

ALSO INSIDE
DELTA, MONTROSE
EACH SENDING
TWO GOLFERS TO
STATE **SPORTS 1B**

THE DAILY SENTINEL

GRAND JUNCTION, COLORADO



75¢

Your community news source since 1893

Wednesday
September 23, 2015

Grouse avoids list



DEAN HUMPHREY/The Daily Sentinel

Sage grouse engage in mating behavior in a longstanding lek in a farmer's field near Craig. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said Tuesday that a collaborative effort between the federal government and 10 Western states is good enough to ensure the birds' well-being.

Interior: Land plans enough to help birds

By GARY HARMON
Gary.Harmon@gsentinel.com

The greater sage-grouse still will rule the roost in northwest Colorado, to the detriment of the regional economy and human residents, officials said of

the decision not to list the bird as threatened or endangered.

The decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was announced by Interior Secretary Sally Jewell on Tuesday at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge, who

hailed it as the result of an "extraordinary collaboration" that means "a brighter future for one amazing scrappy bird that calls the West home."

Small towns in northwest Colorado will need that same kind of moxie, said Bonnie Pe-

tersen, executive director of the Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado, which three years ago drew attention to what officials said was a threat from a listing of the

See GROUSE, page 6A ➤

Insurer files protest over county's plan

Rocky Mountain Health Plans asks board to reconsider its bid

By GARY HARMON
Gary.Harmon@gsentinel.com

The Mesa County Commission next week will weigh whether to reconsider a bid by a Rocky Mountain Health Plans subsidiary to manage the county's employee health plan.

Rocky Mountain Health Plans on

Monday filed a protest of the award granted to Anthem Inc., a large national insurer, to administer the plan with Community Hospital as the preferred provider for \$6.5 million.

Anthem's bid with Community Hospital was \$7,000 less than the next-lowest bidder, the Monument Network administered by CNIC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Rocky Mountain Health Plans, with St. Mary's Hospital as the preferred provider.

A response to the protest was being crafted Tuesday night, said Mesa County Administrator Frank Whidden, who met with attorneys for the county and Segal Consulting Tuesday afternoon. No commissioners attended the meeting and a re-

porter wasn't allowed to sit in. Whidden spoke to a reporter afterward.

Mesa County should reconsider the bid because its decision was based on inaccurate information, according to Steve

ErkenBrack, Rocky Mountain Health Plans president and CEO.

"We felt that in addition to the points we made (at the commission hearing) that additional information had come to light after the public comment, and the

commissioners should have the opportunity to reconsider given the important stakes," ErkenBrack said Tuesday.

Nothing in the protest letter, however, was new, Whidden said Tuesday, adding, "I've never seen a happy losing vendor."

ErkenBrack had promised that he wouldn't protest the contract award, Whidden said, adding the county would respond to the points he made in

See PROTEST, page 6A ➤

Deputy saves drowning kids; attempted murder suspected

By EMERY P. DALESIO
Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — A North Carolina sheriff's deputy says he heard wailing in the darkness and plunged into an apartment complex's pond at night to rescue two young girls who, police say, had been thrown there to drown by their father.

Durham County Sheriff's Deputy David Earp was off duty and says he rushed out with little more than his department T-shirt, badge and flashlight after the apartment manager called him at home around 9 p.m. Sunday to report some kind of trouble.

"I heard something about children, that they might possibly be in trouble," Earp said in an interview Tuesday with The Associated Press. "And



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Durham County Sheriff's Deputy David Earp speaks to reporters in Durham, N.C. on Tuesday. Earp pulled two young girls out of a pond Sunday, who were allegedly thrown there by their father.

water about 5 feet deep and scooped them up, holding one in each arm.

He took no notice of the girls' father, Alan Tysheen Eugene Lassiter, 29, of Raleigh — the man who was later charged with trying to drown his kids. In the heat of the moment, Earp was focused on just one thing: trying to save the girls' lives.

Earp said they were about 10 feet from the bank, which slopes sharply down to the pond that stretches about the length of a football field. After pulling the girls to land, Earp said he took the 5-year-old to a nearby gazebo and asked the property manager and her son to watch over her.

"I knew she was terrified and I just took her off and didn't want her to be around her sister," Earp said.

The 5-year veteran of the sheriff's department said he



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Orange evidence flags line the shore of a pond in the Audubon Lake neighborhood of Durham, N.C. on Tuesday. Police say Alan Tysheen Eugene Lassiter attempted to drown his three young children, two of whom remain hospitalized.

and the arriving officers from the Durham police department performed cardio-pulmonary resuscitation on the 3-year-old for about 15 minutes until medical help arrived.

Police said the younger girl was in critical condition Tues-

day and the older girl was in good condition.

According to authorities, Lassiter threw the girls into the pond surrounded by apartment buildings.

See DEPUTY, page 6A ➤

Pope visits U.S., denies he's a liberal

By NICOLE WINFIELD and RACHEL ZOLL
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The pope of the poor arrived for his first-ever visit to the world's wealthiest superpower Tuesday denying he is a leftist and riding in a frugal little family car, windows rolled down.

Pope Francis' chartered plane from Cuba touched down at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, where President Barack Obama and his wife and daughters paid him the rare honor of meeting him at the bottom of the stairs on the red-carpeted tarmac. Presidents usually make important visitors come to them at the White House.

Emerging from the aircraft to loud cheers from a crowd of hundreds, the smiling 78-year-old pontiff removed his skull-cap in the windy weather and made his way down the steps in his white robes.

He was welcomed by a military honor guard, chanting schoolchildren, politicians, and Roman Catholic clerics in black robes with vivid sashes of scarlet and purple. Joe Biden, the nation's first Catholic vice president, and his wife were among those who greeted him.

See POPE, page 6A ➤

Senator: Identify, clean up West's most dangerous mines

By SUSAN MONTOYA BRYAN
Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — The federal government would be required to identify the most dangerous abandoned mines in the West and make plans to

clean them up under legislation introduced Tuesday in response to the spill of millions of gallons of toxic wastewater from a Colorado mine.

U.S. Sen. Tom Udall, D-New Mexico, outlined the proposal during a conference call with

reporters. He said the main focus would be compensating communities affected by the spill, but another goal is to prevent future environmental disasters.

"There are tens of thousands of abandoned mines around

the West. They are a ticking time bomb, slowly leaking hazardous waste into our streams and rivers," Udall said, indicating more legislation aimed at reforming antiquated mining laws would follow.

An EPA cleanup team trig-

gered the spill in August as it was doing excavation work on the inactive Gold King mine near Silverton, Colorado. The plume turned the Animas River a sickly yellow, and the pol-

See MINES, page 6A ➤