



OVERTIME CLASSIC
Broncos beat Bills to move on in AFC playoffs **6A**

ROOS HAS A PLAN
Big annual festival kicks off this week – check it out **3B**

THE Durango HERALD

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Southwest Colorado yaks offer healthy, eco-friendly beef alternative



Yak ranching is becoming more popular in the United States because of the animal's low-fat meat, low carbon footprint and low-stress management. Ryan Heck, co-owner of Wilderness Farms, talks to Tory and Floyd – part of his 27-yak herd on his ranch west of Breen.

JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald photos

Yak: It's what's for dinner

BY SCOUT EDMONDSON
HERALD STAFF WRITER

BREEN – If one were to drive past Wilderness Farms in Hesperus and glance at the livestock, odds are they would do a double take. Instead of cows, 27 yaks graze on the tawny grasses and linger in the shade of piñon pine and juniper trees.

Their long, shaggy hair sweeps the ground and make the yaks look as if they float across the landscape as they walk. But that peaceful demeanor can change quickly: Unlike their cow cousins, yaks are half domestic and half wild. Get one mad, and they lift their tails, lower their U-shaped horns and charge whatever drew their ire (like the photographer who worked on this story).

A growing number of yak ranching operations in recent



See **YAKS, 8A** A momma yak and her baby are seen at Wilderness Farms on Friday west of Breen.

County officials say yes to BESS

LPEA one step closer to installing utility-scale battery storage units

BY JESSICA BOWMAN
HERALD STAFF WRITER

La Plata Electric Association is one step closer to building a utility-scale battery energy storage system after the Board of County Commissioners lifted a seven-month moratorium on such facilities on Tuesday.

The newly approved land-use regulations for utility-scale battery energy storage systems – BESS – reduces several of the initial setback requirements after input from LPEA and residents.

Under the approved rules, battery storage facilities adjacent to properties with homes can now be built as close as 200 feet from the property line, down from the previously proposed 330 feet. Setbacks for vacant parcels, public rights of way and water bodies remain at 100 feet.

Additionally, reciprocal setbacks were removed from the final approved draft, meaning that only the BESS developer, not a neighboring property owner, would be limited by the code regarding the required setback.

The decision follows months of public debate about how battery storage systems should be regulated locally and what level of risk is acceptable.

“I think this is almost one of the topics – I’d have to look back a little bit – where we’ve gotten the most testimony,” Commissioner Marsha Porter-Norton said.

Battery energy storage systems function as large rechargeable batteries that store electricity generated on the grid for use during periods of high demand or low generation, and are often used as a way to increase the reliability of clean energy.

Opponents of battery storage have raised concerns about fire hazards, toxic runoff and

See **BESS, 8A**

FORT LEWIS COLLEGE

Unity theme of Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration

‘(MLK) understood that it’s going to take all of us to make a difference,’ BSU member says

BY ELIZABETH POND
HERALD STAFF WRITER

A common theme of unity, hope and support was echoed by Fort Lewis College students, faculty and staff members who gathered Monday on campus to celebrate the life and legacy of American civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr.

An evening of events, including sign-making, a unity march and a screening of the 2013 movie “The Butler” was put on by the FLC Black Student Union.

BSU President Elijah Smith said celebrating MLK’s lega-

cy and working toward policy changes should be a continuous effort – not just a one-day focus, and not only a priority when support efforts are trending.

“With Black Lives Matter, the message always goes trending on social media, right?” he said. “We saw rises in 2016, we saw rises in 2020 – but the message never changes. We always do the work. We always work on changes in policy, and we’re always advocating.”

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. is known for leading a nonviolent movement in the late 1950s and 1960s aimed at achieving legal



ELIZABETH POND/Durango Herald

Fort Lewis College students gathered Monday for a unity march organized by the Black Student Union to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

equality for African Americans in the United States.

King, known for his “I Have a Dream” speech, Nobel Peace Prize lecture and “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” is the only non-president to have a national holiday dedicated in his honor and the first African American and non-president honored with an individual memorial on the National Mall.

His leadership played a key role in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights

See **CELEBRATION, 8A**