

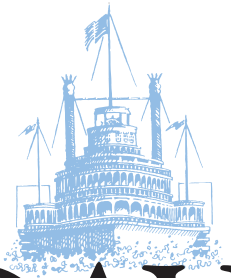
HOLIDAY CLASSIC

Locals compete in race at Howelsen

SPORTS 1C



STEAMBOAT
PILOT & TODAY



SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2007

VOLUME 121, NUMBER 23 • STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, COLORADO • www.steamboatpilot.com

COMMITTING TO A NEW YEAR

It's time to start making resolutions

STYLE 1D



To conserve and protect

Easements across Routt County foster wildlife, preserve open space

Brandon Gee
PILOT & TODAY STAFF

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS

Since 1997, Routt County has helped conserve 11,525 acres at a cost of about \$4.7 million. That comes to a \$408-per-acre cost to county taxpayers.

That's quite a bargain, according to county officials, and a testament to the success of their Purchase of Development Rights Program.

Last week, two new properties became the latest participants in the program. Landowner Robert Waltrip put 2,711 acres of his Wolf Mountain Ranch near Hayden into a conservation easement held by The Nature Conservancy.

"This project will provide a wide variety of wildlife activity and key winter habitat," Routt County Commissioner Diane Mitsch Bush said.

Also, James and Barbara

Ross have similarly protected 170 acres north of Pearl Lake State Park.

"It is an area that did have the potential for expensive real-estate development," Mitsch Bush said. "The view sheds here are tremendous."

When a landowner donates a conservation easement, they are permanently protecting the land from development. This reduces the value of the restricted land, but landowners' compensation isn't just the

knowledge that the land will never be turned into a subdivision or shopping mall. There are significant tax breaks associated with the move, sometimes worth millions depending on the details of the easement.

Also, some entities, such as Routt County and the Colorado Division of Wildlife, will compensate landowners for the land-value loss to encourage more people to enter into

See **Conserve**, page 13A



BRIAN RAY/STAFF

Christy Belton, left, and her husband, Matt, stack bales of hay on a horse-drawn sleigh for the morning feeding of the cattle on the Warren Ranch outside of Steamboat Springs on a Friday morning.



BRIAN RAY/STAFF

Eight-month-old Jacqueline DeCrette checks out the camera as her mother, Nicole, chats with a reporter about the difficulties of finding child care for kids born to employees of the Steamboat Springs School District.

CHILD

CARE

CRISIS

Steamboat Springs teachers ask school district for help

When Nicole DeCrette learned she was pregnant with her first child after moving to Steamboat Springs with her husband in August 2006, fellow Steamboat

SUNDAY FOCUS

STORY BY
MIKE
MCCOLLUM

teachers warned her of the child care difficulties she'd face. "I couldn't even imagine how hard it was going to be until my daughter arrived," she said. "The hard part is thinking that if we had to do this for three more years, or four more years; that's hard for our family both emotionally and financially."

Despite paying heed to her co-workers' advice and pre-enrolling their daughter, Jacqueline, on day



BRIAN RAY/STAFF

Eight-month-old Jacqueline DeCrette drinks from a bottle at her home in Steamboat Springs on Friday afternoon.

care waiting lists prior to her birth, the DeCrettes endured a long, frustrating process that is far from being resolved.

Their daughter was almost

5 months old when she was accepted into one of Steamboat's two day care facilities for three days a week.

See **Child care**, page 14A

Clerks want all mail-in election

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER

Now that electronic voting machines used by most Colorado counties have been decertified, a majority of county clerks want next year's election to be conducted entirely by mail.

Four county clerks told state lawmakers Friday that 70 percent of clerks want an all-mail election in 2008, when voters will elect a new U.S. senator and president. They said they don't have enough money to purchase new voting machines and, even if they did, there wouldn't be enough time to train workers in how to use them.

"We currently have no options to conduct an election as things stand right now," Jefferson County clerk and recorder Pam

See **Election**, page 14A

Drought possible next year

Robert Weller
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOULDER

Despite a series of snow storms that rescued ski areas in Colorado just before the holidays and built up the below-average snowpack, experimental forecaster Klaus Wolter says there still is a possibility of drought next year.

Wolter, of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, said cold and unsettled weather will continue into January and that ski areas and other water users should not expect this bounty of snow to continue into spring.

"Two early December storms

See **Weather**, page 14A

PAGE DESIGNED BY CHRISTOPHER WOYTKO



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OUTSIDE

Cloudy with snow showers. High of 26.

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VIEWPOINTS

LAST WEEK: Are you doing anything charitable this holiday season? Results/5A

THIS WEEK: Did you do more of your holiday shopping in Steamboat than out of town or on the Internet?

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