

State To Mull Dropping Speed Limit West Of Rapid City

BY JAMES NORD
Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS — Travelers on a roughly 55-mile stretch of I-90 west of Rapid City to the Wyoming border may not be able to drive the new 80 mph speed limit for much longer under recommendations proposed by the Department of Transportation.

The state Transportation Commission will take public comment during a hearing at the end of May on the proposal, which would drop the speed limit long-term on that portion to 75 mph. Mike Carlson, a Transportation Department engineer for the Rapid City area, said the hilly stretch of interstate is heavily traveled and has curves that aren't conducive to the new speed limit.

The new upper speed on I-90 and I-29 came as a result of a transportation funding package signed last month that aims to raise more than \$80 million in its first year to fix ailing roads and bridges in the state. South Dakota on April 1 began allowing drivers to legally travel at speeds as high as 80 mph. Texas, Utah and Wyoming already allow those speeds and others are considering it.

Transportation Commission member Edward Seljeskog has been a voice of concern during commission meetings, including a gathering Thursday where the public comment hearing was set. Seljeskog told the commission that he's been approached by people who ask, "Hey, why are they mucking around with this?" "My concern out here in the west is it isn't just straight ... interstate highway," Seljeskog, who lives in Rapid City, said after the

meeting. "It's got a lot of curves in it, a lot of close adjacent property."

House Majority Leader Brian Gosch, a Republican from Rapid City who was the main backer of the increase in speed limit, said he wasn't familiar with the proposed changes.

"People were driving 80 on that road, and it seems pretty popular," he said. "I think people will probably still drive 80 on that stretch."

But Gosch said he trusts the commission to use its best judgment setting the speed.

Carlson said that portion of I-90 is very heavily traveled and has a high number of accidents involving deer. Carlson said an appropriate speed limit is determined by analyzing a road's horizontal and vertical curves and the width of the road, among other factors.

The flatter, less curvy and wider a road is, the safer a driver feels, he said.

Terry Schmidt, a car mechanic at Interstate Auto & Boat just off I-90 in Blackhawk, South Dakota, said he thinks the speed should drop down to 75 mph because traffic is so heavy on that piece of the highway.

"It's just getting a little bit too fast, I think," he said. "Eighty (mph) on my bike on the interstate is just a little too fast."

The Commission also plans to hear from the public on a proposal to temporarily drop speed limits in the area even further in the summer for the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. One part of the proposed changes would be to extend a 65 mph speed limit for a larger stretch of the interstate for a longer period of time in July and August.

Pheasant Producers Are Anxious As Bird Flu Spreads

BY KEVIN BURBACH
Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS — Bill MacFarlane has been anxious since a case of a deadly bird flu strain was recently confirmed in domestic poultry just 50 miles from his southern Wisconsin farm, the largest pheasant operation in North America that supplies 1.8 million birds each year to the game bird industry.

"I would say the last 10 days have been probably the most stressful days of my entire life," he said.

MacFarlane and other game bird producers have ramped up disease-prevention measures in an effort to shield their multi-billion-dollar industry from the highly-contagious avian influenza outbreak sweeping the Midwest poultry industry that has led to the death of millions of turkeys and chickens either from the virus or to stop its spread.

It's still not known how susceptible game birds are to the H5N2 strain of avian influenza. The only case of the virus in pheasants so far was in the distant state of Washington, where the flock was euthanized. Game bird producers in the Upper Midwest primarily raise



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pheasants but also other birds, such as partridge and chucker.

At MacFarlane Farms, feed trucks that come onto the farm have to be sprayed down with disinfectant, employees wear work-only foot gear, booties and coveralls while in barns and pens and visitors are not allowed to enter any production facilities or even to leave their vehicles.

Mike Forsgren, the owner of Forsgren's Pheasant Farm Inc., said he now meets delivery drivers at the end

of the driveway at his pheasant farm in Pelican Rapids, Minnesota to stop the disease from entering his operation.

"We're all doing pretty much the same thing: Everything we can," he said.

Game bird farms raise millions of pheasants to stock preserves that are flooded with sportsmen from across the country and world each fall for hunting.

The industry is important, especially in the Plains states from Texas to the Dakotas as hunters fill up hotels and spend money in

small communities, said Sam Ballou, the president of the North American Game Bird Association and an Ohio preserve owner himself.

"The real big kicker is all the people traveling to and from the hunting preserve: the lodging, the fuel, the hunting clothing," he said. "It's a pretty big impact."

On pheasant operations, chicks are raised in barns like turkeys and chickens, but older birds grow up in fly pens, which are large netted aviaries where pheasants can fly around. Since the pheasants will one day be released to be hunted, they're raised to have the same characteristics as wild birds.

Ballou said his organization consults with veterinary experts often and gives its members weekly updates with the latest news and prevention tips.

"I'm not going to let my guard down at all and think in any way, shape or form that pheasants aren't susceptible," said MacFarlane, who's worked on the family farm for 36 years and employs 60 full-time workers. "I'm not trying to be negative, I'm just being realistic."

Lower Brule Sioux Leader Asks Feds To Freeze Funds

BY JAMES NORD
Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS — The acting chairman of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe has asked the Department of the Interior to suspend transfers of federal funds to the tribe and investigate previous allegations of misdirected federal money.

Kevin Wright said Friday he sent a letter this week making the requests to Kevin Washburn, assistant secretary of Indian Affairs at the Interior Department. Wright said he has been stonewalled trying to access the tribe's finances, which have been subject to allegations of mismanagement.

"Freeze them, and then look into it," Wright told The Associated Press. "We want to know what's going on."

A Department of Interior spokeswoman didn't return requests for comment.

The death three weeks ago of longtime Chairman Michael Jandreau intensified a political battle among members of the tribe loyal to the decades-long administration and a new guard of tribal councilmembers

calling for more transparency, including Wright. He cited the tribe's constitution and bylaws when he took over leadership of the government shortly before Jandreau died of heart trouble.

Wright and Jandreau had previously sparred about administrative transparency, and Wright was one of the council members who criticized Jandreau over allegations of financial mismanagement that were outlined by Human Rights Watch in January.

The organization detailed numerous claims against Jandreau and others, accusing them of diverting money and concealing financial activity by withholding government documents from the public.

Jandreau and Marshall Matz, who has been an attorney for the tribe, have vigorously pushed back against those allegations.

"I totally deny any wrongdoing, you know," Jandreau told The Associated Press before his death. "What was done was always advised or done with a tremendous amount of oversight by peo-

ple of the legal field."

Wright and two allies sit on the tribal council across from two Jandreau loyalists. Wright's declaration at a council meeting earlier this month that he would preside as chairman boiled into a crowd-wide shouting match, and it's unclear how the division will be bridged to form a collaborative government.

"It's frustrating," Wright said. "We're backed into a corner, and I understand that they are too, but it's simply because they've been in power all this time and now the shoe's on the other foot."

Councilman Orville Langdeau, who is also the tribe's secretary and treasurer, and Councilman John McCauley, both Jandreau supporters, didn't immediately return requests for comment.

In the letter to Washburn, Wright describes a "serious situation developing" on the reservation and invites federal officials to investigate the allegations in the Human Rights Watch report, including the tribe's purchase of a New York-based brokerage firm called Westrock Advisors Inc. that ultimately went

bankrupt.

Human Rights Watch said the "most blatant example" of wrongdoing stems from the tribe's purchase of Westrock.

The report accuses tribal leaders and their business partners of setting up several shell companies and then securing a \$22.5 million federal loan guarantee from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Rather than putting the money toward its stated purpose of economic development, the funds were used to buy Westrock, which went bankrupt two years later, the report said. The guarantee was ultimately sold for about \$20 million to another company, though the tribe hasn't disclosed the status of the loan, the report found.

The Department of the Interior's Office of Inspector General said Friday that in February 2013 it started investigating circumstances surrounding the Westrock purchase, and the probe is still open. The office is also mulling whether to investigate allegations from the Human Rights Watch report.

Commissioner Apologizes For Racial Slur

AUBURN, Neb. (AP) — A Nemaha County commissioner is defending his colleague who publicly apologized for using a racial slur during a Thursday board meeting in Auburn.

The Lincoln Journal Star and Nebraska City radio station B103 report that Commissioner Bob Hutton had used a racial epithet at a meeting Wednesday as the council discussed the use of decorative rock over mulch for the courthouse lawn. Hutton, concerned that children would sling the rocks at the courthouse windows, described slingshots using an epithet. Board Chairman Dennis Witmann and County Clerk Joyce Oakley had reprimanded Hutton during the meeting.

In a written statement issued Thursday, Hutton apologized and said he spoke without thinking. He described the epithet as a term he had heard as a child.

"In doing so, and in hearing my own words, I recognized that my terminology was incorrect and inappropriate," Hutton wrote. "It does not reflect on my views as an adult or the views of my family. I am sorry for the inconsideration and inappropriateness of my statement."

Attempts to reach Hutton and Board Chairman Dennis Witmann were unsuccessful Thursday.

Commissioner Marvin Bohling disputed claims Thursday that his colleague was a racist.

"He's as sweet-hearted as they come," said Bohling, adding that Hutton's comments were not meant to hurt anyone.

Bohling doesn't believe any more disciplinary action is needed in the case. But he promised the board would take additional actions if constituents express more concerns.

USD Law School Dealing With Bad Odors

VERMILLION (AP) — The University of South Dakota has found the cause of one odor that has permeated the university's law school but is still seeking the source of another bad smell.

A fluid used in a coolant system is leaking from pipes underground and releasing an odor as it degrades that smells like rotting onions, university spokeswoman Tena Haraldson said. Officials plan to spend up to \$100,000 on replacing the leaking pipes, but the work can't be done until after the school year wraps up.

"We've got to hold out for two weeks," law school dean Tom Geu told the Argus Leader newspaper. "Every day it doesn't smell is a good day because we move one day closer to taking care of it."

Frozen ground in the winter minimized the smell, but with the spring thaw the stink has returned.

"We've certainly had employees who complained about the smell," Haraldson said. "We've had people who work in the area who say the smell makes them nauseous. It is not in fact causing them physical illness. When removed from the smell, they feel better."

Officials are still trying to find the source of an intermittent sewer smell at the law school. Testing will be done once the school year ends, Haraldson said.

Air quality tests have not found any toxic readings, she said.

Creighton University Unveils Sculpture Honoring School's Roots

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Creighton University officials held an unveiling ceremony Thursday for a new sculpture called "The Flame."

The Omaha World-Herald reports that the piece was commissioned by the family of Charles and Mary Heider, supporters of the university and namesakes of the Heider College of Business. Nearly two years ago, the family approached the university's president, with the idea for a sculpture paying tribute to the school's Jesuit tradition.

At the ceremony, artist and Creighton professor Littleton Alston told a crowd that he hopes the sculpture

will serve as a symbol for the university.

The stainless steel piece stands over 20 feet tall and features an eternal flame. An inscription featuring a quote attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola, the 16th century founder of the Society of Jesus, is etched into the side: "Go set the world on fire."

In the early stages, Scott Heider, Charles and Mary Heider's son, asked Alston to consider a flame as a possible theme for the project, though he never imagined the artist would bring back a vision with real fire.

Alston said he chose cast stainless steel for the sculpture because of the way the

material interacts with the flame. During daytime, he claims the polished surface will be bright in appearance. At night, it will become more subdued as the fire inside becomes more visible.

"Sculpture can be a living thing," Alston said. "It isn't just a statue. It deals with us in the physical world in a real way. It has a life of its own, in a way."

Teacher Arrested In Sex Case

HASTINGS, Neb. (AP) — A Hastings High School teacher has been arrested, accused of sexually assaulting a student.

The Hastings Tribune reports that 38-year-old Johnathan Shafer was arrested on a warrant Thursday evening. Online jail records say he remained in custody on Friday. Court records don't list the name of an attorney who could be contacted to comment on Shafer's behalf about the allegations.

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