



## MARCH MADNESS

Final Four set after thrilling UConn win 6A

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# THE Durango HERALD

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## Prescribed burn east of Bayfield will act as backstop to future wildfires

## LA PLATA COUNTY JAIL



JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald photos

Dan Nauman, with the Pagosa Ranger District, douses flames around a ponderosa tree on Saturday during a prescribed burn in the Saul's Creek area in the National Forest east of Bayfield.

## Two women survive overdoses

### Sheriff says more community addiction resources needed

BY JESSICA BOWMAN  
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Two women survived overdoses at the La Plata County jail four weeks ago after narcotics were smuggled into the facility.

The drugs that allegedly caused the overdoses are suspected to have been brought in by a female inmate who arrived visibly under the influence, said La Plata County Sheriff Sean Smith.

Upon arrival, the women was placed in medical observation and was also screened using the jail's body scanner, which provides full body X-rays, but no abnormalities were picked up by the scan, Smith said.

After four days of monitoring, she was moved into the general population, where she is alleged to have provided the drugs to another inmate. Both later overdosed and were revived with Narcan before being taken to Mercy Hospital.

The incident was discussed during the La Plata County commissioners' annual tour of the jail in the days immediately following, where they noted that the overdoses highlight the urgent need for increased community resources to better address drug addiction outside of the jail.

### Why does this keep happening?

While overdoses are, according to Smith, "few and far between," last month's incident mirrors a similar case from roughly the same time last year, when two women overdosed after narcotics were smuggled in during intake.

Since August 2024 there have been five overdoses at the jail, according to the Sheriff's Office.

The jail uses multiple layers of screening and observation during intake, Smith said. New arrivals are first taken to a restroom with an amnesty box, where they can surrender any contraband with no questions asked.

All inmates are also scanned

See **OVERDOSES, 8A**

## Saul's Creek burn marks return of 'good fire' to playbook

BY JESSICA BOWMAN  
HERALD STAFF WRITER

**SAUL'S CREEK** – Several firefighters in soot-covered gear almost blend into the landscape as they walk up and down a dirt road in the middle of the forest, just east of Bayfield. In their wake, small flames lap at the dry brush and crawl over the roots of the oak and pine trees, spreading deeper into the foliage.

To the untrained eye, the scene might seem antithetical to the job of a firefighter, whose overarching job is to put out fires.

But this fire is intentional. Restorative. And carefully controlled.

About 50 firefighters moved through the Saul's Creek area Saturday, carrying out a prescribed burn led by the San Juan National Forest. The 150-acre burn off U.S. Highway 160 is the first of the season and the culmination of months of planning.



Pat Seekins and Ashley Ting, both with the U.S. Forest Service, change batteries on a drone during a prescribed burn east of Bayfield on Saturday in the Saul's Creek area. Drones have become an import tool in managing forest fires.

See **FIRE, 8A**

## DURANGO SCHOOL DISTRICT

## Counselor faces uncertain future after contract nonrenewal

### 'I was the sole breadwinner,' says the staff member at Animas Valley Elementary School

BY ELIZABETH POND  
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Anna Donovan has worked for Durango School District for four years. She was told in March that she will be out of a job by August.

Her role as a counselor and

classroom teacher is among many affected by a districtwide restructuring driven by declining enrollment and budget pressures.

Enrollment in the district's brick-and-mortar schools has dropped by 365 students over the past five years, and about

\$2 million in cuts are needed to bring expenses in line with revenue, district spokeswoman Karla Sluis told *The Durango Herald*. Superintendent Karen Cheser said about 160 students have left since the start of this year.

The district declined to say in early March how many employees have been laid off or how many positions will be affected, but said a range of positions, including administrative and sup-

port staff, will be impacted. Sluis later told the *Herald* that 25 administrative positions had been cut as of mid-March.

"Restructuring can feel personal, but these decisions are driven by enrollment and funding realities – not a lack of care for our staff," she told the *Herald* in an email.

Donovan, who is a certified licensed professional counselor, was first hired at Park Elementa-

ry School and moved this school year into a counseling role at Animas Valley Elementary. She said her contract will not be renewed at the end of the school year.

The layoff is financially stressful, Donovan said, because her husband is unemployed and has cancer, and she provides the family's only health insurance.

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High 54 | Low 29. More weather **8B**

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