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Hello Sublette County, this is Albert Sommers reporting from the Legislative Interim. After a couple months off the Legislature is back to work doing interim studies through its various committees. Management Council is comprised of the Leadership of both parties, and is responsible for operating the Legislature and establishing study priorities for the interim. Management Council considered recommendations from legislative committees for interim work, and then made decisions on each committee's study topics and priorities. As legislators we often submit interim topics to committees for consideration, in an attempt to have constituent issues studied and hopefully addressed.

Occasionally, Management Council will not agree with a committee's priorities, and will assign it a topic that Leadership feels is important. One of those rare occasions when Management Council overrode a committee's priorities occurred this year when the Council assigned the Joint Revenue Committee the teen vaping epidemic issue that has hit Wyoming's school age children. The vaping epidemic was an issue brought to me by several sources in Sublette County, most notably the county prevention specialist. I worked on this issue during session, but the bill I helped create was presented late in the session, and was unsuccessful. As a member of Management Council, I got the opportunity to make the case that a the vape epidemic was an important issue. On May 2 in Riverton, the Revenue Committee held its first hearing on vapes. Wyoming's State Health Officer Dr. Alexia Harrist gave an excellent presentation on how quickly teen use of vapes has increased, and about negative effects on the developing brain from nicotine use. Several folks from Sublette County attended this meeting to support efforts to curb teen vape use, including the School Resource Officers from Sublette School Districts #1 and #9. An administrator and teacher from Sublette #1 also testified, as well as the county health officer and prevention specialist. I also testified on the need to curb internet sales of vapes to underage youth. A big thank you to all of those from Sublette County who made the trek to Riverton to testify. Citizen testimony is very powerful! The Committee asked for several bills to be drafted for debate. These included a bill to increase the fine for underage use of nicotine, a bill to increase the fine for selling nicotine to an underage teen, a bill to increase the legal age for purchase of nicotine, a bill to ban online sales of nicotine products, and a bill to tax vapes. Vapes are often touted as a safer alternative to cigarettes, which could be the case, when related to second-hand smoke. Vape products are new, so long-term studies have not been completed on them. We do know that nicotine is not caffeine, that nicotine has a proven negative affect on brain development in youth up to their mid-twenties, and that it is highly addictive. We spent decades decreasing social acceptance and use of tobacco products

among youth, and we are now on the verge of addicting another generation to nicotine through the use of vapes.

On May 15, I attended the Joint Transportation Committee meeting in Gillette to support an issue I helped place on the Committee's agenda, which was development/improvement of wildlife crossings on Wyoming highways. In 2016, I attended the Wyoming Wildlife and Roadway Summit in Pinedale that was sponsored by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming Department of Transportation, University of Wyoming and several NGOs whose missions center around wildlife. The Summit discussed wildlife migration and the impacts of vehicle collisions on both wildlife and humans. During this summit we broke into groups and helped prioritize stretches of highway that had the most wildlife collisions or impact to wildlife. Through this summit, and further efforts by the Wyoming Wildlife Roadway Initiative Implementation Team, a prioritized list was created, with the intent to put projects on the ground to minimize wildlife/vehicle collisions. The prioritization used a combination of the number of wildlife/vehicle collisions and the importance of the migration route that was impacted.

Sublette County's Trapper's Point project, with high fencing, multiple underpasses, and two impressive overpasses, is likely the best example in Wyoming of a successful project. Projects like Trapper's Point can reduce collisions by as much as ninety percent, which is a huge benefit to humans and animals. It was mentioned in Gillette that the Trapper's Point project could pay for itself in 17 years through reduced collisions. However, these projects are incredibly expensive up front, with the top ten projects estimated to cost a total of nearly \$200 million. There lies the challenge. Representative Stan Blake of Green River brought a bill two years ago to create a wildlife license plate, with the proceeds going to these projects. So far, the license plate has generated over \$100,000 in five months of sales.

Last year, prior to the legislative session, Sublette County Commissioner Mack Rawhouser expressed his concern to me about deer deaths on the Big Piney to LaBarge stretch of US Highway 189. During the session, I helped sponsor House Bill 228 to partially fund wildlife crossing projects, and I put the same bill language in the State Capital Construction bill. Both efforts passed the House, but died in the Senate. House Bill 228 was designed to utilize a little state money to leverage dollars from the Wyoming Game and Fish department, Wyoming Department of Transportation, and NGOs.

While the bill failed, the idea picked up steam. In the past few months the Wyoming Game and Fish Commission committed over \$1 million to help support collision projects, thanks in large part to Sublette County's rep on the Commission, Mike Schmid. WYDOT has stepped up and is applying for a federal

Build Grant in hopes of building out the Highway 189 project. NGOs are also fundraising for this effort. On May 18, I attended a Muley Fanatic fundraiser at the Sublette County Fairgrounds, and the momentum builds as both the WGFD and WYDOT spoke about finding a way to fund the project on Highway 189 from Big Piney to LaBarge.

At the May 15 meeting in Gillette, I testified to the Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee on the need for more funding for wildlife crossings. However, the committee was reluctant to support a bill that committed General Fund dollars to wildlife crossing projects. The motion died by one vote. However, the committee is looking at a couple of bills that would give citizens more options to donate to these worthy projects. I was pleased with the Committee's work, and will continue seeking dollars for this effort. It seems that insurance companies would benefit from fewer collisions; it would be nice to see them help with this effort. I can be reached at albert@albertsommers.com