

# TMMS wetlands get new observation deck

## Deck replaces unsafe wetlands tower torn down two years ago

By **JARED WHITLEY**

*Of the Record staff*

Construction is underway on an observation deck for the Treasure Mountain Middle School wetlands, from which students can examine the wetlands for class projects.

The new deck is 24 by 24 feet, large enough to fit an entire class, and is wheelchair accessible, said Patrick Chambers with PJ Builders, Inc., the company installing the deck. The project will be done before school starts, he continued. "Even though we live in an arid state, wetlands are so extremely important because they represent an endangered eco-system," said biology teacher Michelle Breinholt.

The wetlands provide a real-world way for students to learn about ecology, and myriad animals make their homes there too. Breinholt listed sandhill cranes, black birds, ducks, rabbits, marmots, crayfish, beavers, foxes, snakes, rodents, and Uintah ground squirrels (better known as potguts).

A deck is a perfect way for students to observe the wetlands' ecosystem without disrupting it. With ninth-graders coming to Treasure Mountain this school year – and more advanced science classes, Breinholt predicts she'll use the



GRAYSON WEST/PARK RECORD

**Brad Bermes of PJ Builders levels a railing post for the new Treasure Mountain wetlands observation deck on Wednesday afternoon.**

wetlands more than ever.

"You can see out over the seven acres without having to tromp through the sensitive area," Breinholt said. "You can see where the birds are nesting. You can see the birds, but not disrupt them."

Breinholt continued, "I don't like the kids tromping out there where things are trying to grow, mainly in the spring, but the fall is a free-for-all."

The new deck is replacing the previous observation deck, which was a tower two stories above the ground, according to Breinholt. The tower was torn down in 2003, after officials from the State Division of Risk Management labeled the tower an "attractive nuisance" and it was torn down.

"I loved that thing, it was dangerous though. Originally it was a good idea," said Breinholt, who was

chair of the wetlands committee for nine years. "Anybody could go up there and possibly fall out."

About the old tower, Park City High School junior Calvin Mutcher said, "I liked it a lot, you got a good view of the wetlands you could see the whole thing. Kind of sad they tore it down."

But only a few students could go up at a time, so having one large enough for an entire class is good,

Mutcher said.

"They loved being up there and having a bird's eye view," Breinholt said, but acknowledged the safety hazard. The deck didn't have a lock so anyone could get up there. "I think the new deck will serve just as useful of a purpose."

About 15 years ago, the Treasure Mountain wetlands were a dumping grounds for construction waste. Breinholt and many others from the community restored the wetlands and the Army Corps of Engineers classified them as a protected wilderness area.

"It wasn't easy," Breinholt said. "It took a lot of work, teachers and students put in a lot of man hours putting back the water."

The same risk management team that ordered the removal of the observation tower wanted the school district to address several other issues, such as removal of an amphitheater and rebar people could trip on and expansion of trails for wheelchair access.

It's important to maintain wetlands because they provide several important functions, Breinholt said. One is water purification.

"Water leaving the wetlands is actually cleaner than water passing into the wetlands," Breinholt said.

Another is reducing risk of flooding.

"They act like sponges, in environmental education we call them the sponges of the Earth," Breinholt said.