



EPIC PROJECT

AHS seniors to host Under One Moon Arts Fest **1B**

NEW SEASON

Life Time Grand Prix starts in California **1C**

THE Durango WEEKEND EDITION HERALD

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SUNNYSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Parents, teachers oppose merger

Critics question timing ahead of new Three Springs opening

BY ELIZABETH POND
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Parents and teachers say Durango School District's proposed consolidation of Sunnyside Elementary School with Florida Mesa Elementary School would disrupt student stability, impact staff jobs and could push families to leave the district.

Four teachers and one parent – all requesting anonymity for fear of retaliation – voiced opposition to the proposed merger in interviews with *The Durango Herald*.

"A lot of people are upset. I'll tell you that," the parent said.

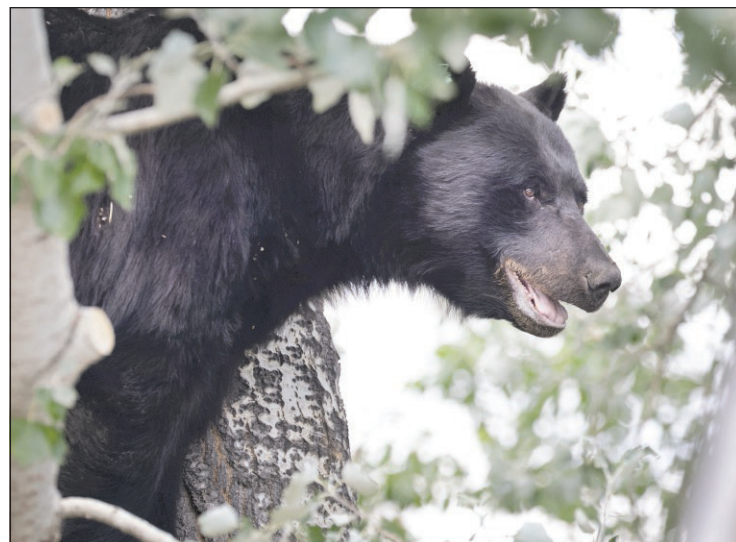
She is considering removing her children from the district if the consolidation happens, saying they would not receive the same level of care and attention at Florida Mesa, where enrollment could grow from about 280 to nearly 400 students in the merger.

She said other families are also considering leaving the district if the consolidation is approved.

"I've heard multiple parents say that if it (Sunnyside) closes, they'll go to the Juniper School or home school," the parent said.

See **MERGER, 8A**

Warm, dry winter likely to alter wildlife patterns in Southwest Colorado

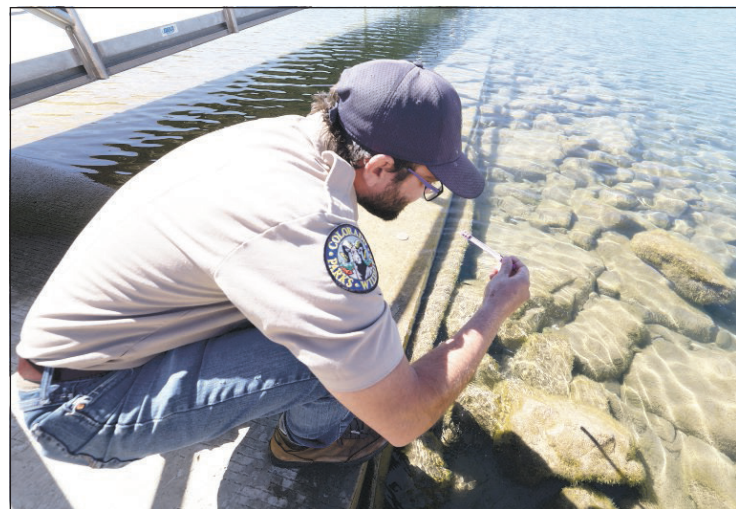


JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald photos

A bear in a tree pants as the hot afternoon sun beats down on it last summer as it looks for a little more shade in the backyard of a Durango home.



Deer rest in the shade on a sunny day in Durango. Low moisture and above-average temperatures this winter can change spring runoff, reservoir levels and habitat quality, which affects wildlife behavior and overall health.



Patrick Healy, a fish culturist with Colorado Parks and Wildlife, checks the water temperature and conditions of Lake Nighthorse before stocking 168,000 Kokanee salmon on March 25.

BY ELIZABETH POND
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Durango recorded above-average temperatures this winter, with record highs in December and February and much of January temperatures in the high 40s and low 50s, according to National Weather Service data.

For wildlife, an unusually warm and dry season can have far-reaching impacts.

Jamin Grigg, a senior wildlife biologist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife's southwest region, said this season ranks among the worst winter conditions he has seen his more than 20-year career.

"Weather-wise, I would say this is the most severe non-winter – just total non-winter – that I've ever observed, both in terms of warm temperatures and lack of snowpack," he said.

Unusually warm, dry conditions spur early wildlife activity

Grigg said CPW has already observed some impacts.

Bears are emerging from hibernation early, deer and elk are migrating sooner, and shrubs and trees are budding early – which increases the risk of a late freeze damaging plant growth.

Low snowpack and drought have reduced forage conditions across the landscape, he said.

Durango has seen several extended dry periods since December, National Weather Service Meteorologist Gillian

Felton told the *Herald*.

Those dry spells include a 22-day stretch from Dec. 4 to 25, 13 days from Jan. 10 to 22, 19 days from Jan. 24 to Feb. 19 and another period from Feb. 21 to April 1.

Low precipitation and extended drought can reduce habitat carrying capacity – the number of animals an area can support – for species like deer, bears and elk, Grigg said. A lack of moisture can leave wildlife – especially juveniles – in poor physical condition, making them more vulnerable and reducing survival rates, he said.

Persistent drought can deplete soil moisture and forage, which can lead to multiyear impacts on animals' body condition, habitat quality and population health.

Reduced plant life means less food for bears and other animals, forcing them into smaller areas with better soil moisture and vegetation. That, in turn, increases competition and predation risk, Grigg said.

Drought years can also increase human-wildlife conflicts, he said. Residents should be prepared as Durango enters its spring and summer months.

"If we stay in this warmer system through the summer, what we're going to see is a lot of wildlife populations that are going to be stressed for natural food availability," he said. "So I would ... urge residents to potentially anticipate a higher-than-average number of

See **WILDLIFE, 8A**

Around THE CORNERS

Fastest skier in U.S. history, from Durango, to be honored

Mayor will declare April 19, 2026, as Ross Anderson Day at an event Sunday

BY SCOUT EDMONDSON
HERALD STAFF WRITER

The fastest skier in American history is not from the resorts hugging the shores of Lake Tahoe or the steep slopes of Jackson Hole, but right here in Durango. And now, that hometown hero will be celebrated for his impressive feats.

Ross Anderson grew up in

Durango, learned to ski at Purgatory, holds the record as the fastest skier in American history and has advocated for Indigenous representation in the sport. On Sunday, Durango Mayor Gilda Yazzie will issue an official proclamation declaring April 19, 2026, as Ross Anderson Day. A special for

See **ANDERSON, 8A**



If you go

Ross Anderson Day will kick off at 9:45 a.m. Sunday at Rotary Park, with opening remarks made by Juanita Anderson. At 10 a.m., a performance by Southern Ute Indian Tribe dancers will take place, followed by remarks from Mayor Gilda Yazzie at 10:45 a.m. and a raffle at 11 a.m.

Ross Anderson speed skis.

Courtesy of Ross Anderson

A&E | **1B**
Business | **1D**
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Obituaries | **4A**
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Today: Slight chance of rain or snow. Clear tonight. High 54 | Low 21. More weather | **6C**

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