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**THURSDAY**  
February 12, 2004

## Cities weigh energy venture

By **CHARLES S. JOHNSON**  
Missoulian State Bureau

**HELENA** – Five of Montana's major cities – possibly six – are spending \$30,000 to hire a consultant to come up with a price they may offer for NorthWestern Energy's electricity and natural gas transmission and distribution system in the state.

Commissions in Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Helena and

Missoula have approved spending the money, and the Billings City Council is expected to take up the issue later this month. The cities are prepared to spend \$20,000 more, if necessary, to put together a formal proposal.

"What we're looking for is the magic number," said Alec Hansen, executive director of the Montana League of Cities and Towns. "That's the amount that cities can pay to acquire the

system and allow them to bring the system up to industry standards, while keeping rates constant in real dollars."

He said the cities will hire a utility consultant with R.W. Beck of Seattle to analyze the numbers, and, he hopes, come up with a bidding price in 30 days that can be submitted to the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Delaware.

See **ENERGY**, Page A5

**THE ISSUE**  
Tracking the news

### Energy transmission and distribution

**The latest:** Five cities will hire a consultant to determine a potential bid for NorthWestern Energy's utility grid.

**What's next:** The utility has until March 12 to file its bankruptcy reorganization plan, after which other parties can submit offers.

## Prostitution arrest made in Kalispell

*Noted businessman charged as investigation continues*

By **MICHAEL JAMISON**  
of the Missoulian

**KALISPELL** – A longtime Kalispell businessman was arrested Wednesday and charged with hiring prostitutes, and police say he may have paid women upward of \$1 million for sexual relations.

The yearlong investigation into Dick Dasen, 61, is not yet closed, said Kalispell Chief of Police Frank Garner.

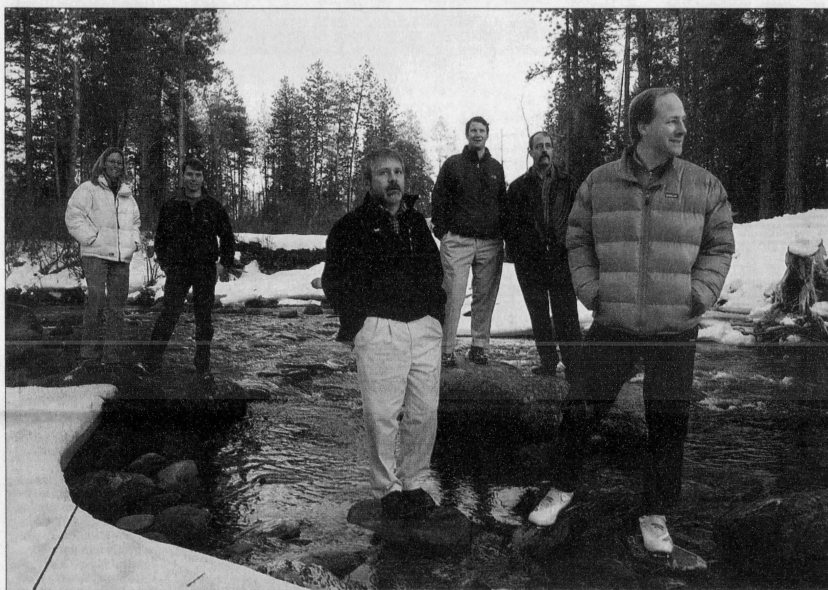
"This could turn out to be a whole lot more complicated than it appears on the surface," he said.

Just how complicated depends in part on what sort of evidence police recover from three search warrants served Wednesday. Late in the day, officers were still combing through files at Dasen's home, as well as at his offices at Budget Finance and Southfield Towers.

Dasen is well-known in Kalispell, having helped build local landmarks such as the Outlaw Inn. Dasen is a major stockholder in the Big Mountain ski resort, and has served on the board of directors at Semitool Inc. Dasen, in fact, has served on many boards, including the Associate Board of Flathead Valley Community College. He also is involved with Christian Financial and Christian Counseling, Garner said.

See **PROSTITUTION**, Page A5

## RATTLESNAKE VALLEY



TOM BAUER/Missoulian

**Members of Friends of Missoula Parks**, from left, Julie Gardner, Tim Bechtold, Lar Auto and Phil Gardner, John Krusemark of NorthWestern Energy Corp., and FMP member Lewis Matelich stand Wednesday where they hope a pedestrian bridge will be built across Rattlesnake Creek near the NorthWestern substation at the end of Duncan Drive. The group is putting together a combination of grants to build the bridge that would connect several trail systems in the Rattlesnake Valley.

# Bridge one step closer

By **ROB CHANEY**  
of the Missoulian

After a lot of frustrating bike rides to the dead end of Duncan Drive, a group of Rattlesnake Valley residents have found a way to bridge two major trail systems.

A patchwork network of trails follows both sides of Rattlesnake Creek as it flows from the Rattlesnake

### Group seeks funds after council backs plan

National Recreation Area to the Interstate 90 overpass at the foot of Greenough Park. But beyond

Mountain View Drive, there's no way to cross the stream without getting wet except for some bridges actually inside the recreation area.

That wasn't acceptable to the

Friends of Missoula Parks, a nonprofit group dedicated to raising money for local park amenities.

"One of the reasons the group exists is just for something like this," FMP President Tim Bechtold said.

Wednesday, two days after the Missoula City Council unanimously approved

taking responsibility for the bridge once it's built. FMP has already landed a \$35,000 trail construction grant through the state Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and is hot after a federal matching grant that could bring as much as \$150,000. With the bridge estimated to cost \$120,000, the pieces appear to be in place, Bechtold said.

See **BRIDGE**, Page A10

## Massachusetts marriage deal fails

*Lawmakers reject civil-union proposal in same-sex debate*

By **JENNIFER PETER**  
Associated Press

**BOSTON** – The Massachusetts Legislature narrowly rejected a compromise proposal

Wednesday that sought to legalize civil unions but ban same-sex marriages, delivering

a setback to lawmakers who wanted to avoid taking the divisive issue head-on.

The defeat of the compromise means that lawmakers will return to the Statehouse on Thursday to consider either an outright ban on gay marriage or letting the state's constitution remain intact.

The joint House and Senate session adjourned for the evening about 8:30 p.m. after about six hours of debate.

The bipartisan proposal was crafted by Senate leaders who wished to overturn a high court

decision legalizing gay marriage while still extending equal benefits to gay couples. It was rejected 104-94.

The compromise would have made Vermont-style civil unions automatically legal in Massachusetts in November 2006, the earliest an amendment could be placed on a ballot for voter approval. At that time, any gay couples married in

Massachusetts would be stripped of their licenses and considered part of a civil union.

See **MARRIAGE**, Page A10



**Connie Mello of Fall River, Mass.**, attends a rally outside the Statehouse in Boston on Wednesday as the state legislature debated an amendment to ban same-sex marriage.

MEGAN BIGELOW/Associated Press

### If you're interested

To comment on the Gold One fire salvage project, include your name, address and phone number and any group you're representing, the title of the project, and any facts or supporting information you want the district manager to consider. Then, by March 15, get the comments to the Stevensville Ranger District, 88 Main St., Stevensville, MT 59870. For more information, call District Ranger Jeanne Higgins or team leader Don Stadler at 777-5461.

See **GOLD ONE**, Page A10



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### Coming up in the Missoulian

#### FRIDAY

**Gift of love:** An 8-year-old Missoula girl will mark Valentine's Day by collecting food from her neighborhood for the Food Bank.

#### SATURDAY

**River history:** Take a trip down the Jefferson River, originally named Jefferson's River, by Lewis and Clark in honor of Thomas Jefferson. **Travel**



#### SUNDAY

**Seuss celebration:** From "The Grinch who Stole Christmas" to "Green Eggs and Ham," we celebrate the 100th birthday of an extraordinary man. **Parade**

### Weather



Sunny  
High 53° Low 16°  
Page C10

FROM PAGE A1

REGION

Energy

Continued

The cities hired the same consultant, who then worked with Stone and Webster, in 2000 when they submitted a \$1 billion bid to buy Montana Power Co.'s electric and natural gas businesses. Montana Power instead sold to NorthWestern, a company based in Sioux Falls, S.D., for \$1.1 billion in 2002.

"Montana Power Co., as long as I've lived, has always had a reputation for providing good service — the people out there working the lines on the worst day of the year," Hansen said. "The quality of the service and the integrity of the system are absolutely vital."

NorthWestern filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection Sept. 14 and has until March 12 to file a financial reorganization plan with the bankruptcy court. Until then, NorthWestern has the exclusive right under federal law to present a plan to reorganize its finances. After NorthWestern files its plan, other prospective buyers can submit offers to the court and the creditors' committee, made up of businesses that NorthWestern owes money to.

Said Hansen: "I guess what this comes down to is this: There's a company in South Dakota (NorthWestern) trying to hold onto the utility. There's a company in North Dakota (MDU Resources Group Inc.) trying to get in this deal. I think the people in the cities feel maybe someone in Montana has to be in this deal. Maybe there is an opportunity this could be owned by a Montana organization."

NorthWestern spokesman Roger Schrum said utility officials have met with officials in each of the communities. "Clearly, we've told them our assets are not for sale, and we will pursue our plan of reorganization, which is focused on re-engineering our balance sheet and becoming an investment-grade company," Schrum said. "We believe it would be very expensive for these communities to attempt a municipalization or a public takeover of our operations, and we don't believe it would be in the best interests of our state."

Missoula Mayor Mike Kadas said the cities aren't talking about condemning NorthWestern's assets, rather the possibility of an outright purchase. "NorthWestern is not in the driver's seat at this point," Kadas said. "If we get to the point where we feel comfortable making an offer, we'll make it to the bankruptcy court and the creditors' committee. That's who will be making the decision."

Kadas cited the importance of having a fiscally sound electricity and natural gas provider serving much of Montana.

"Given what has happened, I think we would be in a lot better position from an expense position and a reliability position if the system were owned publicly," the mayor said.

Butte-Silver Bow County Attorney Bob McCarthy said, "I think the uncertainty of NorthWestern's future is really what has everyone unsettled. I've had employees and retirees calling — some of them senior executives — and saying, 'Why don't you do something about this?'"

Time might be the cities' biggest enemy, he said, with the

March 12 filing deadline fast approaching, McCarthy said. Hansen said if the cities bought NorthWestern, they would make payments to local governments to make up for lost taxes. Cities do know how to run utilities, having run their water and sewer utilities for more than 100 years, he said.

Municipal ownership of the utilities could result in a lot of efficiencies and end the idea of profits, Hansen said. Utility rates would be based on actual costs, not costs plus profits, he said.

"I don't think there's a municipal employee in Montana that makes over \$100,000 a year, and we don't pay bonuses," Hansen said, referring to NorthWestern's bonuses to top executives.

In addition, cities could probably get financing cheaper than NorthWestern could through issuance of revenue bonds.

"A Montana utility would be operated by Montana people driven by the interests of employees and customers," he said.

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Wind-driven snow blocks northern Plains roads

Associated Press

Snow driven by wind gusting to 57 mph closed schools and made highway travel hazardous Wednesday on the northern Plains, and halted an Amtrak train.

Some highways in western South Dakota had drifted 3 feet high, authorities reported.

A stretch of about 100 miles of Interstate 94 was closed Wednesday for a second day in eastern Montana, from Miles City to the North Dakota state line.

Police in South Dakota recommended people travel only if absolutely necessary in the state's northwest corner, including I-94 between Sturgis and the Wyoming state line.

North Dakota authorities urged motorists to stay off sections of I-94 and I-29. The so-called "Alberta Clipper" storm blowing out of Canada did not bring heavy snow — 2 inches of snow was reported at Jamestown, N.D. — but the wind picked up snow

and caused drifting and visibility-cutting whitout conditions. Visibility was down to about 200 feet in central South Dakota, the state Department of Highways said.

Gusts to 57 mph were reported Wednesday at Ellsworth Air Force Base, east of Rapid City, S.D.

Amtrak's Empire Builder service across North Dakota was halted Wednesday by blizzard conditions, said Amtrak spokesman Marc Magliari.

High wind and blowing snow also caused travel problems in southern Minnesota, while in

Montana, many secondary routes in the eastern part of the state were impassable Wednesday. "We are opening up roads as fast as we can," said Bill Juve, supervisor for the Montana Department of Transportation at Wolf Point. "We've got eight or 10 roads that are absolutely blocked. Sometimes we can poke a hole in for one lane of traffic."

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Prostitution

Continued

"First, we believe there were multiple participants over an extended time," Garner said of Dasen's alleged activity with prostitutes. Some of the individual women, he said, are thought to have received more than \$100,000.

Garner declined to say how many of the supposed prostitutes have been working with police, adding only that "we do have a number of cooperating witnesses."

More charges are expected, he said, perhaps against Dasen and perhaps against others involved.

Police are still trying to untangle whether the women were connected in any way, he said, and whether they shared any common "business"

relationship aside from Dasen. "Is there a connection? I'm not saying no," Garner said. "But part of the investigation is determining the scope of the matter."

Some of the women were from the local area, he said, and some were not. Likewise, it is unclear whether the large sums of money came from Garner, said that is just one of many questions the ongoing investigation is aimed at answering.

Dasen was arraigned Wednesday afternoon, Garner said, charged with one misdemeanor count of solicitation. He was later released on a \$5,000 bond. As a condition of his release, he is not to have any unsupervised contact with any women other than his immediate family, Garner said.

Dasen did not return calls following his arrest and subsequent release.

According to Garner, prostitution is not a common problem in the Flathead Valley.

"It happens once and a while," he said, "but it's pretty rare."

Reporter Michael Jamison can be reached at 1-800-366-7186 or at mjamison@missoulian.com.

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