



Water hearing could advance new rules

By Sam Dieter

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A hearing set for next month will help the state decide whether to implement restrictions on well usage in part of Thomas County that were written by the farmers and landowners themselves.

David Barfield, chief engineer for the state Division of Water Resources, will hear a proposal to create the state's first

Local Enhanced Management Area at 10:30 Wednesday, Nov. 28, at the Sheridan County Courthouse in Hoxie.

After an initial hearing Sept. 13, the division decided to let the proposal move forward. The area would cover 99 square miles in Sheridan and Thomas counties, restricting usage for 125 water-right owners under a plan to conserve groundwater.

"It's a deduction in usage, it's a restriction on all the water rights in that area,"

said Wayne Bossert, manager of Groundwater Management District No. 4 in Colby. "The effect is to slow the water table decline, that's why it's set up."

Barfield said he has four options at the hearing. He could either approve the proposal in whole; he could reject it because it runs contrary to state law; he could send it back to the district board with his own suggestions, to be decided at another hearing; or he could send it back with suggestions that were brought up at the

hearing, at which point the board could approve the suggestions or the proposal will be rejected.

The proposal was written to be implemented as soon as next year, Barfield said. If he sends it back to the board with suggestions, however, the starting date could be pushed back several months, and that date could be pushed back another year if it is rejected.

"All I can tell you is we have every hope and we're working to make it effective by 2013," the engineer said.

The restrictions are set up to keep wells in the area from pumping more than 114,000 acre feet of water over the next five years.

These restrictions, Bossert said, would limit farmers to no more than 55 acre inches of water for irrigation for five years. That's a 20 percent reduction from the past 10 years, during which time, he

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Candidates discuss views on state issues

Senator talks about redistricting, water

By Marian Ballard

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Ralph Ostmeier, a native of Colby and a farmer from Grinnell, has represented northwest Kansas in the Kansas Legislature for 12 years, serving two terms as a state representative and two as a senator.

Now he's up for election again. After defeating challenger John Miller in the primary "with flying colors," he faces a contest with Democrat Allen Schmidt of Hays, who has held the Senate seat for the 36th District just east of his for two years.

Sen. Ostmeier says he was not surprised by the redistricting changes that came when federal courts took over the task after the

Legislature failed to agree on new maps reflecting the 2010 census. About 70 percent of District 40 remains the same, both in size and number of voters, he said. Added territory includes part of Phillips County and all of Ellis County, including the traditional Democrat stronghold of Hays.

The senator says the new territory will not dramatically change the urban-rural balance in the district. Though Ellis County is home to Hays, population about 20,000, along with both Victoria and Ellis, 1,200 and 1,800 respectively, he said the interests of the communities remain largely rural. As is the case in Thomas County, he said, there are many farmers and others who live in the city while working

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Democrat says 'don't vote labels'

By Stephanie DeCamp

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Democratic Sen. Allen Schmidt wants you to know that he is first a rural Kansan and second a Democrat.

"Don't just vote labels," he advised. "Know your candidates and try to ensure that they are in this for the right reason."

Schmidt said that while trimming the state's budget and cutting taxes is necessary, government needs to be sure it doesn't just shift the financial burden from one group of people to another.

"Don't be fooled by tax cuts that may come back to us (in northwestern Kansas) as increases in

our sales and property taxes," he said. "We must be very diligent in making sure issues like this, that look good on the surface, don't hurt us, our schools and communities in the future. That takes analysis and good questioning, rather than just accepting something at face value."

"We need to get our budget in line responsibly. This will take some time and some cutting, but responsible cutting means that we must not take the legs out from under programs that we need for our communities and citizens."

"We need to help and enable our businesses to grow by stopping the over regulating and administrative

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Overland Park may restrict open carry

OVERLAND PARK (AP) — Just weeks after allowing Overland Park citizens to openly carry weapons, city officials are considering adding some restrictions after getting an overwhelmingly negative response from residents.

The city council voted in September to allow gun owners to carry firearms in public places if they are kept in holsters with the safety engaged. Guns are allowed in all public places, except city-owned buildings and buildings that post signs prohibiting weapons.

The council's vote came after Kansas Attorney General Derek Schmidt issued an opinion late last year that a city must allow citizens to carry loaded weapons but may impose restrictions on how that is accomplished.

A council committee will consider next month tightening restrictions to require those who openly carrying weapons to have the same permits currently required to carry concealed weapons, *The Kansas City Star* reported (bit.ly/ShXthc).

Those restrictions allow only U.S. citizens who are at least 21 years old to carry weapons.



Classes go on fall walk

After a windy Thursday, Friday was a great time for a nature walk to look for signs of fall. That's what the Puddle Duck Preschool classes did, gathering bouquets of leaves (left and below), exploring the wonders of acorns, even throwing some leaves in the air (above).

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