

## weather report

**42°**  
noon  
Monday



### Today

- Sunset, 5:28 p.m.
- Wednesday**
- Sunrise, 6:33 a.m.
- Sunset, 5:29 p.m.

### Midday Conditions

- Soil temperature 31 degrees
- Humidity 33 percent
- Sky mostly cloudy
- Winds northwest 25-34 mph
- Barometer 29.98 inches and steady
- Record High today 75° (1986)
- Record Low today -4° (1908)

### Last 24 Hours\*

- High Sunday 38°
- Low Sunday 19°
- Precipitation trace
- This month 0.41
- Year to date 0.53
- Below normal 0.09 inches

### The Topside Forecast

Today: Sunny with a high near 57, winds from the north at 5 to 15 mph and a low around 18.  
Wednesday: Mostly sunny with a high near 27, winds out of southeast at 15 mph and a low around 19.

### Extended Forecast

Thursday: Partly sunny with a 20 percent chance of snow at night and a low around 23. Friday: Partly sunny with high near 47.  
(National Weather Service)  
Get 24-hour weather info. at 162.400 MHz.  
\* Readings taken at 7 a.m.

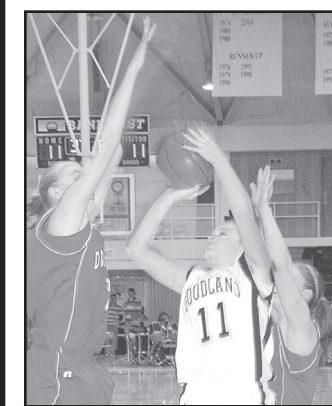
## local markets

### Noon

- Wheat — \$10.12 bushel
- Posted county price — \$10.49
- Loan deficiency pmt. — 0¢
- Corn — \$4.82 bushel
- Posted county price — \$4.79
- Loan deficiency pmt. — 0¢
- Milo — \$4.57 bushel
- Soybeans — \$12.19 bushel
- Posted county price — \$12.49
- Loan deficiency pmt. — 0¢
- Millet — \$7 hundredweight
- Sunflowers
- Oil current crop — \$17.90 cwt.
- Loan deficiency pmt. — 0¢
- Confection — \$30/20 cwt.
- Pinto beans — \$2500 (new crop)
- (Markets by Scoular Grain, Sun Opta, Frontier Ag and 21st Century Bean. These may not be closing figures.)

## inside today

More local news, views from your Goodland Star-News



## Cowgirls lose to Indians

Goodland Cowgirls Whitney Shields tried to take a shot against the taller girls from Dodge City in a game on Feb. 2. Shields led the team in rebounding with 8 Friday against the Hoxie Lady Indians. Goodland lost 64-62. See photo, story on Page 9a.

# Permit hearing planned Tuesday

By Tom Betz

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The Goodland Energy Center has asked the state to modify the air-quality permit for the power plant being built west of town, and the Department of Health and Environment has scheduled a hearing for at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the city commission room.

Norman House, an area farmer and businessman and president of Goodland Energy Resources, the partnership building the coal-fired plant, said the application to modify the construction permit would expand the types of fuel to be burned at the 25-megawatt plant, now under construction five miles west of Goodland at Caruso.

He said the current permit already includes a provision for burning sunflower waste from the nearby Northern Sun plant. The modification will allow the plant to burn other types of material, including tire chips, cardboard, bio waste and possibly municipal trash in the future.

House said the efficiency of the generator and the technology being used in the plant could allow them to reduce the use of coal by burning other materials, and that could reduce carbon emissions to a "neutral" level.

He said the plan includes the possibility of burning trash, but said that is something for the future. House said the biggest problem with municipal solid waste is that plastic in the trash creates toxic emissions. He said

engineers plan to work up to handling the municipal trash after the plant is in operation.

"We want to help take care of the solid waste problems in our area," House said. "We believe there is enough material generated in a 60-mile radius to allow us to reduce the amount of coal and reduce the carbon emissions to a neutral level."

The state is in the last days of a 30-day period to allow people to comment on the proposed modification. Comments may be submitted in writing to Dana S. Morris, Bureau of Air and Radiation, 1000 SW Jackson, Suite 310, Topeka, Kan. 66612-1366 or at the hearing Tuesday.

Requests to speak at the hearing should be

sent to the attention of Christie Thurman at the same address or faxed to (785) 291-3953 by noon on Monday.

A copy of the proposed permit and all information can be viewed during normal business hours at the Health Department office in Topeka. A copy of the permit and information is available at the Goodland city manager's office, at the City Administration building, and there is one at the department's Northwest District Office in Hays.

To review the proposed permit or to get a copy, contact Morris (785) 296-1578 in Topeka or to review the permit only, call Rick Robinson at (785) 625-5663 at the Hays office.

## 17th Ag Expo at fieldhouse on Thursday

By Sharon Corcoran

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Information to make your farm more profitable, vendor booths, even a free lunch — everyone who's anyone in the northwest Kansas agriculture business will be at the Max Jones Fieldhouse on Thursday for the 17th annual High Plains Ag Expo.

The fifth annual "Rally for Beef" hamburger feed will highlight the event, which starts at 8 a.m. Lunch will be at noon.

The expo is sponsored by KLOE, KKCI and KWGB Radio in Goodland and the National Sunflower Association, with "gold-level" sponsors Shay Realty of St. Francis and Arrowhead Feed and Trailer of Burlington.

Given the commodity prices as well as the increases in output costs, said station manager Marty Melia, there will be a lot of issues for the speakers, business people and farmers to discuss, particularly concerning how much farming has changed since last year.

The doors will open at 8 a.m. Melia said, and activities will end about 4 p.m. Speakers begin at 9 a.m., including:

Darrin Newsom, senior analyst at Data Transmission Network Ag Services in Omaha, will open the session with a discussion of the grain markets.

Dennis Coryell, president of the Republican River Water Conservation District, from Wray, Colo., will talk about water conservation and issues regarding the river.

See EXPO, Page 5a

## Cowboy voted regional Wrestler of the Year



Goodland senior Bob Doxon pinned Garrett Wilson of Wellington at the regional wrestling tournament at Clearwater. Doxon had a bye in the first round. He pinned all three of his opponents in under a minute, wrestling a total of two minutes, 36 seconds, and was voted regional wrestler of the year by the coaches. As heavyweight champion, he qualifies to compete at the state tournament this weekend in Salina. Photo by Dennis Saint/The Goodland Star-News

# Grassland value changes could raise taxes

By Tom Betz

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A drop in the valuation and a capped capitalization rate for grassland could cause a hike in everyone's property taxes, Sherman County Appraiser Terry Ballard told county commissioners during a special meeting Friday afternoon.

Ballard said he got the agricultural land values to be used this year on Wednesday and the grassland figures "jumped out at him."

The impact on Sherman County for this year is about an \$1.8 million in loss of valuation on agricultural land, he said, and to make its budget, the commission may have to raise taxes.

"That may not be much on our \$65 million countywide valuation (3 percent)," he said, "but there are other counties who have less valuation and more grassland."

He said it was something he had been watching for several years, but during the drought years, the loss of value was a small amount each year. He told the commissioners that based on the new state formula, the loss of agricultural assessed values from the past four years has been \$4,535,475, and that since 2001 the loss has come to \$6,423,987.

He said an artificial cap on capitalization rates established by the Legislature five years ago is holding the values of grassland down. That means a tax break for stockmen, but higher taxes overall to meet the county budget.

Ballard said he has been talking to other assessors about the situation, and will be meeting with the Rawlins County commissioners this week. He said assessors in

northwest Kansas are going to meet to compare notes, and are looking at what options there might be to have the situation reviewed.

Commissioners agreed he should question the loss of value and suggested Ballard keep them informed on what he finds out.

Ballard said one option is to appeal to the state Division of Property Valuation, and another might be to get the Kansas Association of Counties involved along with area legislators.

Ballard said the value of agricultural lands has been based on a modified income approach, using an eight-year average on yields and a five-year average on commodity prices.

"Up to the last seven or eight years, that was the method we used," Ballard said, "and it worked

pretty well. The landlords were included in the expense part of the formula.

"Grass has been based on the lease rate, and then take out expenses to get a net income."

He said the state formula establishes a capitalization rate that is part of the income approach. He said that was a floating figure until 2003, when the Legislature decided to cap it. He said seven or eight years ago, the capitalization rates were high, above the 11 to 12 percent level.

In 2003, he said, the state capped the capitalization rate making it a minimum of 11 percent and a maximum of 12 percent.

"With the recent rains, it appears we have turned the corner," Ballard said, "and with the interest rates falling, the capitalization rate has been held at 11 percent."

He said based on the lower interest rates and increased rental fees on grassland, the capitalization rate should probably be down to about 9 percent.

"I am not saying the agricultural values and the methodology are not appropriate," Ballard said. "I think it is appropriate. I think the legislators provided some relief to the agricultural landowners to give them a break when the income was down because of the drought and so it would not be an excessive tax burden to farm."

"The craziness is that the value of agricultural land is going up and the rental rates are going up, but the income stream is going down, or at least it appears to be from the valuation methodology."

See VALUES, Page 5a

# Burn plans recommended for more than an acre

By Tom Betz

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Sherman County commissioners plan to revise their burn permit policy to require that farmers get burn plans from the U.S. Farm Service Agency and permission from the fire chief for any fire larger than an acre.

Questions have been raised because the agency wants to enforce a requirement to burn Conservation Reserve Program land on about 7,500 acres around the county over the next two months.

Dennis Mote, county executive director of the agency, and Fred Wedel, conservationist for the Sherman County office of the National Resource Conservation Service, met with the commissioners and their recommendations for handling the program.

Steve Duell, a farmer from north of Ruleton, was at a meeting Tuesday to show the commissioners an example of a burn plan he had worked out for one of the plots he has to burn this year.

Duell showed the commissioners a colored

aerial map of the area he got from the Farm Service Agency that shows what needs to be burned and the surrounding area.

"It is a good way to see what you are looking at," Duell said. "I will be getting a copy of these to Alan David or Chris Bauman (the rural fire chief and his assistant)."

Commissioner Kevin Rasure asked if the maps were available for piece of land. Duell said they are available for any tract in the county from either the Farm Service or the Conservation office.

Duell said that he had worked out a burn plan for one area but was worried about power lines on the edge of the property. He said Wedel told him he could mow the grass short under the lines to keep the fire away.

He said with the burn plan and a county burn permit, he would need an agreement with the fire chief that a given day is OK to burn. Duell said the plan includes information about the best weather conditions for burning.

Commissioner Mitch Tiede said he thought the county should require a burn plan for

anything over 30 acres.

Dennis Shank, a farmer and member of the county Conservation District board, said he felt it would be better if the county had a burn plan for anything. Lonnie Whiteker, president of the Conservation District board, agreed.

Shank said his insurance agent said if he has a burn plan and follows it, the company would cover him for liability if the fire got out of control.

Tiede said he thought the farmers ought to get together with their neighbors. Rasure said he thought making a burn plan required for everything would include open field burning or a pit. Shank disagreed, saying he felt a pit was a controlled area.

"What about a place less than half an acre," he suggested.

"I understand that you know what we mean," Rasure said, "but that may not be true of everyone reading this resolution."

Tiede suggested making it a minimum of one acre to require a burn plan. Shank said making that would cover most everything.

Rasure said a plan has to be approved before

it is burned, and they need to make sure that is in the burn permit resolution.

Whiteker asked about land along I-70. Rasure said he felt the burn plan and agreement between the farmer and the fire chief should cover that area as well.

"It will be a daily process," Tiede said. "There may be a field that does not meet the safety or wind requirements."

Duell said they have to burn the Conservation Reserve ground, but felt the burn plan and maps would help the firemen out.

Whiteker said he felt there may be some situations where the firemen ought to be on the scene of a burn and wondered if the county has a rate for that.

Tiede said David and Bauman were working on a rate for that.

Duell said one thing would be to make sure the county roads are noted on the maps to give the firemen an idea of where they are going.

The commissioners will review the burn permit resolution at their next meeting at 8 a.m. on Friday, Feb. 29.