

Old friends



MICHELLE WORTH/Brewster High School

Kasey Hoyt as “Jeannie” and Aaron Luckert as “Johnson” greeted each other after 500 years in the Brewster High School fall production of “I Dream of Genie.” Two performances were given Saturday and Sunday in the high school gym.

State records unusually dry October

October was dry in Kansas, with 19 of the state's reporting stations recorded no moisture at all.

Through 10 days of the month, not one of the statewide network of stations reported any precipitation.

“For another 10 days, our statewide average precipitation was less than a hundredth of an inch,” said Mary Knapp, state climatologist. “Kansas’ overall total for the month added up to just a third of normal.

"It could have been much worse, though. It wasn't our driest October on record."

Kansas' all drought record hold-

er remains October of 1914.

“Nov. 9, 1914, marked the end of what still is the longest dry spell in the history of the continental United States,” Knapp said. “On that day, Bagdad, Calif. – in the Mojave Desert – saw its first measurable precipitation since Oct. 3, 1912. Bagdad had gone an incredible 767 days without rain.”

As Kansas' official climatologist, Knapp not only maintains the state's weather-recording stations, but also the ever-growing Kansas Weather Data Library of records that extend back into the 1800s. The library's home is with Kansas State University Research and Ex-

tension.

Kansas weather data is available online at www.ksre.ksu.edu/wdl/.



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Report casts doubt on Kansas bio-lab safety

By John Milburn
The Associated Press

TOPEKA (AP) — A new report contends that federal officials have underestimated the risks associated with building a lab in northeast Kansas that will study dangerous animal diseases, some of which could be passed to humans.

The National Research Council report criticizes placing the National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility in Manhattan, a college town in the heart of cattle country. The new lab would replace an aging one on Plum Island, N.Y., about 100 miles east of New York City.

The Department of Homeland Security says the lab will be safe, but the council notes in its report released Monday that the agency itself estimates there is about a 2 percent chance each year that a pathogen could be released.

The research council calculates that based on department figures, there is a 70 percent chance a leaked pathogen could cause an infection within the next 50 years.

Homeland Security spokesman Chris Ortman said the calculation “was based on a cumulative worst-case scenario” and did not consider any safety measures the department will incorporate during design and construction of the lab.

“DHS will not build or operate the NBAF unless it can be done in a safe manner,” Ortman said.

Still, Kansas' congressional delegation issued a statement Monday expressing confidence that the facility "will be the safest research laboratory in the world."

But the council, which is affiliated with the National Academy of Sciences, called a Homeland Security assessment of the lab's safety that was completed in June "not entirely adequate or valid." Ronald Atlas, chairman of the committee that issued the report, later described the department's assessment as "incomplete."

The current laboratory is on an isolated, 840-acre island. A Long Island-based environmentalist and a state lawmaker both said the report suggests moving the lab off of Plum Island would be a mistake.

“The report reads like the premise of the next Steve King novel. Only this would be nonfiction,” said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of the Citizens Campaign for the Environment. “Critical gaps including the lack of rapid detection of the release of pathogens, impacts of tornados and assessing risks of infection from airborne exposures paints truly frightening picture even for the hardest among us.”

Rep. Timothy Bishop reiterated his stance that the cost of relocation should dissuade federal officials from moving ahead. There are estimates Plum Island could fetch \$50 to \$80 million, but Bishop said building the new facility would cost 10 times that much.

"The notion that the new project could be funded with the proceeds from Plum Island is wishful thinking in the extreme," he said.

Because the island is a potential target for those who might want to steal dangerous pathogens or wreak havoc, visitors must undergo FBI background checks and all bags are inspected before anyone is permitted onto a ferry for the 1.5-mile trip.

The laboratory is modern and would not look out of place on any college campus, but the rest of the island is largely undeveloped, with freshwater marshes, pristine beaches and seals resting

on huge rocks just offshore. There is an 1869 lighthouse (no longer in use) and buildings from a U.S. Army base that closed after World War II.

The council specifically avoided saying whether the new lab should be built in Kansas or making other policy recommendations, and it commends the department for completing its assessment in a relatively short time, calling it “a solid starting point.” But it says in its 146-page report that the site – in the heart of cattle country and near Kansas State University’s football stadium – adds to the risks.

“Ultimately, policymakers will need to decide whether the risks are acceptable relating to constructing and operating NBAF in Manhattan,” the council says.

Ortman said the department will ensure that before the lab begins operations that “all biosafety and biosecurity requirements have been met.

"NBAF will be a modern research facility that will protect the U.S. from threats to our animal agriculture, food supply and public health."

Kansas officials said some of the questions raised by the report would arise no matter where the new lab were built. Tom Thornton, president and chief executive officer of the Kansas Biosciences Authority, said the assessment was never meant to be the final word on the lab's safety.

"We've got plenty of time to incorporate procedures into this facility," he said.

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