

from our viewpoint...

Plan to close office should start a fight

The state office of the U.S. Farm Service Agency, after suffering a bloody nose last year with a proposal to close more than half its county offices, has come back with a plan to close 11 in some of the state's smallest counties.

In northwest Kansas, only the office in Gove, the state's smallest county seat with a population of 103, would close, merging with the Logan County office in Oakley. Farmers could choose to do business with the government at any office, and many are expected to gravitate to nearby Hoxie in Sheridan County.

The agency's Agriculture Department twin, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, announced that it will follow suit, closing offices in the same 11 counties.

Under the first plan, offices in Oberlin, St. Francis and Sharon Springs in the northwest would have closed, but for the present, all are safe.

So, with our offices open, we should go on about our business and ignore this little government reorganization?

Only if we want to be next.

Eleven offices is just a foot in the door. Given their way, eventually the bureaucrats would return for another bite. And another.

Today, Farm Service and Conservation offices typically are small, three or four workers in a county, with the two "co-located" in the same building.

If you want to see the future, though, look to the largest agency in the Agriculture Department, the Forest Service. Once run by district rangers stationed out in the woods, in small towns and mining camps, the service averaged three to four employees per district well into the 1950s.

In the last 25 years, though, the service closed most of its rural offices, concentrating employees at ranger stations with 20-25 employees.

No one lost their job, mind you. Employee numbers stayed fairly constant. But the layers of bureaucracy thickened as workers began to specialize in one area or another, grazing, timber, recreation, law enforcement. Little money was saved, but expenses for vehicles and travel soared.

The management model is a lot like the one adopted a couple of years ago by the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, which closed many of its county offices in favor of regional offices serving several counties.

The result, as usual, was no money saved, but a big disconnect between clients and those supposed to serve them.

These consolidations aren't about saving money. They're not about good management or specialization. They're about gathering the troops in one place and creating a warm nest.

The represent the state and federal governments abandoning towns that get too small, too dull for officials to want to work in.

In rural America, we shouldn't tolerate that, not from the Department of Agriculture, the state or any other government designed to serve us. If the state is going to have the same employees and the same expenses, why not spend some money in towns like Gove?

We should fight this kind of thinking, whenever it appears. — Steve Haynes



There's another cat in our basement

Steve told me not to go looking for a new cat and, as usual, he was right.

Steve's theory is that the cats always find us. Too true.

But I've been wanting to replace my missing Siamese for about five years.

Every time a new cat comes — usually from my children — it's not a Siamese.

So when my favorite pet pusher told me about a Siamese kitten she had at the Norton city animal shelter, I tumbled.

Sherry works as the Norton animal control officer and as the circulation/classified/you-name-it manager at *The Norton Telegram*. Which is probably why *The Telegram* has a lot of information about lost, strayed, dumped and underloved cats and dogs in it.

The newspaper office even has a pair of birds, which Sherry brought in for a short visit — about a year ago. Oh well. The Oberlin office has a cat and we never even pretended it belonged to anyone but the newspaper.

Anyway, back to the Siamese.

Sherry said she had a 5-month-old female Siamese-mix that needed a home.

I talked to Steve. I discussed it with the girls at the office. I talked to Steve.

I called Sherry about a test drive.



cynthia haynes

• open season

Sure, she said, I'll bring her down to the office.

I stopped by *The Telegram* and picked her up — a scared bundle of shedding fur. She's beautifully marked and lay unresisting in my lap. Ah, I thought, the perfect cat — pretty, loving, docile.

At home, I showed her where the water was upstairs and the food and litter box and food bowl downstairs. Then I let her go.

She ran between a couple of boxes near the food bowl in the basement.

OK, no problem. I knew where she was and she was safe from the other cats.

But I was afraid she'd get lonely. So I headed for bed, taking the new baby with me.

She needs a bit more socialization, I figured, and a night in our bed should help her to get close to Steve and me.

Steve stays up late, but he was ready to hit the hay at about 2 a.m. when I woke and real-

ized something was wrong.

The baby had had an accident all over me, the bed and herself.

Steve removed the kitten to her hole between the boxes in the basement. I took a shower and stripped the bed and rinsed the sheets. He hauled the bedding to the washing machine.

We remade the bed and went to sleep, figuring that I was to blame for the "accident."

That was four days ago, and neither of us has touched the new kitten since.

We figure she's somewhere in the basement among the boxes, Christmas decorations, summer clothing, books and stored items. There are about a million places a small cat could hide down there.

We're pretty sure she hasn't left through the cat door. It's kinda hard to get to, and every time one of the other cats goes down there, it growls and sniffs around suspiciously. Steve says he saw a flash of white the other night.

The upside of this is that Jezebel, the cat we hadn't seen since we took her to the vet three months ago, has come upstairs demanding love and attention. Rooming with a kitten apparently wasn't to her taste.

We still have a cat in the basement we never see. It's just a different cat.

The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

Inland Press Association Colorado Press Association

National Newspaper Association

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansas.com

The Goodland Star-News assumes no liability for mistakes or omissions in advertising or failure to publish beyond the actual cost of the ad.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

Incorporating:

The Goodland Daily News

1932-2003

The Sherman County Herald

Founded by Thomas McCants

1935-1989

THE SHERMAN COUNTY STAR

Founded by Eric and Roxie Yonkey

1994-2001

Nor'West Newspapers

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We can help global warming, save money

By Jim Merriott

The Oberlin herald

Is Al Gore right?

Whether he is right or not about global warming, I believe one thing: this winter's weather is definitely different than it has been in the past 50 years of my life.

Viewing Mr. Gore's film on global warming, "An Inconvenient Truth," got me thinking again about our Ol' Mother Earth.

No matter how much I try to help stop global warming, doing what experts suggest to cut down carbon dioxide into our atmosphere, I am only one person. It will take each person on this planet to see the big picture.

Sure, most likely, I will never live to see what happens, but somewhere down the line, future generations are going to have to live with what I, along with every other person who lived during my time, left them.

When Americans crossed this land, calling it Manifest Destiny, they didn't give a damn about raping the environment. They felt it was there for the taking and it would last forever.

Now sitting in my air-conditioned house when the temperature is 104 degrees out, or when the temperature dipped to -10 degrees, I think to myself, what did my ancestors do back in the day?

They didn't have the comforts that spoil us today. We have developed technology to make our lives easier, but does it really hurt us to cut back and see what it felt like to be alive 150 years ago?

When the blower motor went out on my furnace the coldest day of this year, the temperature dropped to 46 degrees in the house.

I decided to heat the house with the six kerosene lamps that I inherited from my grandparents. It wasn't that uncomfortable, and if I had a wood-burning stove like grandpa did, the house would have been nice and toasty. I have no way of knowing how much emissions the stove would have put out, but I do remember tossing in dried cow chips in one, the ol' timers way of recycling. It wasn't that bad.

So I have looked at the website www.stopglobalwarming.org to see if there is anything that I can do. Here are a few things we all can do to not only help global warming, but put a few bucks back into our pockets.

• Check the water heater, keep the thermostat no higher than 120 degrees. Save 550 pounds of CO2 and \$30 per year.



from other pens

• commentary

• Use a push mower or electric mower. Use your muscles instead of fossil fuels; this can save 80 pounds of CO2 and a few bucks per year.

• Put on a sweater instead of turning up the heat in your house. Wear more clothing in winter. Save 1,000 pounds of CO2 and \$250 per year.

• Inflate your tires. Keep the tires on your vehicle adequately inflated. Check them monthly. Save 250 pounds of CO2 and \$840 per year.

• Install a low-flow shower head, using less H2O in the shower means less energy to heat it. Save 350 pounds of CO2 and \$150 per year.

• Switch to a tankless water heater. Your water will be heated as you use it rather than keeping a tank of hot water. Save 300 pounds

of CO2 and \$390 per year.

• Change the air-conditioner filter. Clean or replace dirty air conditioner filters as recommended. Save 350 pounds of CO2 and \$150 per year.

• Insulate your water heater. Keep your water heater insulated could save 1,000 pounds of CO2 and \$40 per year.

• Replace old appliances. Inefficient appliances waste energy. Save hundreds of pounds of CO2 and hundreds of dollars per year.

• Buy minimally packaged goods. Less packaging could reduce your garbage by 10 percent. Save 1,200 pounds of CO2 and \$1,000 per year.

• Insulate your home. Make sure your walls and ceilings are insulated. Save 2,000 pounds of CO2 and about \$245 per year.

• Finally, take some action. There are many simple things we can do in our daily life — what we eat, what we drive, how we build our homes — that can have an effect on our immediate surroundings, and places as far away as Antarctica.

If everybody pitches in, we all win and save a few bucks along the way.

