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Crews begin work on I-70 rebuilding

By Steve Haynes

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Contractor crews should be starting some off-road work on a \$7 million project to repave and upgrade Interstate 70 west of Colby whenever the weather allows.

Eric Oelschlager, area engineer for the Kansas Department of Transportation in Atwood, said the work runs from the Edson interchange east to the Thomas County line.

At first, crews will be extending pipe culverts and doing erosion control, he said, and as weather permits, they'll be pouring concrete for ditch liners and to extend box culverts.

At first, the work won't require closing any traffic lanes, he said, but the shoulders may be closed where crews are working and drivers may see workmen on or near the pavement. As always, said Kristen Brands, public affairs manager for the department in Norton, drivers should use caution and move over or slow down when workers are present.

The project includes milling two inches off the driving lanes and replacing that with an "inlay" of new asphalt, Brands



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Goodland Star-News

Contractor APAC Kansas Inc., Hays Division, has been storing crushed rock and other materials for a paving project on Interstate 70 on a leased lot near the Brewster interchange. Work was to start this week on extending culverts.

said. That will be followed by 1 1/2 inches of new pavement over the entire roadway, including the shoulders. On and off ramps at Edson will get a 2-inch overlay.

The paving won't require detours or two-way traffic, but one lane at a time, either eastbound or westbound, may be

closed during the work, Brands said.

As part of the project, however, traffic will be diverted under a bridge at the county line so workers can lower the pavement and increase the vertical clearance for oversize load on the freeway.

Brands said while that work is done, one

side or the other will be closed, with two-way traffic under the bridge.

Oelschlager said traffic will be "head-to-head" first in the eastbound lanes, then on the new pavement in the westbound lanes, with signs and a lowered speed limit.

Guardrails will be replaced and slopes along the road improved, Brands said. A bridge on Sherman County Road 36, one mile west of the county line, will be closed for deck repairs.

APAC-Kansas Inc., Hays Division, is the prime contractor in charge of the project. Subcontractors include Sporer Land Development, Oakley, pipe extensions; ditch-liner, dirt work; Bridges Inc., Newton, box bridge roof repair;

Cillessen & Sons, Wichita, traffic control; Dale Dickhut, Scott City, seeding, erosion control; Double D Construction, Lamar, Colo., guardrail; Dustrol, Towanda, milling; Fulsom Construction, Cedar Vale, permanent signing;

J & J Construction, Iola, box culvert extensions; PCI Roads, St. Paul, Minn., concrete barricades; Surveys Inc., Ellsworth, surveying; and Twin Traffic, Kansas City, permanent striping.

Weather permitting, Brands said, the work should be complete by July.

For questions, contact Oelschlager at (785) 626-3258 or erico@ksdot.org, or Brands, at (785) 877-3315 or kristenb@ksdot.org.

To see upcoming road projects, go to the T-Works website: www.ksdot.org/tworks.

Township asks county to split wind money

By Christina Beringer

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Members of the Summers Township board expressed sometimes-heated concerns Monday on payments of up to nearly a quarter-million dollars a year that Thomas County could receive if a 72-turbine wind farm is built south of Colby.

One trustee characterized the agreed-on "payments in lieu of taxes" the company would make as "borderline illegal," then said the townships should get a share.

The commission chairman promised the board would "give it some thought," but the board took no action on the request.

Summers is one of three townships involved in the project, but it's the only one which hasn't signed a "hold-harmless" agreement with Acciona Energy, the company planning to build the wind farm. In part, that agreement says that Acciona will restore roads to the same condition or better than they were before construction.

Though exempted from property taxes by the state Legislature, Acciona has entered into an agreement with the county to make payments in lieu of taxes, which is the primary concern of Summers township's trustees.

Later, commissioner Chairman Ken Christiansen explained that the agreement is a standard practice in the wind-farm industry. He said he and his fellow commissioners see it as a payment for potential services.

At a meeting Dec. 19, Acciona representatives said the construction phase should begin this month and continue throughout the year. Routine maintenance would re-

quire about 10 people to keep the farm up and running.

The payment in lieu of taxes would continue for 20 years or longer, depending on how long the wind farm is in operation, they said.

After the trustees left Monday, commissioners said that when construction begins, those working on the project will receive all of the services available to a permanent resident of the county. For example, if someone is hurt on the job, an ambulance crew would respond. If equipment is vandalized, the sheriff's office would investigate, and the rural fire department would respond to a fire call. These services are normally paid for with property taxes.

Since the company is exempted from property taxes, they said, the payment is designed to cover expenses to the county as a result of the wind farm.

Craig Reed, Summers Township trustee, told commissioners he thinks the act of accepting money from the company is "borderline illegal," but also said he hopes the county will share a portion of it with the three townships affected by the wind farm "as a way of alleviating the ill act."

Fellow township board member Bert Stramel said at the Dec. 19 meeting that, "it would make a decision (to sign the hold-harmless contract) easier if the township got some of the payment, too."

"We feel left out of the negotiating process with Acciona," he said Monday, "and I wouldn't have even known about the county receiving payments if I weren't a landowner."

He said an Acciona representative told him about the agreement.

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CHRISTINA BERINGER/Colby Free Press

Emergency manager Susan McMahan (above) was one of many Thomas County officials who attended an animal-disease training session Monday at the Community Building. McMahan worked with others in the class (below) on fictitious scenarios so they'd be better prepared to handle an outbreak of foot and mouth disease, avian influenza or some other infection.



Officials study for outbreak

By Christina Beringer

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Several officials from Thomas County attended an animal-disease training session Monday at the Community Building in Colby.

The day-long session, put on by the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Animal Health, also drew representatives from Rawlins, Cheyenne, Sherman and Greeley counties.

Dr. Tarrie Crnic, a veterinarian, animal-health planner and group facilitator, said an outbreak of serious animal diseases in Kansas, such as foot and mouth disease or "high-path" avian influenza, or bird flu, would not only affect farmers and ranchers and related industries, but veterinary practices, the general economy and

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Girl, 18, killed child for 'fun,' gets life

By David A. Lieb

The Associated Press

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. — A central Missouri teenager who confessed to strangling, cutting and stabbing a 9-year-old girl because she wanted to know how it felt to kill some-

one was sentenced Wednesday to life in prison with the possibility of parole.

Alyssa Bustamante, 18, pleaded guilty in January to second-degree murder and armed criminal action in the October 2009 slaying of Elizabeth Olten in St. Martins, a small rural town west of Jefferson City.

The judge also ordered the teen to serve a consecutive 30-year term in the armed criminal action charge.

Bustamante was 15 years old when she confessed to strangling Elizabeth, repeatedly stabbing her in the chest and slicing the girl's throat. She led police to the shallow grave where she had concealed Elizabeth's body under a blanket of leaves in the woods behind their neighborhood.

With her hands shackled to her waist and her

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House redraws its map

Members of the Kansas Legislature are tackling political redistricting issues.

The House had a bill for redrawing the boundaries of members' districts on the agenda for its Wednesday session. The measure encountered little opposition in committee.

Lawmakers must adjust the boundaries of their districts and the state's four congressional districts to account for changes in population over the past decade.

The plan for the state House

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