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PHOTO: ROGER DIETRICH
This Red-breasted Nuthatch was one of the birds spotted during last year's local Audubon Christmas Bird Count.

Annual Yankton Christmas Bird Count Sunday

BY RANDY TRAMP
P&D Correspondent

Audubon's 126th annual Christmas Bird Count will be held on Sunday, Dec. 14.

"You can help conservationists protect birds by joining the longest-running bird census," says Roger Dietrich.

Birders and nature enthusiasts in the Yankton area will join this tradition that has lasted for over a dozen years. Data collected by participants over the years contributes to one of only two large existing pools of information that notify ornithologists and conservation biologists of the conservation actions required to protect birds and the places they need.

Last year, 32 people participated in the Yankton CBC. "I'd like to see more this year. We have the earliest possible date for the count, and hopefully, we will have mild weather," Dietrich said.

The 2024 CBC produced 76 species and, in total, counted 22,022 birds. Highlights from 2024 were three Trumpeter Swans, 9,000 Common Goldeneye, one Lesser Yellowlegs, 11 American White Pelicans, and two Northern Saw-whet Owls.

Many times, the Lewis and Clark Lake and Lake Yankton area hold some unusual ducks, geese, or gulls in the winter. In 2012, seven Long-tailed Ducks hung out above the dam for two weeks. This year, we have had Long-tailed Ducks, three species of scoters, plus Common and Pacific Loons. What surprises will the count bring this year?

The Audubon Christmas Bird Count is a great tradition and opportunity for everyone to be a part of more than 12 decades of community science in the name of protecting birds," said Dr. Brooke Bateman, senior director of climate and community science for Audubon. "Your Christmas Bird Count observations help scientists discover trends about bird species that inform conservation. Ever since the first count in 1900, participating in the Audubon CBC has been a fun and meaningful way to spend time outdoors for anyone and everyone."

The Audubon CBC is one of

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Happy Holidays



Dec. 9
16 shopping
days to Christmas

School Issues In Pierre

D-18 Lawmakers Talk To YSD Board About Upcoming Session

BY MARK MAHONEY
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Property taxes and a possible statewide law regulating student cellphone use during school hours could be topics of discussion during the upcoming legislative session.

District 18's lawmakers — Rep. Julie Auch (R-Lesterville), Sen. Lauren Nelson (R-Yankton) and Rep. Mike Stevens (R-Yankton) — were invited to address the Yankton School Board on Monday with a preview of the South Dakota Legislature's 38-day

2026 session, which officially starts on Jan. 13. All three legislators attended and spoke during the board's regular monthly meeting.

In his recently proposed \$7.44 billion state government budget, Gov. Larry Rhoden did not offer to use any savings from state government cuts to provide relief for local property taxpayers, according to South Dakota Searchlight. State lawmakers came up with many proposals to that effect during summer study meetings.

Auch said she believes property taxes will be one of the biggest topics that will be discussed during

the upcoming legislative session.

"Since the actual education segment of property taxes is over 50%, it will be, of course, an important topic for schools," she said. "Serving on the (Comprehensive) Property Tax Task Force this past summer, property taxes are a burden in some of the segments of our state, and they are definitely a hot topic in all parts of our state. You will be seeing some legislation in reference to property taxes. It will probably be one of the key issues."

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KELLY HERTZ/P&D

Amid falling snow and slippery conditions, two firefighters set up a water hose to contain a fire that had engulfed a rural Yankton County home late Sunday afternoon. One person was displaced in the incident.

One Person Displaced After Rural Yankton Blaze Destroys Home

BY JAY GRAVHOLT
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One man is displaced after a structure fire completely destroyed a home east of Yankton Sunday night.

According to Yankton Fire Chief Tim Linke, dispatch was called shortly after 5 p.m. for a house fire approximately one mile east of the WNAX radio towers on 308th Avenue.

"When I arrived, there were flames coming out of the roof and all the windows," Linke said. "The structure was too far gone so, after consulting with the resident, it was just too much risk and it turned into a controlled demolition."

Weather conditions didn't help, according to Linke.

"We all know what the weather and the road conditions are right now," he said. "The snow had just started up again, the roads were icing and the structure was located in a rural area that's sometimes a challenge just getting there in time, especially if you don't notice the fire until you actually have flames coming out of the roof."

The occupant wasn't home at the time of the fire. Linke said it was called in from a bystander.

"Knowing the location and the weather conditions, I contacted dispatch and had them call Gayville for mutual aid right away. I asked for an engine and a tanker from Gayville and tankers from Volin because I knew we'd need water."

When Linke arrived at the scene, he connected with the brother of the occupant to make sure no one was inside.

"Once we knew no one was in danger, we commenced a fire attack," he said. "We attempted to fight the fire defensively for a

while, and that included using the dump tank, which is basically a portable swimming pool that we dump water into and it shuttles water in. We also called Vermillion but ended up not using them. We fought the fire for a while, but there was no headway.

"We spoke with the homeowner and tried to determine if there's anything we needed to be concerned about in regard to the cause of the fire," Linke said. "We didn't find anything, so the cause will be undetermined. The homeowner was okay with us backing off and letting it go. It got to the point where we were making more ice than we were putting out fire because it was just so far gone."

The temperature at the Yankton airport at the time the fire was reported was 16 degrees, with light snow and mist falling.

Linke said he also spoke with the State Fire Marshall and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) which is a customary practice for these types of events.

"They also concurred that there wasn't going to be a need for doing an extensive investigation just because of the amount of damage already done by the time we got there," he said.

Linke said there were no injuries to anyone on his crew or any civilians.

He thanked other agencies who provided crucial support such as the Yankton County Sheriff's Office, Yankton County Emergency Management, Yankton County Emergency Medical Services, Yankton County dispatchers and the other departments that aided in the call.

Also, the Yankton Fire Department Auxiliary brought hot coffee and warm food as the firefighters were on the scene for close to four hours.

City To Examine Recycling Issues

BY JAY GRAVHOLT
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Yankton City commissioners spent a fair amount of time at their meeting Monday discussing the city's recycling program, eventually moving the discussion to a future work session in the new year.

At a request from Commissioner Bill Conkling, city staff put together some of the history behind the recycling program in Yankton. Conkling said he was looking for ways to reduce current utility bills.

Public Works Director Adam Haberman and City Manager Amy Leon gave a brief history of recycling in Yankton, which started as part of the Joint Powers Agreement with Vermillion.

Haberman said the City recycled with Vermillion as part of that agreement until 2017 when Yankton chose to go to single-stream recycling, which it currently has today. Prior to that, residents had to sort the various recyclable materials at the curbside, and the workers at the transfer station had to do a little more.

Leon dug a little deeper. "When we went to single-stream recycling, that was something that our partner in Joint Powers in Vermillion chose not to do," she said. "If we were going to dictate that route, that was something that we needed to pay for independently. And the commission at that time decided that they wanted to get back to that, so we moved to single stream recycling. "Our whole community pays for recycling, regardless of wheth-



Leon

CITY | PAGE 8

Striking Up The Bands

Musical filled the holiday air Sunday and Monday as the Yankton Area Summer Band and the Yankton High School Bands presented concerts at the YHS theatre. RIGHT: On Sunday, the summer band's winter concert was held, with Yankton native Meghan Powell serving as guest conductor. LEFT: The Yankton High School Concert and Symphonic bands presented its annual winter concert, with selections including "Mary Did You Know?" and "Let the Bells Ring!" finishing with "Sleigh Ride," featuring Supt. Dr. Wayne Kindle as guest conductor. The bands were directed by Gwen Wenisch. (Kelly Hertz/P&D)

