

# LOCAL NEWS

## SCHOOL DISTRICT PREPS FOR POSEIDON ADVENTURE

Romero, Mammoth Unified Board brace for possible budget cuts

By Geisel

It's no secret that Sacramento's in turmoil. Actually, given the state of the state's budget crisis, perhaps "near meltdown" is a better description. Meanwhile, education and a host of other budget items are caught in the crossfire between a "come with me if you want to live" Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, taking heat as being a sort-of lame duck "terminator," and an obstinate, do-nothing legislature, seemingly more interested in reelection than real financial solvency.

Mammoth Lakes Trails and Public Access saw its operational funding grant frozen before Christmas, Mammoth Lakes Housing has seen similar freezes from the state capitol, and according to Mammoth Unified School District Superintendent Frank Romero, our schools could be on the hit list before long.

It's not all doom and gloom yet, but the proactive Romero isn't taking any chances, choosing disclosure over deferral. To that end, during Monday night's Mammoth Unified School District Board meeting, Romero laid out some possible budget cut scenarios that he said "could" affect MUSD in the future.

Romero cited four possible areas of concern. The first may involve elimination or reduction of \$380,000 in Class Size Reduction grants.

The second area may be a reduction in transportation funding, worth almost \$400,000 to the district.

Another possible hit could be in the form of a \$500,000 reduction in categorical grants, a bundle of handouts from various sources, including the California lottery. Currently, categorical sources fund up to \$1.1 million annually for the district.

Romero tagged this funding stream as "a serious problem for small school districts such as ours."

The fourth area of concern is excess property tax revenue over and above the current Basic Aid allotment. This money is apparently unprotected from a state grab. All Basic Aid districts statewide could be subject to search and seizure.

Between the end of this school term and the next, all this could add up to a \$2 million impact on the district's \$13 million budget.

"The perception is that many school districts are revenue rich," Romero

said. "That may be true in Marin County, where enrollment is stable and property tax revenues are up, but it's not true here." Dollars from the state that are expected in April may be deferred to the summer, and very likely beyond, he advised.

Romero said he wasn't trying to scare anyone, and emphasized that he's seen no signals from Sacramento as to what direction things are heading. "This is a warning shot. Something's coming, and I'm not going to stand here and tell you everything's rosy and then have to make Draconian cuts," Romero told the Board. He

also added that research has shown it could be as much as two years after the current recession is over before any lost funding is recouped.

New School Board member Jack Farrell commended Romero on his candor. "Communities don't like crisis. They like crisis management," he said. "Part of what's bad is that we won't know how bad it is for some time."

Romero concurred. "It's hard to plan when you don't know what's going to happen," the Superintendent said. "And the state can change things at any time."

## U.S. SENATE WILD ABOUT WILDERNESS BILL

By 73-21 vote, Senate sends bill to House

More than 450,000 acres of wilderness and 74 miles of wild and scenic rivers took a major step toward permanent protection with the U.S. Senate's 73-21 passing of S.22, the Omnibus Public Land Management Act, Wednesday, Jan. 14. The bill, sponsored by Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM), was introduced Jan. 7, and includes the Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriel Wild Heritage Act, sponsored by Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA) and Representative Howard "Buck" McKeon (R-Santa Clarita), and co-sponsored by Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA).

A cloture vote on the measure invoked in Senate on Jan. 11 paved the path to its passage. Cloture is the only procedure by which the Senate can vote to place a time limit (30 hours) on consideration of a bill or other matter, and thereby overcome a filibuster.

The controversial bill drew fire from

land rights organizations, which called it "the largest land grab in 20 years," and was criticized for blocking off millions of acres "to save 500 salmon." Others opposed to the act claimed it would remove access to trillions of cubic feet of natural gas and billions of barrels of oil. The U.S. Geologic Survey, however, estimated that the Wyoming Range portion of the act contains resources that would be burned through in less than one month of American consumption.

Meanwhile, conservation groups succeeded in enlisting support from business owners, sportsmen, community leaders and everyday concerned citizens to bolster support for the bipartisan legislation. "Rep. McKeon and Sen. Boxer worked tirelessly to craft a bill that is broadly supported and will benefit our communities," said Sally Miller, Senior Field Representative for

The Wilderness Society, based in Mammoth Lakes. "This bill, when enacted, will leave a lasting legacy for people who treasure the Eastern Sierra's remarkable landscapes."

"[This bill] preserves beautiful wild lands for future generations, protects watersheds crucial to the health of our fisheries, and provides high quality recreation opportunities for our visitors which helps our local economy," commented noted Eastern Sierra fish farmer Tim Alpers.

Area elected officials were also pleased by the Senate's "thumbs up" for the bill. "After years of work and extensive collaboration, we are witnessing a momentous occasion that will benefit all Americans for generations to come," said Mono County District 5 Supervisor Byng Hunt. "Congressman McKeon and Senator Boxer have made a landmark step forward in American society."

From the mountain peaks in Mono County to the desert floor of Death Valley, the proposal preserves some of the region's most treasured natural wonders, including the new White Mountains Wilderness and the specially-designated Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest, which contains the world's oldest living trees. The proposed Hoover Wilderness Additions represent a classic High Sierra landscape of deeply carved glacial valleys dotted with tranquil alpine lakes and forests of lodgepole pine.

Should the package pass the U.S. House of Representatives, its next stop, it will then head to the Oval Office for President Barack Obama's signature, which it would almost certainly obtain.



**OLD NEW YORK**  
DELI & BAGEL CO.  
Est. 1999

"Where  
**GREAT FOOD &  
GREAT PEOPLE**  
Meet!"

**FREE WiFi**

934-DELI | [www.oldnewyork.com](http://www.oldnewyork.com)  
The Village @ Mammoth



**CLEAN SWEEP**  
A Better Fireplace

**A Great Selection of New Bosca EPA Wood & Pellet Stoves**  
Starting at \$849.00

**We offer other brands of Stoves & Fireplaces**  
**Installation, Cleaning & Repair Services is also available!**

Showroom located at 123 Commerce Drive, #B1  
760.934.3453 | [www.abetterfireplace.com](http://www.abetterfireplace.com)