

Ringneck bust ahead?

Ringneck bust ahead? While visiting the Dakota Farm Show at the DakotaDome earlier this week, I must admit I didn't have amber waves of grain on my mind.

I was thinking, instead, of the pheasant hunting season in South Dakota that just concluded last Sunday. And how, after not picking up a shotgun for years, it would be nice to stroll on familiar ground near the farm where I grew up to see if I could flush up a bird or two.

Should I resolve, sometime in the future, to make pheasant hunting a priority in the fall, my chances may not be all that good.

That's according to Mike Balaalid, a Pheasants Forever farm bill biologist stationed in Mitchell. According to a recent report in the Mitchell Daily Republic, Balaalid said the landscape in farm country in rapidly changing in a way that's not good for pheasants.

Drain tile is being installed in rural fields. Wetlands are being burned away so they can be farmed. Rocky, erodible, native sod that has never been turned is being converted to cropland.

I was reminded of this trend while at the farm show Tuesday. A visitor to the show quickly becomes exposed to the most modern and most popular farm equipment available.

I was stopped in my tracks as I confronted this large, cage-like device that mounts to a Bobcat-type of machine, or other types of small, powerful tractors. On a monitor mounted next to the machine, a video played of it in action.

The thing works a virtual rock magnet. A single farmer could clear a quarter section of land of pesky rocks with ease. Such devices weren't around during my youth, when I regularly joined by brothers each spring for "rock picking sessions" in the fields of our family farm.

Clearing a field has become easy. And in this current era of South Dakota cropland fetching several thousands of dollars per acre, and strong commodity

prices, despite the current drought, farmers are doing their best to make a profit. There are financial benefits, indeed, to clearing what was once idle property and transforming it to cropland.

Balaalid says that from a wildlife habitat standpoint, South Dakota is becoming the next Iowa, and that's not a good thing.

"We're not headed in the right direction, I can tell you that," Balaalid told the Daily Republic. "I hate to say it, but I truly believe we are headed for a worse place. It might be awhile until we get back in the right direction again."

There were approximately 2.1 million pheasants in the state in 1986, but the population jumped over the next 20 years due to changes in land management and a better understanding of wildlife's role in tourism.

The federal Conservation Reserve Program, which pays landowners to set aside marginal land, played a large role. It created ideal habitat for wildlife in general, and pheasants in particular. South Dakota became a destination, and the state cashed in. The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish & Parks estimates that nonresident hunters spent approximately \$179 million in South Dakota in 2008 alone.

Balaalid is likely correct to be concerned about recent trends, but I realize there are other factors at work, too, that may determine future pheasant population trends. "The No. 1 thing that affects corn or pheasant production is Mother Nature," said Lisa Richardson, executive director of the South Dakota Corn Growers Association, who as a youngster hunted with her father. "Pheasant numbers were up 18 percent in 2012 because last winter wasn't too bad and last spring wasn't too wet."

I'm a bit relieved by that news. But I still worry. Pheasant hunting is big business in South Dakota. I hope Balaalid's concerns don't become reality. Should the pheasant boom end in our state, even for a short time, cash registers in sporting goods stores, gas stations, and motels may not ring as often as in Octobers past.

We South Dakotans love the richness of the natural resources our state provides. Our home will be just a bit poorer economically and in spirit if pheasant numbers decline.

BETWEEN THE LINES



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SOUTH DAKOTA EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

The Associated Press

Rapid City Journal: Jan. 2, 2013 United Tribes college welcome

Rapid City is becoming a center for post-secondary education with the recent announcement that United Tribes Technical College of Bismark, N.D., is opening a new center at the former National American University campus.

The college is dedicated to educating Native Americans and has an enrollment of about 1,400 students. The fully accredited school offers three bachelor of science degree programs, 12 associate of applied science degrees, 13 certificate programs and six online associate of applied science programs.

College officials made the announcement during the Lakota Nation Invitational in Rapid City. Officials hope the college's online programs will become available to area students this summer with the former NAU campus ready by fall 2013. The learning center will provide computer access, technical support and financial aid programs.

United Tribes college has agreements to work with South Dakota School of Mines & Technology and Western Dakota Technical Institute, as well as the Department of Interior's criminal justice system. Officials said the school would not compete with other educational institutions, particularly Oglala Lakota College, but will provide additional education opportunities for Native students.

The college also said it intended to offer dual enrollment for Native American high school students in order to better prepare them for college.

Phil Baird, vice-president for academic, career and technical education for United Tribes college, said the Rapid City center could eventually become a full-service satellite campus, serving Native

American students nationwide.

"It would be a university without walls and the beginning of creating a very unique educational experience," Baird said. "The seeds of that vision are being planted."

The expansion of United Tribes Technical College to Rapid City is good news. Giving Native American students in the Black Hills area more opportunities to obtain a higher degree and improve their job skills is a welcome idea. It's also a good use for the former NAU campus.

We welcome United Tribes college to Rapid City and wish it success in its expansion.

Argus Leader, Sioux Falls: Dec. 31, 2012 Suggestions to make 2013 a success

Welcome 2013! What's ahead for the people of the Sioux Falls area and all South Dakotans. It's a whole new year for hopes and challenges, dreams and dilemmas. When this year closes in 365 days, we hope we all are better for the experiences it brings.

Since we're in the news business, we won't pretend to make New Year's predictions, but we like to make New Year's suggestions.

Let's look at local and state suggestions in a broad sense.

In Sioux Falls, we like to be progressive, which is maybe part of the passion behind the urge to bring snowgates to more neighborhoods and states faster. People who have seen them, generally like them. As a city, we've added them to our wish list. The public is scheduled to vote on the issue in 2014, yet some would like it earlier. Let's just make sure we have good data — a measure of how much money and time they take — and then do what's best.

The same could be said for a new indoor aquatics facility. People don't like ideas forced upon them but, if given honest, unbiased information,

we usually can come to a reasonable agreement. So let's listen to each other.

We can't go without offering some suggestions on the new convention center, which promises to be a beautiful facility. Advice for the city: Do not in any way go over budget and try to hide it. It's all about trust when future issues come up.

Our state thrives in part for its variety and certainly the independence of its people. We enter 2013 as a state with a nice budget surplus, and true to South Dakota style we aren't likely to blow it on something fun and frivolous.

We understand that no one wants lawmakers and the governor to go crazy with spending, nor do they want our leaders to hide it in a mattress for a big rainy day. But we suggest that it is well past the time when we should be seriously addressing teacher salaries and other budget items that got shut down when times were tough and cuts were made.

Let's pay our fair share back to the people of South Dakota by appropriately funding those programs with our collective South Dakota money.

In all cases, keeping citizens informed and engaged ends up being good for everyone. We would urge that open dialogue continue in our

county, city, school and state governments and that officials at each level be as open and transparent as possible as the tackle whatever comes before them in this new year.

The Daily Republic, Mitchell: Jan. 2, 2013 Hoping for better news in new year

Sad news tended to dominate The Daily Republic's top stories of 2012.

South Dakota lost some great leaders in Bill Janklow and George McGovern, and tributes for both men filled our pages.

Young Isabella Morgan died in a tragic and needless crash that was caused by a

drunken driver. There was tragedy in Wagner when 2-year-old Rielee Lovell was found dead in a closet of a Wagner home. And 3-year-old Jaxson Sehnert died in a Mitchell house fire.

These were terrible tragedies and our prayers remain with the families of those young people. There were other tragedies throughout the year, too numerous to mention here.

Drought dominated the landscape last year, and an unusually high number of fires struck Mitchell.

Now, 2012 is behind us and our wish for 2013 is for a year with fewer sad stories.

Don't get us wrong. We still will report the stories of unfortunate mishaps, accidents and tragedies, hoping that our coverage can help educate readers and prevent such things from happening in the future.

Meanwhile, we pray that fewer people will die in mishaps and that fewer cars will veer off of our area roads.

We pray that fires will be less prevalent in 2013 and that fewer people will be victimized by theft and violence.

We pray that the drought will end, that our reservoirs and stock dams will be filled to the brim and that business will be brisk in our region.

We pray for bountiful crops and employment for all.

We pray for the region's military men and women who are fighting for us overseas in dangerous regions of the world. We hope for only good news to report on their well-being.

We pray that enemies can become friends and that old acquaintances are not forgotten. We remind readers that life is just too short to hold grudges.

We pray for the good health of all and for goodwill among mankind.

These are our prayers, hopes and wishes for 2013. Happy new year.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Working together for a safer community

As we start 2013 and look back at 2012, I wanted to write to express my sincere thanks to the citizens of Vermillion who have worked with the police department to make Vermillion a safe community. In a free society, it is necessary that citizens participate in the process of developing and maintaining a safe and secure environment. The police department is just one facet of the community-wide team that is necessary to provide for a safe community. In Vermillion, examples of this close teamwork between the police department and community abound, and I would like to mention two illustrations of this teamwork in action from 2012.

First, the Community-wide Safety and Protection Survey was conducted in the spring of this year. This survey required the cooperation of several community members to create and hundreds of citizens who completed and returned the survey. This cooperative effort provides the police department with valuable insight into the needs and perceptions of the community and will be used in planning for the future. A copy of the final results from this survey can be found on our website at <http://vermillionpd.org/survey.aspx>

Second, the community alcohol license holders worked with the police to develop a reward program for employees who passed alcohol compliance checks. The idea brought forward by the alcohol license holders was to provide a pool of funds that would be used to provide a reward if an employee successfully prevented the purchase of alcohol by a minor during the police department's compliance check efforts. This program has resulted in \$50 in Vermillion Dollars being rewarded to eligible employees during 2012. The funds for these rewards were provided by the community's alcohol license holders and two local distributors: Dakota Beverage Co., and John A. Conkling Distributing Co., Inc.

Both of these cooperative efforts illustrate the teamwork that is necessary to make Vermillion a safe place. The men and women of the Vermillion Police Department appreciated the trust the citizens of Vermillion have given them and will continue to work hard to be worthy of that trust.

Our wish is that you and yours will have a safe 2013.

Sincerely,

Matt Betzen
Vermillion Chief of Police

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Vermillion

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TALK

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