



COLBY FREE PRESS

THE BIG DIG

Weekend storm dumps on northwest Kansas

By Jan Katz Ackerman

Colby Free Press

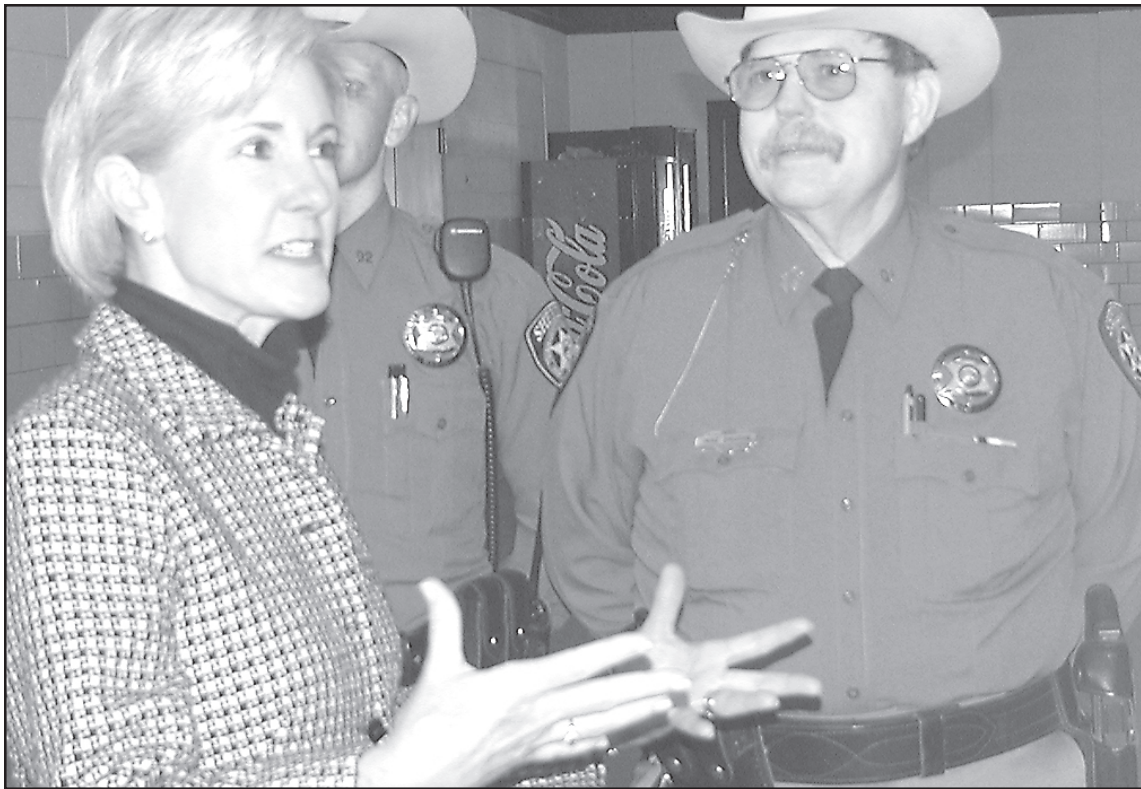
State officials assisted area residents after parts of northwest Kansas was crippled by a winter storm over the weekend.

The winter storm first hit western Kansas Thursday and resulted in significant snowfall, drifting and ice in some areas.

Watson said as much as 30 inches of snow was reported in some areas of Wallace County, with drifting up to 13 feet. She said the Kansas National Guard armory in Norton opened its doors Sunday as a shelter to assist residents hit by the storm. The armory in Colby opened Saturday.

Watson said a weather-related death is under investigation in Wallace County where snowfall of up to 32 inches and drifting of up to 13 feet have been reported.

The sheriff's office is investigating the death of 48-year-old man found in a home in a rural part of the county. Initial reports indicate a generator was in use at the home, but the cause of death has not yet been officially determined and the victim's identity has not been released.



TISHA COX/Colby Free Press

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, left, spoke with Sheriff Mike Baughn today at the Colby National Guard Armory. Sebelius toured western Kansas after declaring it a disaster because of the snow.

Snow and ice left more than 50,000 residents without power and the American Red Cross and several

community organizations opened shelters in across northwest Kansas, including Oakley. The Kansas Na-

tional Guard transported generators to Winona, Grainfield, Gove, Quinter and Park as a way to restore

water and power to various locations.

"The Kansas Highway Patrol flew an airplane through portions of northwest and southwest Kansas to search for stranded motorists and look for any significant damage not yet reported to officials," Watson said.

Another agency which helped residents was the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. Watson said hospitals and critical-care facility staff members were asked to update the status of available beds and power and to work with their local emergency managers to determine if any additional resources are needed.

"Local resources quickly become severely hampered in a storm of this size, so the Kansas National Guard is ready to help as needed, as are other Kansas state agencies," Maj. Gen. Tod Bunting, the Kansas adjutant general said.

On Saturday, Gov. Kathleen Sebelius declared a state of disaster emergency for 39 counties in western Kansas to ensure resources are available to counties severely affected.

The counties under the declaration are west of U.S. Highway 183

and include Cheyenne, Clark, Comanche, Decatur, Edwards, Ellis, Finney, Ford, Graham, Grant, Gray, Greeley, Gove, Hamilton, Haskell, Kearny, Kiowa, Lane, Logan, Meade, Morton, Ness, Norton, Pawnee, Phillips, Rawlins, Rooks, Rush, Russell, Scott, Seward, Sheridan, Sherman, Stanton, Stevens, Thomas, Trego, Wallace, and Wichita.

The Kansas Division of Emergency Management activated the State Emergency Operations Center on Thursday and it will remain activated throughout the storm to coordinate the response and recovery needed by local governments impacted by the storm.

"The governor's declaration is in anticipation of the need for additional state resources to be provided to counties responding to the storm," Watson said. "It also expedites the restoration of electrical power by resolving issues related to additional hours of service needed by employees serving in response roles."

All labor and equipment costs must be tracked by counties and state agencies during the first 48 hours for emergency work eligibility.

Storm odd in intensity, progression

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

The digging out goes on.

Snowfall amounts around the area varied, but the storm dropped up to 32 inches in places.

Colby had 19 inches, as reported by the Northwest Research-Extension Center. Goodland received 17.7 inches. The maximum snowfall amount reported was 32 inches in Sharon Springs. Hill City had the least snowfall, with two inches.

Meteorologist Jeremy Martin with the National Weather Service in Goodland said the slow-moving storm came from the southwest. Unobstructed access to moisture from the Gulf of Mexico and slow movement made for heavy snow.

"That was the primary reason for

so much snowfall," he said.

The storm was unusual in the amount of moisture it packed, and Martin said it was uncommon to have two strong storms back to back.

The blizzard followed almost the same path as the storm that hit the week before Christmas. However, the difference was the first storm moved through the area much faster.

The area was placed under a winter storm watch Dec. 26. Martin said this was a well-forecasted storm. Forecast models were consistent with each other on this weather system. Usually they aren't so uniform.

Colder than average temperatures followed the storm.

"The snow reflects the sun's energy during the day. The ground

below can't heat up, which leads to colder weather at night," he said.

Normal highs and lows for this time of year around the area are 39 for a high and 16 for a low.

As far as records go, this was the fifth biggest snowstorm for the Goodland area. It was also the second snowiest December on record with both storms. The Goodland area has not seen this much snow in December since 1924.

There is a chance Friday for some light snow and wind. Martin said it is a quick, weak system that is nowhere near the strength of the past two storms.

The Climate Prediction Center in Camp Springs, Md., is calling for a seasonal outlook of above normal precipitation and temperatures for January through March.



RANDY DECKER/Colby Free Press

A Colby Fire Department fire truck held up the collapsed roof at the firehouse Sunday after the roof buckled under the weight of snow.

Snow damages firehouse roof

By John Van Nostrand

Colby Free Press Publisher

One emergency could have made other emergencies worse.

Last weekend's winter storm and heavy snowfall caused a portion of the Colby Fire Department roof to cave in.

The roof fell in at about 2:30 p.m. Sunday. There were no injuries. The fire department is manned 24 hours a day.

Preliminary reports from the fire department are only two trucks, still within the building Tuesday, received minor, cosmetic damage. After the incident, firefighters were able to remove the other five trucks housed in the building to prevent additional equipment damage.

"It's still settling," said Colby Fire Chief Robert McLemore Tuesday about the roof. "The cracks are getting wider."

The roof over the north bays collapsed and landed on top of the rescue truck and rural pumper truck.

McLemore expects to know more about the trucks' condition after the snow and roof have been removed.

"We can't do anything until the snow has been removed," he said.

The five other fire trucks were relocated to the National Guard Armory building at 470 S. Range Ave.

Colby City Manager Carolyn Armstrong said city officials are talking with two construction com-



RANDY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Two vehicles are still at the firehouse, holding up the roof. Damage to the building can't be assessed until after snow is cleared.

panies about how the roof and building can be reinforced to remove the two trucks. An architect has declared the entire building unsafe to use.

McLemore said the firehouse, at 585 N. Franklin Ave., was initially built in the 1940s after the construction of city hall. The firehouse has had several additions since. The section with the collapsed roof was built about 30 years ago.

Armstrong said the city and Armory officials have had a long, cooperative relationship.

"We work very well together," she said.

In the past, city and Armory officials have joined forces with other emergency-like situations. Finding a place to keep fire trucks is no different.

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City asks for residents' patience

By Patty Decker

Free Press Editor

Since the snowstorm began Friday, 715 hours were logged in by more than 10 city of Colby employees using 10 types of snow removal equipment, said City Manager Carolyn Armstrong.

"The street crews have been working in shifts all weekend using all the equipment and manpower it has," she said.

"The public has been a great help as well, but we are only now beginning to move the snow piled in the middle of the streets."

In order to assist in the process, Armstrong and Chris Bieker, public utilities director, are encouraging everyone to "bear with them."

Even though all restrictions have been lifted regarding driving vehicles, the city continues urges residents to drive only

when necessary.

Structural damage within the city was limited, she said. On Sunday afternoon, the city's fire station roof collapsed onto two fire trucks. The only other structural problem involved the Coors Distributing Plant on Country Club Drive. Reports indicated the south side of the building was damaged due to the heavy snowfall.

Many tree limbs are down throughout the city and most secondary streets are still one lane.

While street crews continue to remove snow, the city's sanitation trucks will not be running in residential areas until Monday and even then it will be difficult, Bieker said.

"We will have a blade on the front of the trash truck to help, but residents can also assist in clearing snow away from trash areas."

Today, crews are hauling snow from the downtown area while other employees are working to clear the airport runways.

"We have hired private contractors to assist at the airport and in the city there should be a vast improvement in removal efforts by the end of today," Armstrong said.

When the storm first hit, the city's main priority was in keeping one-way traffic going on the snow routes, Armstrong said.

In a storm of such magnitude, the city also has an ordinance with a provision declaring traffic emergencies in this situation.

"The emergency can be declared by the mayor, myself or public works director," she said. "In this case, Mayor Ken Bieber made the declaration and the only vehicles that could be used were four-wheel drive or tire chains."

The police department, along with monitoring for accidents, also offered rides to emergency personnel, delivered medicines and got various people where they needed to be, she said.

Storm crashes New Year's Eve party

By John Van Nostrand

Free Press Publisher

The loud cheers welcoming in the new year were silenced by the snow.

The snowstorm forced the cancellation of the Rappin' and Rockin' New Year's Eve Party in Colby. The party, expected to have about 1,000 youth, included concerts, food and a variety of games and activities

throughout Colby.

But that does not mean ticket holders will be left out in the cold.

Party organizers are negotiating with John Reuben, who was to have one of the two concerts, to come back to Colby in the future. People who purchased tickets to go to the party can use the same ticket for the rescheduled concert.

"We are negotiating with Reuben

for a concert date in the next 90 days or so," said Rich Epp, one of the party organizers. "It is unknown if Three Cord Wonder will want to play."

Three Cord Wonder was to provide the second concert.

Epp said organizers are considering asking other bands to play.

For more information, call 785-443-1994.