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County

From Page 1

The 2010 U.S. census lists the county's population as 3,431. Only one in four pays property tax, the county's lone source of revenue other than grants, Kraft said.

"We have 858 taxpayers in the county," Kraft said.

One-fourth of Bennett County is Native American trust land.

"It's tax exempt," Kraft said. "In our case, 45 percent of our population lives on that land. They receive services, but they don't contribute to the tax base."

Bennett County Auditor Susan Williams said of the county's total 760,960 acres, 190,259 acres are tax-exempt trust land. An additional 16,555 acres comprise the LaCreek National Wildlife Refuge, she said. The federal government contributes payments in lieu of taxes to the county for the wildlife refuge. But these are less than half what the land would contribute if it paid property tax, she said.

"We've been trying to solve that problem for 20 years," said Dale McDonnell, a former Bennett County commissioner and former chairman of the state commissioners' organization. "Nobody listens to us. We're such a small group."

This year, Bennett County collected \$2.5 million in property tax. Of that, \$972,700 went to the school district, \$143,600 to the city of Martin and \$1.395 million to the county. The county's total budget is \$1.4 million, according to Kraft. Of that, he said, \$700,000 is tied up in public safety expenses.

Three years ago, the county averaged seven people per day in jail. Bennett County averages 25 people per day in jail at present, he said.

"We have a higher crime rate per capita than Sioux Falls does," Kraft said.

He ties much of the crime increase to widespread unemployment in Bennett County and drug and alcohol abuse.

Compounding problems associated with the cost of crime is the fact Bennett County has to send its prisoners to other counties because its jail closed about five years ago. Adults go to the 132-bed Winner Combined Law Enforcement Center for \$50 per day plus transportation to get them there. Juveniles are housed in Rapid City's Western South Dakota Juvenile Services Center for \$225 per day.

"Our jail budget is gone already for this year," Kraft said. "Last year, we overran our budget by \$150,000, and we're right around there again."

Bennett County already has eliminated cost-of-living raises for employees. It slashed another \$40,000 from the budget by eliminating temporary employees.

"You run out of money, what do you do?" Kraft asked.

Nebraska

Tax Study To Examine Income, Property Taxes

BY GRANT SCHULTE

Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Lawmakers studying the state tax system will hear from property- and income-tax experts on Tuesday before they start traveling Nebraska for public input.

Members of the Legislature's Tax Modernization Committee will join for a work session to continue work on the tax study, which could lead to legislation when lawmakers reconvene in January. The panel is looking to create tax policy that's fair, simple and stable, while helping Nebraska compete with other states. It will also explore how to keep the system adequate to pay for essential state services.

Seven states have no formal corporate-income tax, including Nebraska's neighbors Wyoming and South Dakota, said David Sjoquist, a corporate income-tax expert at Georgia State University. But Sjoquist said a corporation leaving either of the two states for Nebraska was unlikely, because the borders are rural and most businesses are concentrated in Omaha and Lincoln.

Sjoquist, who will speak to lawmakers Tuesday, said there's general agreement on sales taxes, but less common ground in setting the best corporate income tax policy.

"With the sales tax, you have a general set of principles about what a good system is," he said. "You want a broad tax base, a uniform rate, and you don't want to tax business purchases. You could get almost every economist in the country to agree to that. But with the corporate income tax, there's no gospel of the economists as to what the best policy is."

Still, Sjoquist said Nebraska and the nation's shift from manufacturing to service-related industries have helped businesses become more mobile. As a result, he said, businesses may be more willing to move to states with a more favorable tax climate.

Nebraska's personal income tax is roughly in line with other states, said Georgia State Univer-

sity economist Sally Wallace, who will also give a presentation to the tax committee.

Wallace, a personal income-tax expert, helped produce a 1988 study of Nebraska's tax climate while at Syracuse University. The report described Nebraska's tax climate as "sound and reasonably competitive" with nearby states, but suggested that the state should extend its sales tax to consumer services.

"Even on the income tax back then, it was a pretty run-of-the-mill system," Wallace said.

"Nothing struck me as particularly out-of-whack." Lawmakers will hear from University of Nebraska-Lincoln economist John Anderson, who has studied the state's property tax system.

Property taxes in Nebraska have increased faster than inflation in part because of cuts in state aid to local governments, leaving them in the positions of raising property taxes or cutting services, said Renee Fry, executive director of the Lincoln-based OpenSky Policy Institute. Fry said lawmakers should consider increasing state aid for K-12 education, which she said would allow local school districts to reduce property taxes. Fry said Nebraska ranks 49th nationally in the state aid it distributes to schools.

Lawmakers on the 14-member Tax Modernization Committee are conducting a six-month review of the tax structure, with public hearings scheduled in Lincoln, Omaha, Scottsbluff, North Platte and Norfolk. Some committee members have said the review will look for structural deficiencies in the tax system, but may not lead to widespread tax cuts.

Gov. Dave Heineman released a proposal last year to eliminate — or at least reduce — the state's income tax. In exchange, the Republican governor recommended that lawmakers abolish as much as \$2.4 billion in state sales tax exemptions. The plan drew criticism from farm groups, manufacturers, nonprofits and others that stood to lose a sales tax break, and Heineman withdrew the proposals so lawmakers could launch the tax study.

South Dakota

Weather, Walleye Helping Parks

BY JORDAN STEFFEN

The Daily Republic

PLATTE (AP) — Weather and walleye fishing are bringing more campers to South Dakota's state parks.

Snake Creek, a state Game, Fish and Parks campground and recreation area about eight miles southwest of Platte, is seeing a boost in revenue.

Snake Creek District Manager Dave Enke said the park's camping is up 7.7 percent in this year's first six months compared to last year. The facility sold 4,200 camping permits through June this year, compared to 3,900 by the same time a year ago.

"A lot of the revenue can be contributed to the beautiful spring and summer we have had this year," Enke told *The Daily Republic*. "If you look around, everything is still green and lush, which was certainly not the case last year."

Across South Dakota, state parks and recreation areas have generated nearly 5 percent more revenue through June than they did for the first six months of last year.

Statewide, camping permits are up 9 percent through June. This year, the state has sold 115,000 permits through June, a jump of 9,000 permits over the same time last year.

Enke also manages two other modern campground areas, Platte Creek Recreation Area and Buryanek Recreation Area, both of which are along the Missouri River's Lake Francis Case. Enke has been busy keeping facilities functional and attractive to visitors to keep revenue numbers growing.

"Last year with the drought, we stopped mowing by the third week of June," he said, "and this year we are still mowing every week."

Snake Creek just installed new camping cabins, which fit four people and have air conditioning and heating. Enke said it provides more options than just the traditional tent campsite or ground for a camper.

Good fishing on the Missouri has helped attract more campers to sites, according to Enke.

Dudley and Nancy Nelson, of Scotland, visited Snake Creek Recreation Area earlier this month to do some fishing and spend the evening in a cabin.

"The fishing is what attracts me to Snake Creek, because it is some of the best walleye fishing around," Dudley said. "My wife Nancy and I just retired, so we are trying to enjoy the outdoors and spend time fishing and camping. The cabins give us the option to bring our boat out for the day and have a nice place to stay."

The Nelsons, who caught walleye and bass on their trip, plan on spending most of their retired time enjoying the outdoors of South Dakota.

The strong fishing this year is one of the biggest reasons for revenue increase at state parks, said state Parks and Recreation Director Doug Hofer.

"I think other areas along the Missouri River have increase in revenue just because the fishing has been phenomenal," Hofer said. "North Point Recreation has seen some of the best fishing in years."

North Point, located near Pickstown, is up 37 percent on camping permit sales compared to 2012. In 2012, North Point Recreation Area sold 2,700 camping permits through June, compared to 3,700 in 2013 for single-night camping sites.

"One of the huge factors that revenue is up this year

statewide is we raised the annual park entrance permits from \$28 in 2012 to \$30 in 2013," Hofer said. "We still have two of our biggest months of the year in front of us. As far as use of the state parks system, summer is just beginning."

According to Hofer, weather will play a strong part if there is record-breaking revenue for the state park systems.

"If we have good weather, I can almost assure you we will have a record-breaking year," he said.

SD Couple Killed In Motorcycle Crash

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — The South Dakota Highway Patrol says a Brandon couple on a motorcycle died in a crash with a minivan in Brookings.

The patrol says 61-year-old Leonard Feltman and 61-year-old Janis Feltman were killed in the crash Saturday in a two-lane construction zone along Interstate 29.

Troopers say the motorcycle veered into the path of the minivan and struck the minivan driven by 60-year-old Lynne Louise Duin of Estelline.

The patrol says Duin suffered serious but non-life threatening injuries.

City Files Lawsuit To Take Down Signs

GRAND ISLAND, Neb. (AP) — The city of Grand Island has filed a lawsuit to try to force a man to remove profane, anti-government signs on his property in the central Nebraska city.

The *Grand Island* Independent reports that the city filed complaints Friday against entities registered to Larry Tourangeau in Hall County District Court.

The signs criticize government officials because they refused to indict a former Tourangeau employee whom Tourangeau accused of embezzling money. The signs went up in 2011, and Tourangeau has resisted city efforts to take them down since.

City officials say the signs were erected without a permit and violate the city's litter and offensive substances code.

The city is asking the court to order the signs removed.

SD Joins In Legislative Prayer Case

PIERRE (AP) — Attorney General Marty Jackley says South Dakota has joined 23 other states to file written arguments in a Supreme Court case that will determine whether the U.S. Constitution allows prayers during legislative sessions.

Jackley says the states are challenging a federal appeals court decision that found a township violated the constitution by opening each board meeting with a prayer.

The attorney general says all 50 states in some fashion follow the practice of opening each legislative day with a prayer. He says the U.S. Supreme Court will determine whether the constitution allows prayers during legislative sessions, and what limits might apply to such prayers.

Jackley tells the *Argus Leader* the case could affect the South Dakota Legislature and local governments across the state.

SD Mountain Lion Hunting Season Set

ABERDEEN (AP) — South Dakota wildlife officials have set the hunting season for mountain lions.

The *Aberdeen American News* reports that the state Game, Fish and Parks Commission voted unanimously open the mountain lion season from Dec. 26 to March 31, 2014.

The 2014 season would allow for a statewide harvest limit of 75 mountain lions or 50 females. If the limit is not met by the end of the season, it could be extended by special resolution.

A public hearing on the plan is slated Oct. 3-4 in Spearfish.

The number of mountain lions allowed to be harvested in 2013 was 100, or 70 female cats.

South Dakota hunters last year killed 61 mountain lions, including 35 female cats. Officials say 4,351 mountain lion licenses were issued last season.

11 People Escape Omaha House Fire

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Firefighters say 11 people, including nine children, escaped an Omaha house fire unharmed. Omaha television station WOWT reports that the fire was reported Friday afternoon.

Officials say the house in north Omaha sustained heavy smoke and water damage. The American Red Cross is assisting the family until they can get back into their home.

Officials have not said how the fire started.

The Physicians and Staff at Lewis & Clark Specialty Hospital

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Micah M. Likness, MD is an Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgeon specializing in surgical and non-surgical treatment of the full spectrum of pediatric and adult disorders of the Ear, Nose, and Throat - Head and Neck. He graduated from Sanford School of Medicine of the University of South Dakota and completed a five year residency in Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

Dr. Likness will begin seeing patients August 1st at Ear, Nose & Throat Associates PC, located in the Lewis & Clark Medical Plaza, 2525 Fox Run Parkway, Suite #101. Call 605-665-0062 for an appointment.

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