



Lookout Fire
burns near
Spearfish

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Prep football
coverage

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WAGS & WAVES

FOR THE DOGS



SHALOM BAER GEE PHOTOS, JOURNAL STAFF

Canines of all kinds cooled off during Wags & Waves at Jimmy Hilton Pool on Monday, Sept. 7.



Wells drying up in West River

BART PFANKUCH
South Dakota News Watch

CAPUTA — Each morning this summer, Gordon and Connie Howie have awoken on their cattle ranch in central Pennington County and turned on the kitchen faucet, unsure if any water will come out.

“We can’t do laundry or dishes or take showers other than with a little trickle,” said Connie Howie, 76. “Other times we have a little water because it seems to come and go.”

Like many ranchers and residents in rural areas of western South Dakota, the Howie family relies on a well to provide them with water for their lives and livelihood.

But this year, perhaps the worst in recent memory, many shallow wells are running slow or have gone completely dry, forcing people to go to great lengths and expense to provide clean water for themselves or their livestock.

Experts say several consecutive years of limited winter snow pack and a shortage of rainfall have combined with increased consumption of water to cause a decrease in the levels of some underground aquifers that are a main source of water for a large swath of the Black Hills region. The problem is most acute in areas outside the reach of pipes from municipal and rural water systems.

High heat during the summer of 2026 has exacerbated the problem as people, crops and animals all require more water than usual to survive.

“We have a well at the house, but it’s just not keeping up because the aquifer is dry,” said Gordon Howie. “For 20 years you could trust that well 24/7, and it never quit on us, but now it’s not providing enough water for everything we need.”

The Howies are buying bottled water for drinking and positioning jugs of fresh water throughout the house for daily uses.

“I’ve lived here my whole life and I’ve never seen it this dry, this hot, this long,” said Gordon Howie, who served in the Legislature from 2009-2011 and ran for governor in 2010.

All across the plains of western South Dakota, residents who rely on shallow wells — generally 1,000 feet deep or less — are being forced to find alternative water sources.

Some are utilizing a somewhat obscure system of obtaining water in which users insert quarters or bills into a vending machine that triggers a hanging water spout to provide fresh water

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Weather

Sunny, not as hot
High: 85 Low: 55
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THE LODGE AT DEADWOOD