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Drought concerns persist in parts of Montana

By **BOBBY CAINA CALVAN**
Associated Press

HELENA — A wet and cooler spring has eased drought concerns over much of Montana, but extreme drought conditions remain along the Rocky Mountain Front after two straight winters of low snowfall and warm temperatures.

The recent spate of warm temperatures triggered an early snowmelt that could mean lower flows in some rivers and streams through the summer, if May and June rains fall below normal.

While cumulative precipitation is near normal levels, the

past year has been the warmest on record in Montana, with temperatures about 4 degrees above normal, said Donald Britton, the meteorologist-in-charge at the National Weather Service office in Great Falls.

Drought conditions have broad ramifications on the risk of summer wildfires, the health of prized fishing streams and the state's water supply.

The governor's Drought and Water Supply Advisory Committee, which convened on Thursday at the Capitol, continues to monitor the situation. It is currently making a county-by-county assessment of drought risks.

"We are monitoring the Northern Rocky Mountain Front closely," said Ada Montague, a water resource planner with the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation.

Summer drought conditions will depend on how much rain the region gets in May and June, usually two of the year's wettest months.

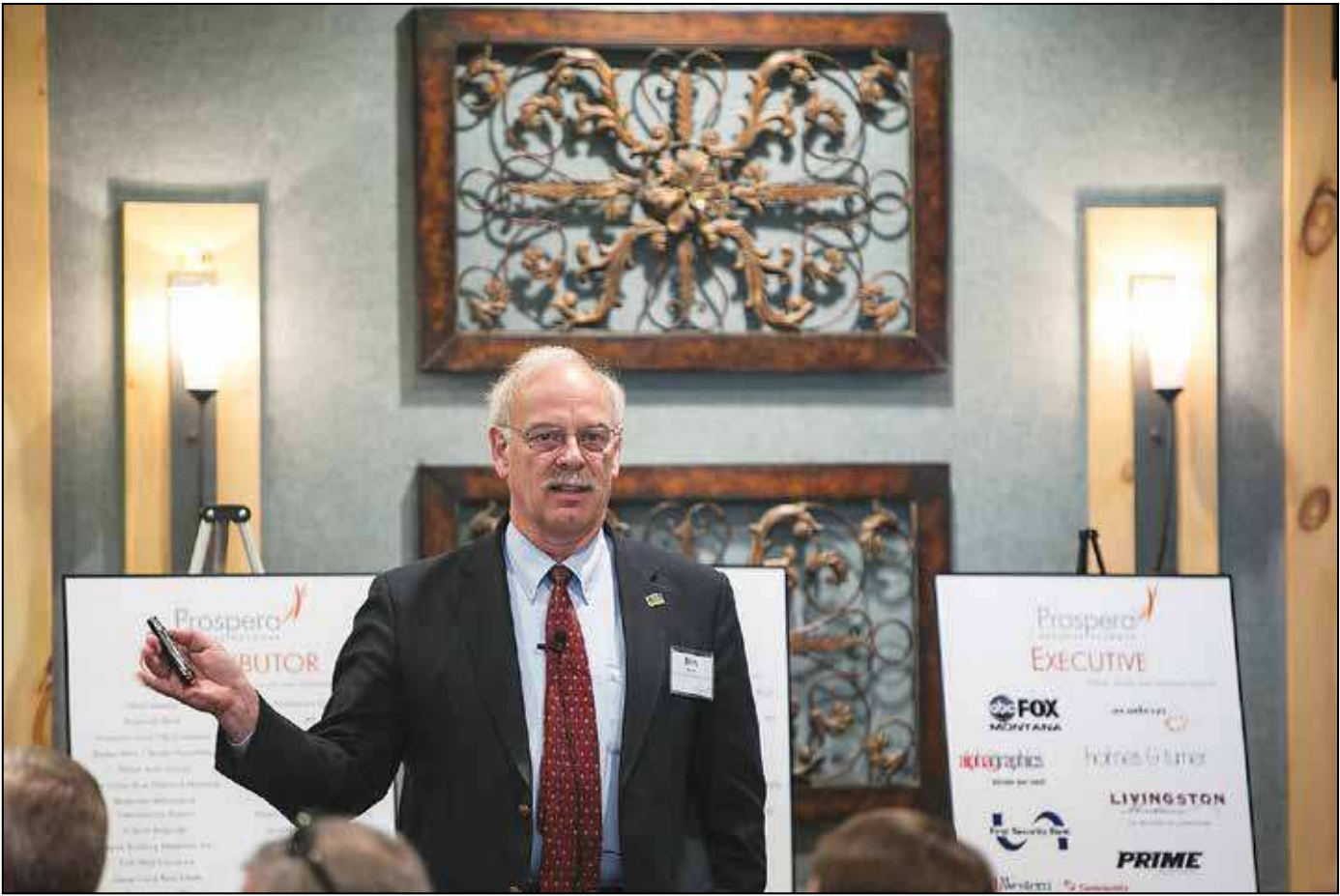
Fire officials are hoping for the usual rainfall and are expecting a normal fire season. "That still means we're going to have a lot of fires on the ground," said Harold Gemmell, a DNR fire coordinator.



ADRIAN SANCHEZ-GONZALEZ/CHRONICLE

More **DROUGHT** | C2 Snowpack is shown in the Bridger Mountains in this Chronicle file photo.

'TO PROTECT THE RESOURCES'



ADRIAN SANCHEZ-GONZALEZ/CHRONICLE

Dan Wenk, superintendent at Yellowstone National Park, speaks on the value of partnerships in building a community around the Park during the Prospera Business Network's annual member luncheon on Thursday, May 19, in Bozeman.

Yellowstone superintendent talks tourists, park growth

By **LEWIS KENDALL**
Chronicle Staff Writer

Yellowstone National Park Superintendent Dan Wenk summarized the state of the park in a speech to local businesspeople at **Prospera Business Network's** Annual Member Luncheon on Thursday.

The superintendent covered wildlife issues, the winter-use debate and the ever-increasing visitor numbers in an hour-long speech at the event, of which the Chronicle is a sponsor.

Wenk also addressed the recent spate of national headlines surrounding tourist behavior in the park. Last week, a pair of visitors were cited for putting

a bison calf in the back of their car to protect it from the cold. The calf was later euthanized, sparking controversy that resulted in 13 million hits on the park's social media pages.

Over the weekend, a video surfaced showing several Canadian tourists filming themselves walking on Grand Prismatic Spring. A criminal complaint was filed and arrest warrants were issued for three of the men.

"We know who they are; we will find them and they will be prosecuted," Wenk said of the filmmakers. "We're trying to use these as learning moments."

To date this year, the park has seen a 60 percent increase in visitation, Wenk said. The south entrance saw a

30-minute traffic jam after it opened last week.

The park recorded 4.1 million visits last year, and Wenk said officials are closely monitoring how increased traffic could affect the park in the future.

"Is there a limit to the number of people, and what is the impact, because first and foremost our job is to ensure the resources are protected for future generations," Wenk told the crowd. "My job as superintendent is to protect the resources, and I never forget that every day that I wake up."

If the growth continues, the park could be forced to restrict visitor numbers, he added.

More **YNP** | C2

Donald Trump to stump in Billings next Thursday

By **TROY CARTER**
Chronicle Staff Writer

The bumper stickers read "Trump," and on Tuesday morning, 69-year-old Lynda Klein was passing them out at the Pray Cafe.

She and five other women from Paradise Valley had gotten them at the Montana Republican Party's delegate selection convention in Billings.

But it was on Thursday she learned that the billionaire New Yorker and the GOP's presumptive presidential nominee would be rallying at Billings' Metra Park on Thursday, May 26. She's excited to go.

Like many Americans, Klein is worried about America's future. And Donald Trump, she said: "He's gonna try to save our country."

In order, Klein listed "the ISIS thing," "people coming over our borders," "drugs," "this new transgender bathroom thing" and deteriorating race relations as problems facing the country. "Obama has caused all the problems between the whites and the blacks," she said. "We used to get along."

A tall order for Trump, but Klein has done some reading and decided he's got the right stuff.

And that's her message: that, despite the naysayers, there are women who support Trump, right here, in Montana, and everywhere else. Down in Wyoming her friends told her about the "Pumps for Trump" group online.

More **TRUMP** | C2

Officials are investigating 'suspicious' Belgrade fires

By **WHITNEY BERMES**
Chronicle Staff Writer

Officials are investigating suspicious fires near Belgrade early Thursday.

According to Central Valley Fire District Chief Ron Lindroth, responders were dispatched about 3 a.m. to a fire in the Bruce Industrial Park in Belgrade.

Several fires were located in the area, including in the cab of a semitrailer at the entrance to the park and another semi and several cargo trailers in the north yard of Big Sky Insulation on Arden Drive.

Firefighters from Amsterdam, Bozeman, Manhattan and Rae Sourdough helped get the fires out. No one was hurt.

The fires are being investigated by Central Valley and the Gallatin County Sheriff's Office.

Anyone with information is asked to call Crimestoppers at 586-1131.

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AG files for partial stay in campaign finance ruling

By **TROY CARTER**
Chronicle Staff Writer

Montana's attorney general Thursday filed a request seeking a partial stay in a federal District Court ruling that invalidated Montana's campaign contribution limits.

Attorney General Tim Fox's asked the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals to delay the portion of U.S. District Judge Charles Lovell's ruling from earlier this week that struck down Montana's 1994 campaign finance laws that addressed political party contributions.

Commissioner of Political Practices Jon Motl has

already said that Montana's pre-1994 contribution limits for other types of contributions would be in effect as the result of Lovell's decision. If granted, the attorney general's request would mean that the state's current political party contribution limits would remain during the appeal.

"Montana currently has contribution limits on the amounts that individuals and political committees can donate to a candidate but no limits on the amounts that political parties can donate. This loophole must be closed," wrote Fox's assistant attorney general Matthew Cochenour in court docu-

ments submitted Thursday afternoon.

Fox said that the court should grant the stay because the state's appeal is likely to succeed on the merits, that the U.S. Supreme Court has said that campaign contribution limits are constitutional if they prevent corruption, and that Lovell didn't properly consider the state's evidence of it.

On April 1, a Lewis and Clark County jury found Rep. Art Wittich, R-Bozeman, guilty of breaking Montana's campaign finance laws in 2010 by accepting thousands of dollars in never reported contributions from conservative nonprofit corporations.

"Of course, the jury verdict in the Wittich case, which found that a Montana politician in fact had violated Montana's campaign finance laws, stands in contrast to this court's assessment," Cochenour wrote. "But, more importantly, this court's analysis ignores that the quid pro quo examples presented by Montana show that 'opportunities for abuse' exist. To put it succinctly, this court adopted and applied incorrect quid pro quo standard that appears to require actual corruption."

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