

Commissioner Comments  
Steve Shockley  
September 15, 2011

It's hard to believe that summer is coming to an end. The kids are back in school, harvest will soon be in full swing, and the fall hunting seasons are underway. The Platte County Fair wrapped up another successful year. I am always impressed with the support that the community and the businesses of Platte County show our youth with their participation in the livestock sale and the donations for all the awards.

It has been a busy season for the road and bridge department. No matter how long the good weather lasts, we never seem to get everything accomplished that we want to. They have been chip sealing and patching roads throughout the county and this takes the whole crew, consequently other roads get neglected during this time. The road and bridge department also spent several days on the Squaw Mountain Fire. The grader operators are back to their normal areas now and are in the process of catching up. The rest of the crew is hauling gravel, repairing cattle guards and other odd jobs to get ready for the winter months.

With all the hot and dry conditions we have experienced lately, the Commissioners passed a burning ban resolution. The good spring moisture produced a lot of fuel that has dried out in the past few weeks making the fire danger high. You can view the full resolution on the county web-site.

<http://www.plattecountywyoming.com/Commissioners/Documents/Resolutions/Resolution201117.pdf>

With the high fire danger and the recent area fires I decided to review the county's fire protection plan and how it is funded.

The Squaw Mountain fire took a large amount of the county's resources this past month. Fires of this size put a lot stress on the county. We rely entirely on volunteers for our fire protection and they do a great job. There were people and equipment from every fire department in the county as well as neighboring counties and state and federal fire agencies. I would like to thank everyone who donated money, food, water, and time. The ice was also very much appreciated as there is nothing worse than 110 degree Gatorade on a hot day at a fire. I *would* also like to thank the sheriffs department, dispatch and all of the other emergency personnel who spent many hours supporting the fire fighters.

The Squaw Mountain fire burned over 14,000 acres with an estimated total cost of approximately \$1.4 million. Platte County is responsible for about 56% of this total. To help protect the county from these costs, the county pays into the state fire suppression fund which is similar to an insurance policy. This program was set up in the 1970's so that counties would have access to resources that they would otherwise not be able to afford. This program is funded by the state legislature and an assessment against each participating county, not every county chooses to participate. In order to access the fund the county has to have used up all available county resources. The cost of the fire must also exceed the floor cost to open the fire suppression account.

Platte County does participate and the amount we pay each year, similar to an insurance premium, is based on our county valuation and the number of deeded acres in the county. This year the amount would be .00002 times the county valuation of \$148,959,415; plus four tenths of a cent (.004) times 1,029,809 (the total number of deeded acres in the county); which comes to \$7,098.43. At the time of the Squaw Mountain fire there was more than \$10 million in this fund. Platte County also is responsible for a floor cost, similar to a deductible, each time we have to use the fire suppression account. This amount is \$5,000 and is paid by the fire district in which the fire occurred, in this case the F-2 (Glendo, Palmer Canyon and Antelope Gap) fire district.

The county is divided into four fire districts; F-1 (Wheatland), F-2 (Glendo, Palmer Canyon and Antelope Gap), Guernsey Rural and Chugwater. Each of these districts is supported by mill levies assessed against the property in each district.

Fire District	Square Miles	2011 Mill Levy	Cost/Square Mile
F-1 Wheatland	121	\$205,773	\$1,700.60
F-2 Glendo, Palmer Canyon and Antelope Gap	1,279	\$73,787	\$57.69
Guernsey Rural	297	\$38,937	\$131.10
Chugwater	415	\$26,435	\$63.70

As you can see, some of the districts have to cover quite a large area with a limited amount of resources. This could lead to spreading our protection thin, but we have a county-wide mutual aid agreement so each district helps out wherever needed. The guys from the various districts have sort of a competitive rivalry but when called upon they work together as one.

Hopefully this gives everyone a little better understanding of how these things are handled and how your tax dollars are being spent. As always, if anyone has comments or concerns, I welcome your input. Feel free to attend a commissioner meeting any time you want as they are always open to the public.