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County hires attorney

By Jan Katz Ackerman
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New tactics are being taken to get Logan County landowners to control prairie dogs.

After nearly 50 landowners met with Commissioners Doug Mackley, Carl Uhrich and Nick Scott on Dec. 18, they decided to hire outside counsel to help Logan County Attorney Andrea Wyrick with the battle.

“We are in the process of retaining an attorney,” Mackley said Tuesday. “We are going to see what Mr. Hoffman and our county attorney come up with.”

Hays attorney Donald Hoffman will help Wyrick enforce state law which allows county personnel to go on to land and treat prairie dogs and bill the landowner for the process. In addition to Hoffman, commissioners have asked interested land owners to hire their own lawyers to help fight the battle against prairie dogs.

The commissioners continue to maintain their original position they will treat land left untreated by owners. But the commissioners are hitting road blocks in their fight.

Logan County has primarily used Rozol to treat prairie dog holes, but the legal time for its use ends March 15. Rozol can not be used where cattle are present, but the county does not have the legal right to move someone’s cattle in order to use it.

Capable of being used year-round is the chemical Phostoxin, but state and federal label restrictions limits its use.

“Plus, Phostoxin costs about \$1.70 a hole,” Mackley said.

Mackley said one of the label restrictions is before Phostoxin can be used a land survey must be conducted. He said the county has been talking with the U.S. Fish and Game Service in Manhattan to see if the survey can be waived, allowing use of Phostoxin. “They have to give us a survey, but I think they are going to bypass it,” Mackley said.

When contacted to discuss the differences in Rozol and Phostoxin and label restrictions, Logan County Prairie Dog Director Denny Mackley refused to comment. Field agents with the U.S. Fish and Game Service were unavailable.

Raising the roof



CRYSTAL RUCKER/Colby Free Press

A crane from Woofter Construction was used to hoist someone over the roof at the Colby Fire Department Thursday to survey damage from a roof collapse Sunday. The roof buckled under the weight of heavy snow and is still held up by two trucks inside the bay. Fire department training officer J.L. Ellis said the building has to be stabilized before the roof can be removed, but that is on hold until the weather clears.

Storm aftermath

Guard helps cattle feeding

By Jan Katz Ackerman
Colby Free Press

A hotline for ranchers with stranded cattle has been set up by officials in Topeka following storms which blanketed much of western Kansas.

“Ranchers who have stranded cattle and are unable to get feed or water to them are asked to contact Kansas Emergency Management at (785) 274-1446,” Sharon Watson, director of public affairs with the Kansas Adjutant General’s Department said.

“They may also request assistance at www.ksready.gov by clicking on the Ag Emergency icon.”

On Thursday, a livestock feeding and watering effort started when the Kansas National Guard dispatched helicopters to drop bales of hay near stranded cattle.

In addition, servicemen and women and volunteers used sledge hammers to break ice on watertanks for cattle.

Watson said National Guard units across Kansas have been helping with the effort. Approximately 134 Kansas National Guard personnel are involved. Additional personnel are coordinating efforts at the State Emergency Operations Center in Topeka.

“Two Black Hawk helicopters from the 1st Battalion, 108th Aviation flew from Goodland on Wednesday to move hay in the Wallace, Logan and Cheyenne County areas,” Watson said. “The 137th Transportation Company is also involved in hauling hay to affected areas using flatbed trailers and other large vehicles. A ground hay hauling mission is also taking place in Greeley County.”

A number of other Kansas National Guard units are assisting with power restoration and other missions.

These units include the 891st Engineer Battalion; 778th Transportation Company; 1st Battalion, 635th Armor; 1st Battalion, 161st Field Artillery, 169th Corps Support Battalion; 69th Troop Command; 287th Sustainment Brigade; 995th Maintenance Company; 235th Regiment, 170th Maintenance Company; 184th Air Refueling Wing, 134th Air Control Squadron and 190th Air Refueling Wing.

“Two Black Hawk helicopters from the 1st Battalion, 108th Aviation flew from Goodland on Wednesday to move hay in the Wallace, Logan and Cheyenne County areas.”

Sharon Watson, Adjutant General’s office

On Tuesday, it was estimated 60,000 people were without power in several counties. Since that time, power has been restored in some areas.

Currently, there are 23,000 electric meters out and those meters each serve homes or businesses.

Watson said the Kansas National Guard is also providing emergency generators and operation personnel to some communities to provide power to water treatment plants and other critical facilities.

These generators are being moved to other locations as power is restored.

“Command posts are being established at the armories in Garden City and Hays to direct activities of responding Guard units,” she said.

The Kansas Division of Emergency Management activated the State Emergency Operations Center Dec. 28.

Gov. Kathleen Sebelius initially declared 39 counties as part of a federal disaster declaration and she has revised that to incorporate a 44 county area. Counties included are Cheyenne, Clark, Comanche, Decatur, Edwards, Ellis, Finney, Ford, Graham, Grant, Gray, Greeley, Gove, Hamilton, Haskell, Hodgeman, Jewell, Kearny, Kiowa, Lane, Logan, Meade, Morton, Ness, Norton, Osborne, Pawnee, Phillips, Rawlins, Rooks, Rush, Russell, Scott, Seward, Sheridan, Sherman, Smith, Stafford, Stanton, Stevens, Thomas, Trego, Wallace, and Wichita.

Editor’s note: Watson was incorrectly identified in a front page story on Wednesday.

Area legislators want to look at what’s on the back burner

By John Van Nostrand
Colby Free Press Publisher

With funding for public education in the past, area state legislators are hoping they can now look toward the future.

Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer and Rep. Jim Morrison both said the intensity of funding Kansas schools during last year’s legislative session is not expected to return this year. The session starts Monday.

“With education funding, we had excellent years in 06 and 07. And in 08 we should be able to fund it. One-hundred and twenty-million was secured in the third year,” Ostmeyer said.

He explained how legislators approved to fund education over a multi-year period. With that done, he said it is time to move on to other items that were put off because of the education funding.

Related to education, Ostmeyer said he expects the state board of regents to ask for hundreds of millions of dollars to repair facilities at the state universities.

“Five hundred million was the first estimate,” he said. “Now it is up to \$800 million.”

Ostmeyer said he expects those related to university facility repair to use what happened with public education funding as leverage.

“K through 12 got funded so well, these guys are saying why would we want just \$500 million?”

But Ostmeyer hopes some of his issues can be addressed, and not get lost in another session dominated by funding an aspect of education.

“What about the water issues?” he said.



FILE PHOTO

An irrigation sprinkler sits in a western Kansas field. Area legislators Rep. Jim Morrison and Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer hope water rights and usage will be discussed during the 2008 legislative session that begins Monday.

“Our lakes are getting dry.”

Ostmeyer said the water issue is a statewide concern, not just western Kansas that has been plagued by drought the past years.

A proposed electric generation facility near Holcomb will use a significant amount of water.

Knowing the concern over the amount and use of water in western Kansas, and how the water sources networks with neighboring states, Ostmeyer said the generator proposal is getting the attention of those neighboring states.

Ostmeyer said he is concerned about how

the declining amount of water will impact Kansas’ recreation from places to fish and boat.

“That is people’s entertainment,” he said.

If water usage and rights in western Kansas do not get the attention of east Kansas legislators, Ostmeyer said hopefully the western Kansas legislators in key positions will.

Rep. John Faber is chairman of the agriculture and environment committee. Faber’s district includes Cheyenne, Decatur, Norton, Phillips and Rawlins counties.



J. Morrison



R. Ostmeyer

Rep. Virginia Beamer of Oakley is on the appropriations committee.

“A very powerful committee,” Ostmeyer said.

Legislators from Lakin and Hugoton are also in key roles Ostmeyer said.

“It’s unusual to have this many in key positions,” Ostmeyer said, “but it does say something. We are more conservative out here. We have an agenda and others must realize these people are in charge.”

Ostmeyer represents district 40 that includes 18 counties in northwest Kansas including Thomas.

Another western Kansas legislator who is hoping to be heard from is Rep. Jim Morrison.

“I am expecting a quiet session,” he said. Morrison said it will be quiet because he wants more research and study on the operations of state government.

“We have efficiency and technology and have departments that do a wonderful job, but my fear is duplication of staff and technology,” he said. “How much of this can be put under one roof?”

Late last month, the state department of labor announced there were 6,000 more

government-related employees in Kansas than there were a year ago.

“We have too many state employees,” he said. “We have more taxes being collected but I fear of having too many jobs in Topeka.”

Morrison does not expect a solution to that this session.

Morrison said he will also inquire about health care access and availability to Kansas residents. Recent studies have shown a growing number of people who do not have health insurance because of a variety of reasons. Cost is the most popular reason.

“Why is it so expensive?” Morrison said.

Those without health care who use a hospital can make the situation more difficult. Hospitals provide the care, but have to eventually increase their costs to make up for the loss. Those increases can also reflect health insurance premiums.

At the same time, Morrison wants to research the relationship between health care providers and facilities.

“Why are we taking people out of service? I don’t plan on getting all of this done in one session.”

Like Ostmeyer, Morrison said water usage should be discussed. Crop irrigation in two of his counties, Thomas and Sherman, are popular. Morrison also represents Sheridan and Graham counties.

“Irrigation is a big deal and it’s an emotional thing when we are in a drought. How do we conserve and still irrigate?”

Morrison hopes the people and issues of western Kansas will get the attention of east Kansas.

“What benefits western Kansas will benefit eastern Kansas,” Morrison said.