

With sweet peas like this, Gunnison's Halloween need not be all about fright and might. See pages 40-41.

Printing all the news we know about for more than 100 years.

COUNTRY TIMES

50¢

VOL. 127 No. 44

Thursday, November 2, 2006

Records show grouse decision tainted

D.C. politics, not biology, drove ESA ruling

Michelle Burkhart

Hundreds of records that recently were made public indicate that senior officials at the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) first delayed, and then reversed a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) decision to list the Gunnison Sagegrouse under the Endangered Species Act.

In those records, which were obtained through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, it was discovered that the USFWS had gone as far as crafting a press release in Sept. of 2005 to announce a proposed "endangered listing" for the imperiled bird. But the decision changed before the press release hit news rooms.

"For eight months, the USFWS was working and recommending an 'endangered' listing for Gunnison Sage-grouse. In two weeks, it changed to 'not warranted,'" said Mark Salvo, director of the Sagebrush Sea Campaign, a national conservation group.

See ESA on page 29

Local view on pot proposal cloudy

Some support, some oppose attempt to legalize less than one ounce

Ian Neligh

Reactions to Amendment 44 – which, if passed on Election Day next Tuesday, would allow anyone 21 or older to legally

possess up to one ounce of marijuana in Colorado – are mixed among local residents, business owners, organization heads and law enforcement personnel.

Currently, Colorado's state

law says any person possessing one ounce or less of marijuana is committing a Class 2 petty offense, which is punishable by a

See Amend 40 on page 30



Habitat's helping hands at it again

The seventh Habitat for Humanity project is underway in Gunnison – this one a duplex located on property near Rock Creek Village donated by the county. Here, volunteers Jerry Kowal, right, and Rick Sandoval put the finishing touches on a truss during last Saturday's work day. More work days are planned. See story on page 26 for details.

Photo by Alex Stephens

It's tournament time

GHS athletes moving on in football, VB and gymnastics

Matt Smith

A huge football upset over Olathe, some clutch wins in volleyball and solid scores in gymnastics have combined to make this weekend one of the biggest in recent Gunnison High School sports history.

Thanks to a convincing victory over the rival Pirates, the Cowboy football team earned the right to host a 2A State Playoff Game in Gunnison Saturday. The GHS volleyball team is on to regional play in Colorado Springs after placing

second in their conference tourney. And three Gunnison gymnasts have qualified to compete against the best in the state.

"This has been one of the most successful seasons of fall sports in my experience," said longtime Gunnison Athletic Director

Dennis Fraser.

With their win in Olathe last Friday, Gunnison clinched the Western Slope League Championship and the right to take on the defending 2A State Champion Holy Family at Western's Mountaineer Bowl at 1 p.m. on Saturday.

The GHS volleyball team's bid into the 3A Regional Tournament is their second in a row. In Colorado Springs, Gunnison will battle it out with Colorado Springs Christian, Bennett and Strasburg for rights to move on to the 3A State Tournament.

In their first match, the Cowboys will take on Strasburg (19-4) at 9 a.m. in Colorado Springs Christian Gymnasium.

Chrissy Merrifield, Lauren Ma-

See GHS on page 30

Weather playing into local hunters' hands

DOW reporting high harvest so far

Thanks to some cold and snowy weather, hunters apparently enjoyed above average success rates for deer and elk during the second rifle season that ended on Oct 29.

While the Colorado Division of Wildlife can only use anecdotal observation this soon after a hunt, the evidence indicates that hunters found an abundance of animals, including plenty of mule deer bucks and elk, explained Brandon Diamond, ter-

restrial biologist for the DOW in the Gunnison area.

"The cold weather was timely; it pushed deer and elk down to lower elevations and made them more accessible to hunters," Diamond said. "Weather conditions were highly conducive to good hunting."

As expected, Diamond said deer hunting in the Gunnison Basin was "exceptional." He also explained that elk hunting was vastly improved compared with last year, when the animals stayed at high elevation during

See Hunting on page 30

