lots could be reasons they remain unsold. A motion to approve Timbers’ appeal on Block 70, Lot 1 & 2 failed by a vote of 4-0.

In regard to the assessed value of Block 91, Lot 2A, Timbers wrote to the board: “My property assessed value of \$109,000 has decreased in value again this year due to NJUS not properly packing my home after their project. I have written letters to the office and provided public testimony on 3/27/06. I am currently paying bills for plumbing, and will this summer have to have my home releveled due to NJUS project creating more shifting and flooding problems in front of my property. I cannot sell my home at the assessed value of \$109,900....”

Farrington noted that the Board of Equalization had revalued the property at \$109,900 last year and that this year its assessed value had increased based on the 2006 revaluation of Nome. “Based on Ms. Timber’s letter stating problems with the house and the overall fair observed condition of the subject property, it is my recommendation that the value be lowered to the 2005 BOE value, as this value is considered to be more in line with the current market,” Ferrington added.

In response to a question from Knodel, Ferrington said there is no for sale sign on the property. Councilman Randy Pomeranz said his own house had shifted all over the place because of fill placed on lots behind his house and that it seems to be a product of where they live. Councilmen Jerald Brown, John Larson and Pomeranz voted in favor of a motion to approve Timbers’ appeal of the assessed value of Block 91, Lot 2A, and Councilwoman Knodel voted against it. The motion failed because a minimum of four votes are required for adoption of a motion.

Law requires that the same Council members who voted as members of the 2006 Board of Equalization May 3 certify their decisions within seven days, so on May 9 Brown, Knodel, Larson and Pomeranz adopted the findings of fact and conclusions of law for the 2006 Nome Board of Equalization. Brown and Larson participated by phone in the May 9 meeting.



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