The Hot Springs town council met last Tuesday evening to discuss several important agenda items.

First was the final reading and review of changes for the flood plain ordinance. Following that discussion, the council had a second reading of the ordinance for camper vehicle regulations.

Discussion and public comment then focused on cleaning up specific properties within town limits. From that discussion, the council voted to proceed with the abatement of the Alden-Odekirk property. Abatement fees will be passed on to the homeowner.

Mayor Randal Woods raised a concern with how local residents have been calling for emergency services. In several instances, residents have called him or the town office to report fires and medical emergencies. Woods stressed that the public use 911.

On one incident, Woods said, “fire personnel could have arrived 10 minutes quicker if they had called 911 first. Please use the system in an emergency.”

Under new business, the council discussed the hiring of a new Police Chief and narrowed the list to two applicants. A total of 12 applications were received.

The balance of the meeting was devoted to addressing the bear/public conflicts in Hot Springs and how to reduce the problem.

A Bozeman-based organization called People and Carnivores, and Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes wildlife biologists were on hand to discuss ways to limit bear-human conflicts.

People and Carnivores Field Project Manager Ryan Wilbur, along with CSKT wildlife biologists Paden Alexander and Payton Adams discussed available resources for Hot Springs to reduce wildlife conflicts. Many of those resources were paid for by grants. People and Carnivores have helped other communities in Montana to reduce the conflict numbers.

Virginia City is one example that has had remarkable success in reducing conflicts to almost zero.

Alexander and Payton reviewed the leading causes of conflicts and how they were categorized. Number one was the sighting of bears in town, followed by bears and trash left out by residents, with number three being entry or attempted entry into homes, followed by unsecured attractants such as fridges or freezers on porches, pet food, barbecues, bird feeders, gardens and beehives. Over one thousand conflict reports were taken in 2022 on the Flathead Reservation.

The highest number of conflicts with bears involved trash left out by residents at 52%, followed by bear sightings (no conflicts reported) at 35% and entry or attempted entry into house or garage at 4%.

Attempted entry of homes or garages usually resulted in the animal being put down.

CSKT offers several low or no cost resources such as bear spray $20, bear resistant garbage cans $20, loaner electric fencing. CSKT also has a carcass refund program for local ranchers who want to take deadstock to the landfill. The rancher must keep the landfill receipt and will be reimbursed for the
cost of disposal.

Alexander and Payton recommend that local disposal of dead livestock only attracts the bears.

Hot Spring Community Volunteer Stephanie Lindemann. (Tracy Scott/Valley Press)

CSKT wildlife biologist Payton Adams. (Tracy Scott/Valley Press)
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