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## Mountain Goats In SD Thriving

**JB YIM HOLLAND**  
Rapid City Journal

RAPID CITY — While some people may be surprised to learn that mountain goats are not native to the Black Hills, state wildlife officials hope a rejuvenated population of transplants and zoo escapees will continue to grow and thrive.

"We want people to be able to hike up and see them and for people to see them at Mount Rushmore. That's important to a lot of people," said John Kanta, regional wildlife manager for the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks.

The Black Hills' original mountain goat herd dates to the 1920s, when six animals were imported from Alberta, Canada, and placed in a zoo in Custer State Park.

They weren't penned up for long.

"Within a matter of few weeks or a few months those goats escaped," Kanta said.

The goats found a new home in the granite outcroppings in the park and eventually expanded throughout the Alpine areas of the Hills.

The goat population grew to an estimated 300-400 animals by the 1960s and 70s.

Kanta said that while the numbers began to decline in the 1980s, the population remained generally healthy.

Around 2000 the population started to decrease in size pretty significantly, he said.

"We didn't know exactly why," Kanta said.

Theories on the decline ranged from increased predation from mountain lions,

encroachment by trees in the open rocky areas mountain goats prefer and human pressure from hikers and rock climbers.

Also a possibility is what Kanta called a lack of genetic diversity.

Because the Black Hills population originated from just six animals, Kanta said the descendants became less hardy and vulnerable to disease and climactic changes.

To increase the bloodlines, officials bolstered the population with 22 goats brought in from Utah last October, added to 19 animals transplanted from Colorado in 2006.

The transfer from Utah, including the move, disease testing and staff time cost around \$30,000 with donations from the Dakota Chapter of Safari Club International and the Midwest Wild Sheep Foundation added to Game, Fish & Parks funds to cover a third of the cost.

A \$6,000 donation from the Midwest Wild Sheep Foundation paid for radio collars to monitor the animals. Weekly flights monitor the animals' movements and well-being, he said.

Public rumors of the Utah herd being decimated by mountain lions are untrue, Kanta said. One of the transplanted goats died from stress related to the move, he said. The rest are adapting well to their new surroundings.

"New bloodlines increase the genetic diversity and we like genetic diversity," Kanta said. "We should be healthy since these animals will be

co-mingling."

Goats can be found in the granite spires of Custer State Park and around the Crazy Horse memorial and Mount Rushmore. They have also been spotted in Spring Creek Canyon, Spearfish Canyon and Vanocker Canyon, Kanta said.

Mount Rushmore is the most likely place to see mountain goats and mornings are the best time of day to spot them close to the highways, Kanta said.

"I always say that's your best bet," he said.

Mountain goats may not be native to western South Dakota, but they have adapted to the rocky high points of the central and southern Black Hills.

"For a mountain goat that's a must-have. They bed up on those rocks. They stand on those and can see danger coming from miles away. They're very agile on the rocks. They move around well," Kanta said.

Mountain goats are herbivorous, munching on plants and berries, even subsisting on lichen scraped off the rocks.

"Just like domestic goats, they'll eat just about anything," Kanta said.

The GF&P will continue to keep an eye on the current population. The animals have been off-limits for hunting since 2007, but a limited season could return if the population continues to grow, Kanta said.

"This really should set us up for years to come," Kanta said.

## Nebraska

### Lawmakers To Act On Some Tax Measures

**BY GRANT SCHULTE**  
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Lawmakers are poised to act this session on income tax cuts aimed at Social Security recipients and veterans who agree to launch a new career or business in Nebraska after they retire.

Senators will also debate a bill that would ensure Nebraska's income-tax brackets keep pace with inflation, while giving a greater tax break to low- and middle-income Social Security recipients.

The bills were introduced in the wake of a legislative tax study last year, and calls by Gov. Dave Heineman to lower Nebraska's income and property taxes.

The tax-bracket bill would address cost-of-living salary increases that can bump taxpayers into a bracket with higher rates. The proposal would save taxpayers roughly \$100 million over a decade that the state otherwise would have collected because of inflation, said Sen. Galen Hadley, chairman of the Legislature's Revenue Committee.

"It's a very significant bill," said Hadley, of Kearney.

Nebraska's top tax rate of 6.84 percent kicks in for married couples once their incomes exceed \$70,400. For single filers, the top rate goes into effect at \$35,200. The rate only applies to the income received at those levels and higher.

It also would increase the state's tax exemptions for Social Security income. Married couples with adjusted gross incomes of less than \$58,000 wouldn't have their Social Security benefits taxed; nor would other taxpayers who make less than \$43,000.

Hadley said he wants to follow the recommendations

of a Tax Modernization Committee, which released its findings in December after a series of summer hearings. The legislative panel concluded that no major changes were needed, because Nebraska's tax system is similar to those in other states.

Hadley said he plans to launch a legislative study this summer of Nebraska's tax exemptions and deductions. Eliminating some of those tax breaks would help Nebraska lower its overall rates while still allowing the state to pay its bills, he said.

"I recognize that our highest tax rate kicks in too soon, and it's probably a little high," Hadley said. "That's something we have to work on. But there's no easy, quick fix."

The future of a more aggressive income-tax measure remains unclear. The bill, backed by the Nebraska Chamber of Commerce & Industry, would lower both individual and corporate income tax rates. It also would eliminate one of the state's tax brackets and expand the others, so that a larger share of income would be taxed at lower rates.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Burke Harr of Omaha, said he was concerned the proposal wouldn't be sustainable. The original measure would cost the state an estimated \$403.8 million in lost revenue by fiscal year 2016, and the amount is projected to grow each year.

"We're still trying to find something that's viable," Harr said.

Harr said he also wants to ensure that any income tax cuts include the lower brackets, so that low- and middle-income families see a benefit.

"I don't think you can just do the top rate," he said. "I think you have to do it

across the board. It's a fairness issue."

One bill by Sen. Sue Crawford, of Bellevue, would create a state tax exemption for military retirement pay to encourage veterans to launch second careers or a business in Nebraska.

The measure would exclude one dollar of military retirement pay for every dollar of non-retirement pay earned in Nebraska. The exemption would be capped at \$60,000 for married tax filers and \$30,000 for singles. Members of the Revenue Committee are finishing their work on the proposal, and will likely send it to the floor as an add-on to another bill.

The bill was inspired by several legislative studies of what the state can do to support Nebraska's military veterans. Crawford said the bill was important for keeping and attracting veterans to Nebraska, and it addresses one of the most common concerns she heard while campaigning for office in 2012. The U.S. Department of Defense also looks at state benefits for veterans when making decisions about where to place its resources.

"This is one of those pieces that show the Department of the Defense that we, as a state, are being attentive to those concerns," Crawford said. "It's an important economic development issue, above and beyond recruiting veterans — to ensure that we're an attractive state for new (military) missions."

Crawford is working with state Sen. Charlie Janssen, a U.S. Navy veteran from Fremont, on final changes to the bill. Hadley said he expects the Revenue Committee will approve it this week for a floor vote.

## Missing Neb. Teen Returns To Omaha

BELLEVUE, Neb. (AP) — A missing eastern Nebraska teenager has returned to the Omaha area, but didn't immediately return home to her family.

Police in the Omaha suburb of Bellevue say 16-year-old Michaela Wells was flown back to the area on Friday — a day after she was found safe in Indianapolis at the home of a teen boy.

Bellevue Police Chief Mark Elbert says Wells will be held in the Sarpy County Juvenile Justice Center until investigators can talk with her and evaluate the situation.

Elbert says this interview procedure is used in any case of missing or runaway teens his department investigates.

Wells disappeared March 2 when she went outside to take out the trash.

## Firefighters Battle Brush Fires In Neb.

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Firefighters are working to extinguish several brush fires in eastern Nebraska.

Fires broke out as temperatures climbed into the low 70s Sunday, but winds gusting 30-to-40 mph made it difficult to contain the fires.

No evacuations or serious injuries were reported Sunday afternoon, but at least one firefighter had to be treated for smoke inhalation near Branched Oak Lake.

Some roads had to be shut down at Branched Oak as crews battled a grass fire northeast of the lake.

Otoe County officials say firefighters were battling fires near Dunbar and Palmyra.

The Saunders County Sheriff's office says a grass fire northwest of Ashland was contained Sunday.

Another brush fire was reported near Springfield, Neb. Sunday afternoon. That blaze forced a road closure nearby, but no injuries were reported.

## Sioux Falls Natural Food Co-op Reopens

SIoux FALLS (AP) — A Sioux Falls natural food co-op damaged in a January arson fire has reopened in a temporary location.

Co-op Natural Foods General Manager Molly Langley tells KDLT television that a combination of volunteers, people in the community and a really sharp staff helped get the store back open.

No one was injured and nobody was in the building when the store burned Jan. 19. The co-op says more than \$100,000 in inventory was destroyed and a small amount of money was taken.

The co-op says it has about 2,500 members, but anyone can shop at the store that does more than \$2 million in business every year. It has 18 full-time and part-time employees and its suppliers include 40 local farmers.

## SF Flood-Control Project Almost Done

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Construction crews in Sioux Falls are working on the last piece of a flood-control upgrade project that has lasted almost 15 years.

But, the *Argus Leader* reports, the work being done in the city's west side was not part of the original project.

Last summer, marked the end of the last phase of the project as well as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers final inspection of the Big Sioux River's levee system. But outside the original project, the corps found eight rusting culverts that might not hold up to a major flood.

A local official now worries about how that inspection may affect homeowners' wallets.

The work is costing about \$3 million. It's being paid through a bond the city took out to fund the previous levee work.

## Police Arrest Suspect In Fatal Shooting

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Omaha police have arrested a suspect in Friday's fatal shooting of a 21-year-old man.

Police said Saturday that 23-year-old Laron Jones had been arrested on suspicion of first-degree murder and weapons charges in the case.

The shooting at a house in northeast Omaha was reported around 2:50 a.m. Friday. Officers found Brandon Samuels there with gunshot wounds.

Samuels was taken to Creighton University Medical Center where he later died. He is from Omaha.

Police interviewed several witnesses, and later arrested Jones.

## Dead Eagles Found In Neb. Collected

NORTH PLATTE, Neb. (AP) — The carcasses of dead bald and golden eagles found in Nebraska are collected and recycled for religious purposes.

The *North Platte Telegraph* reports the state is part of an unusual federal recycling program that provides parts of eagle carcasses to Native Americans who hold valid permits.

The feathers and other body parts of eagles are considered sacred by some Native Americans. But federal laws designed to protect the birds make it illegal for most people to possess any part of a golden or bald eagle.

Lauren Dinan with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission says the state recently sent 37 eagles to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Eagle Repository in Commerce City, Colo.

## Group Honors BIA's Police Chief

SIoux FALLS (AP) — The police chief of the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation has been named the 2013 Indian Country Officer of Year by the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

The U.S. Attorney in South Dakota says the award was given to David Lawrence for the nearly 18 years he has worked in Indian Country.

U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson says Lawrence has worked in numerous complex cases involving murder, kidnapping, violent sexual assaults and child abuse. Johnson notes that for several years Lawrence was the only criminal investigator in the reservation in a period when the area saw an increase in teen suicides.

The Standing Rock Sioux Reservation straddles the border between North and South Dakota.

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