

# SMALL STREAMS

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# BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

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## Romney Hall's \$25M renovation gets life in Legislature

By **CHUCK JOHNSON**  
Chronicle Staff Writer

HELENA — Montana State University's \$25 million proposal to renovate Romney Hall to create more classroom space is now in both Senate and House infrastructure bills that won preliminary approval Wednesday in both chambers.

The Montana Senate and House, in preliminary action Wednesday, voted to spend tens of millions of dollars on infrastructure projects.

However, the bills all will face final votes in each house, and some

will require two-thirds majority votes on the final votes if they involve bonding.

Here's what happened:

The Senate voted 38-12 for Senate Bill 367, a \$98.8 million infrastructure bonding bill by Sen. Eric Moore, R-Miles City. It will require a two-thirds majority vote to pass the Senate before moving to the House.

The bill includes \$45.4 million for four major long-range building capital projects: \$25 million for Romney Hall, \$10 million for a bridge loan with the federal government to pay for a veterans' home in Butte; \$5.4 million to Great Falls College MSU to complete work on

dental hygiene teaching facilities; and \$5 million to combine with a previous appropriation to pay for construction of a new science and tech building at MSU-Billings.

The other \$53.4 million would go for grants for city, county and school projects that weren't included in a series of bills funded by dedicated revenue to pay for traditional local public works projects that pass every two years. This money goes for water, sewer and similar public works needs. A number of these projects also will get matching federal and local funds.



CHRONICLE FILE PHOTO

Montana State University's \$25 million Romney Hall remodel is now in both House and Senate infrastructure bills.

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## NO SIGNS OF SLOWING

Gallatin County's growth fastest in state, economic report shows



RACHEL LEATHE/CHRONICLE

On Tuesday, Prospera Business Network released its annual economic overview of Gallatin and Park Counties.

By **LEWIS KENDALL**  
Chronicle Staff Writer

Bozeman-based economic development nonprofit **Prospera Business Network** on this week released its annual overview of Gallatin and Park counties.

Described as a "comprehensive description of the regional economy," the 200-page report runs the gamut from demographic and transporta-

tion trends to area infrastructure and industry updates.

Below are a few relevant takeaways.

### THE AREA — AND STATE — CONTINUE TO GROW

The Prospera report cites U.S. Census data that suggest the Gallatin Valley's growth shows no sign of slowing.

Between 2000 and 2016, Gallatin County had the largest population increase in the state at nearly 53 percent. Last year, the county

ranked 22nd in the nation in terms of growth rate.

As the Chronicle previously reported, roughly 80 percent of the county's population gain between 2015 and 2016 came from the number of new arrivals exceeding the number of people leaving for other places, with the remainder stemming from a "natural increase," or the difference between birth and death rates.

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## State, locals talk Yellowstone fish kill response

By **MICHAEL WRIGHT**  
Chronicle Staff Writer

LIVINGSTON — When a bunch of fish turned up dead in the Yellowstone River late last summer and the state shut off all river use for a time, locals felt the pain. Now, as they look toward another summer with the possibility of another die-off, they're talking about how the state can deal with it better next time.

About 50 people gathered at the Park County Fairgrounds here Wednesday night to hear from a panel of local business owners, an economist, state officials and Montana's Lt. Gov. Mike Cooney about the long month they had last year when tens of thousands of mountain whitefish died.

"It was a reminder of how fragile our ecosystem really is," Cooney said.

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks

started hearing about dead whitefish in the Yellowstone River in mid-August. They learned the fish were suffering from a microscopic parasite that causes proliferative kidney disease, a condition that can be devastating to trout and whitefish. In response, the state banned all recreation on 183 miles of the river and its tributaries, a move it said was meant to give the remaining fish a chance to survive.

The closure was lifted piece by piece over the next month, but it dealt a significant blow to the local economy. Jeremy Sage, an economist with the University of Montana's Institute on Recreation and Tourism, estimated that Park County lost about \$500,000 in non-resident spending.

Leslie Feigel, the executive director of the Livingston Area Chamber of Commerce, said that impact was certainly felt by fishing guides and raft companies, but it was also felt by restaurants, hotels and other local businesses.

"It impacts everyone. Even our local plumbers," she said.

Looking forward, Feigel and others here last night said the state needed to communicate better with locals. Some said that the closure totally blindsided them, and others said they were frustrated that the state couldn't offer a clearer blueprint for how the river would reopen and when, something that may have helped them plan for their business.

Several at the meeting said they felt the closure was the right thing to do for the river at the time, but they wondered what they could expect in the future. The parasite is still in the river, and there's a chance more fish will turn up dead this summer.

"It was a reminder of how fragile our ecosystem really is."

— Montana's Lt. Gov. **Mike Cooney**

More **FISH** | A7

## Bill allowing all-mail ballots in upcoming election stalled

By **CHUCK JOHNSON**  
Chronicle Staff Writer

HELENA — A move by Democrats to move a controversial election bill out of committee backfired Wednesday when Republican members voted instead to table the bill.

At issue was Senate Bill 305, by Sen. Steve Fitzpatrick, R-Great Falls, which would give county election officials the option of using

all-mail ballots for the state's May 25 special congressional election.

In a surprise motion, Rep. Virginia Court, D-Billings, made a motion in House Judiciary Committee to push SB305 out of committee to be debated on the House floor.

Chairman Rep. Alan Doney, R-Bloomfield, told her that the committee already had a list of bills he wanted the committee to vote on.

Rep. Shane Morgieau,

D-Missoula, tried to amend the bill, but Rep. Theresa Manzella, R-Hamilton, instead moved to table SB305. A motion to table takes precedent and cuts off debate.

The bill was tabled 11-8, with all Republicans voting in favor of tabling, while all Democrats voted against it.

Morgieau said later he had wanted to amend the bill to require the election to be conducted in accordance with federal court cases involving the federal

Voting Rights Act.

Rep. Ellie Hill Smith, D-Missoula, objected afterward, calling SB305 one of the most important bills of the session, but that it was not subject to any debate in the committee. That had not happened previously in her four-terms in the House, she said.

"It's partisan hijinks and not what we do in this body," Smith said.

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