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Cowboy Poetry

COVERING CENTRAL MONTANA LIKE THE STARS

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'This house is a testament to the community'



Carla Allen and her mom Jeanne Erlandson stand in the living room of Erlandson's new home, which is filled with gifts and donations, including the decor on the walls from friends, family, and neighbors. Photo by Will Briggs

First home up in Denton following West Wind Fire

By WILL BRIGGS | Reporter

On March 22, Jeanne Erlandson and her daughter, Carla Allen, watched as Erlandson's home was torn down. The demolition process lasted only 11 minutes. Less than three months later, they gathered at the same site for a much happier occasion: the construction of her new home.

Erlandson's house is the first new home built in Denton following the West Wind Fire that burned nearly 50 structures and over 10,000 acres Dec. 1 of last year. The 1,200-square foot, two-bedroom, two-bathroom modular unit features a spacious kitchen with a large island, front deck, luxurious master bath, and walk-in master closet that Erlandson is turning into a sewing room.



Erlandson's new modular home arrived June 17. Crews lifted the house by crane and placed it onto the foundation before completing its assembly. Photo courtesy of Carla Allen

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Ranching groups to appeal BLM's approval of bison grazing proposal

By DEB HILL | Reporter

It didn't take long for ranching groups to push back against a proposal to change grazing leases from cattle to bison on BLM land in Phillips County.

On July 28 the BLM issued a decision on seven grazing allotments, a total of 63,065 acres, administered by the Malta Field office. The decision approved a request by the American Prairie organization to change from grazing cattle to grazing bison on these allotments.



Karen Budd-Falen

The request dates to 2018, and included changing seasons of use, modifying some fences by adding electric wire, and removing some interior fences.

As part of the process, the BLM held public open houses to solicit comments and extended the comment period to allow for more public input. After receiving thousands of comments, both pro and con, the BLM issued a decision: allow the AP's proposed actions, or a combination of AP proposed and current management practices, meaning bison could be grazed under the permit system, and the season of grazing would be modified.

The decision drew fire immediately from those who have opposed the idea of bison grazing since the beginning.

"To say we are disappointed with the final decision would be an understatement. Ranchers have worked diligently for over a century caring for the public land livestock graze. Ranchers are held to the highest standards by federal land agencies in the areas of range management, range monitoring, range improvements, and processes within the BLM's grazing regulations, yet when concerns were raised regarding these areas in comments and protests, BLM did not acknowledge these concerns," said Montana Stockgrowers President Jim Steinbeisser.

According to Winifred area rancher Laura Boyce, a member of the Save the Cowboy group, that group has joined with the Stockgrowers and others to hire attorney Karen Budd-Falen of the Budd-Falen Law Offices in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Budd-Falen said she will file an appeal of the BLM's decision as well as a request for a stay. If granted, the request for a stay means the BLM cannot implement the changes until the appeal has been ruled on.

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'Modern barracks' planned for missile worker housing in Lewistown

By DEB HILL | Reporter

"Nondescript" and "resembling modern barracks" are terms used by the U.S. Air Force to describe the housing to be built in Lewistown for workers on the project to decommission Minute Man III missiles and replace them with the new Sentinel missile system.

At the end of July the Air Force presented an overview of the project, including what the community might expect from being designated a workforce hub. There are only two workforce hubs planned for the Montana portion of the project. The two workforce hubs for Montana missile workers will be located in Lewistown and Great Falls.

At a July 28 community meeting held during the fair, contractors working on the Environmental Impact Statement answered general questions about how the project might affect Central Montana. Those seeking detailed information were referred to the draft EIS document.

The EIS covers a wide range of potential impacts from

the Sentinel project, including effects on air quality, water, biology and visual resources (how things look; the viewshed). According to the document, the workforce housing has the potential to impact visual resources at the highest level, VM 4, in the short term.

While the exact site for Lewistown's worker housing has not yet been decided, design details are emerging. The Air Force is seeking a 50-60 acre site located in a developed area of the city and near existing infrastructure. According to the EIS, the Air Force plans to coordinate fully with city and county officials and comply with all planning and zoning requirements.

As described in the report, the workforce hub includes a self-contained site with a residential area, a common area and an office/training area.

The residential area is made up of multiple three-story dormitories housing up to 3,000 single-person dorm rooms.



An artist's rendition from the draft Environmental Impact Statement shows how Sentinel worker housing and communal facilities for up to 3,000 workers might look. An Air Force spokesperson emphasized this drawing is only conceptual; the actual design might look considerably different. Image courtesy of U.S. Air Force

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Montana's Longest Table

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Denton

◀ From Front Page

“My old house was about 800 square feet, so I’m running my legs off going from one end to the other,” Erlandson said. “I lived in my old house close to 70 years. It cost \$7,000 at the time. I didn’t realize how small the place was.”

As with any house, however, it’s more than just the physical features that make a home.

“This house is a testament to the community,” Erlandson said.

Tokens of Erlandson’s family, friends, and the Denton community fill the space. The family of Ora Ayers, Erlandson’s dear friend who passed away in May, donated a number of furnishings for the new home, including a quilt for the master bedroom. Another friend, Linda Gluth, threw a housewarming shower for Erlandson in May in anticipation of her imminent move-in date.

Assembly required

Beyond the contents of the house, the kindness of friends and strangers permeated the process of acquiring and building the home.

“Any time we needed curtain rods set up, I’d call Roger Campbell,” Erlandson said. “We have family friends who did the electrical and plumbing work. Friends from Oklahoma helped put together the barstools in the kitchen.”

“Local contractors built the deck and poured the sidewalk,” Allen added. “Greg Buckingham fast-tracked it for mom.”

Erlandson, who is 93, also received money from her insurance company, as well as donations from the Denton Fire Relief Fund. In addition, Northwestern Energy, whose power lines sparked the fire, paid to clean up her lot.

“We originally thought the house was OK because it was still up, but the floor joists were all burned and just the shell left and the house was unrecoverable,” Allen said.

Allen started looking for modular homes so her mother, who was staying with her, could get into a new house without needing to wait for new construction. Erlandson’s new house is actually the second house Allen found for her mother, after issues with the timing of getting insurance money derailed their first attempt.

“I thought it would be a quick process, but there’s so much more to it,” Allen said. “This one was built for a couple that couldn’t take it at the time, so we got a call asking if we wanted it.”

Once the house arrived on June 17, a crane lifted it in pieces, placing them onto the foundation before they were put together.

“The guy who put the house together had quite the job,” Erlandson said. “It was interesting to watch. The guy with the crane just picked up the pieces and swung them around



While Erlandson’s house is the first new home built in Denton since the West Wind Fire in December, many of her neighbors are still recovering. The lot next door to hers, as pictured here, is the last in town to be cleared. Photo by Will Briggs

and it was such a windy day.”

Looking back, moving forward

Though it’s a modular home, there’s still plenty of work for Erlandson, Allen, and the rest of the family to do on it. Erlandson is pondering what to do with an empty wall in the living room, perhaps putting up her mother’s needlework of the Lord’s Prayer. The garage also needs to be painted and then there’s the yard, which is completely empty, save for a single tree by the curb and some weeds that have popped up in the meantime. The local Lion’s Club has donated money for Erlandson to use for grass seed.

“We’re waiting on prices for a sprinkler system,” Erlandson said. “The house used to sit closer to the street, so there’s more lawn this time.”

As Erlandson gets settled, she can’t help but notice the changes taking place around her house.

“The view is different,” she noted.

A total of 11 houses within several blocks of her home were destroyed. Some of her neighbors are moving. Others are rebuilding, though many are having issues finding people to do the work. One of her next-door neighbors has the last lot in the neighborhood to be cleaned up.

There’s also the matter of getting back into her own routine.

“I still wake up and think ‘Carla should be going to work now,’” Erlandson said.

“I’ve had to do my own washing for four days,” Allen joked.

Erlandson moving into a home of her own once again has also given the pair a chance to reflect on what has been a difficult season of life.

“It’s been a year,” Allen said. “We’ve had our moments during this process, but it’s been good, even if it’s taken a toll.”

For her part, Erlandson thought of her mother, Fern, who dealt with difficult times of her own.

“She drove all the way from Wisconsin on her own in a Model-T or a Model-A to teach in the school here. She was a pioneer, especially for a woman in that time,” Erlandson said. “She was tough.”

Linda Gluth, the friend who threw the housewarming shower for Erlandson, stopped by Friday morning to check in on her and see the new house.

“She’s Grandma Jean to me,” Gluth said. “Through this process there hasn’t been a person in town who wasn’t saying ‘Yes, they got their house down!’ or ‘Yes, they got their roof on!’”

Allen pulled up a picture on her cell phone of the old house getting decorated for Christmas on Nov. 29, just two days prior to the fire. With a new home to spruce up, she and her mother are grateful for the assistance they’ve received in getting to this point.

“It’ll get there,” Erlandson said. “All the help from friends, neighbors, and family – this wouldn’t have happened without them.”

Barracks

◀ From Front Page

The common area includes dining, kitchen, laundry, medical and recreational facilities for the workforce. There will be parking for 600 personal vehicles and 70 buses near the dormitories, with additional parking for 250 more vehicles built in conjunction with the training facilities.

The buildings, because of their temporary nature, are described as nondescript and built for functionality rather than aesthetics.

After 2-5 years, the workforce hub will be “disassembled and incorporated back into the landscape.” Because efforts will be made to locate the housing hub near already developed areas, and because of the temporary nature of the facility, no long-term effects on visual resources are anticipated.

So far, in this early stage of the project timeline, no specific parcel of land has been identified for the workforce hub facilities. Where they will be built may not be up to the local community, although input will be provided through the City, County, and Port Authority.

“Northrop-Grumman and the military will decide what makes the most sense,” said Fergus County Commissioner Ross Butcher.

“The City has had many conversations with both the Air Force and contractors

regarding the upcoming Sentinel project,” Lewistown City Manager Holly Phelps told the News-Argus. “These discussions have always centered around locating a workforce hub in or around Lewistown so that existing infrastructure can be utilized. The hope is that after the completion of this project, the improvements left behind can be utilized in the future.”

Butcher said he thinks the Lewistown Airport business park might be a good location.

“However there are other locations that can work, that are in developed areas and have access to the right infrastructure,” Butcher said. “For example, east of town on Highway 87, near the Big R store, or the hay ground near the fairgrounds. I think if the housing hub was at the airport, it might help kickstart commercial or industrial development up there. I can see the benefits but there are a lot of logistics to consider, including what will be the least intrusive for the community.”

Chair of the Fergus County Port Authority KellyAnne Terry said there will be a series of meetings between Northrop Grumman, the Air Force, and community leaders.

“This is something that we asked for in the EIS public hearing, for better communication. We’ve been told they are working on a regular schedule of meetings, which will allow the community to learn more about the plans and provide our input,” Terry said.

Terry expects the meetings to start sometime in September but said the dates have not yet been confirmed.

BLM

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“This is an administrative appeal that we must file with the Office of Hearings and Appeals by Aug. 26,” Budd-Falen told the News-Argus. “If we lose that appeal, we can file with the Interior Board of Land Appeals.”

All of this, of course, takes time.


“It’s something I complain about all the time, how long this process is and how it drags things out for years while people are waiting for a decision,” Budd-Falen said.

In response to the news of a possible appeal, Pete Geddes, vice president of American Prairie and chief external relations officer said, “We understand that not everyone agrees with allowing bison to graze on public lands, but that doesn’t change the law. We are confident in the soundness of this analysis and in the Bureau of Land Management’s long-established legal authority to authorize bison grazing.”

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