

## Wild fires may not be all bad

Simple Tricks and Nonsense



Kevin Bottrell

As a Colorado native I often keep up with the news coming out of our neighbor, and I've been following, as have many, the story of the High Park Fire.

As I write this, the fire is somewhere around 50 percent contained, which of course is only an estimate,

and still means that around half of the fire is still burning out of control. It has burned some 65,000 acres.

I grew up in Loveland, about 25-30 miles from the fire, and went to college in Fort Collins, which is about 15 miles away, so I know the area pretty well.

As a Boy Scout I often went to the Ben Delatour Scout Ranch in Rocky Mountain National Park, about 40 miles northwest of Fort Collins, which is right in the path of the fire. A photography instructor at the camp sent in pictures to CNN that show the fire crawling along the wooded mountainsides toward the camp. Its an eery feeling seeing something like that in a view that I've seen in person many times. The note on the photograph said about 180 campers and 40 staff were cleared out late last week.

It's sad to think that if it can't be controlled, the fire could consume that camp. I have a lot of good memories of that place. Camping with my friends, shooting .22 rifles, canoeing, learning about wildlife and more. That said, I almost envy the Scouts that were there this year, can you imagine a more interesting campout?

One of the troops that was evacuated was Boy Scout Troop 1, from Edmond, Okla. I actually encountered that troop taking a break at the truck stop in Colby several weekends ago. I didn't know it at the time, but they were on their way to Ben Delatour. I almost went over and talked to the leaders, after all how often is it that you encounter Troop No. 1 (mine was 182).

I'm sure I've been hiking more than once in the burn area. As a resident assistant at Colorado State University, I once took a group of students hiking up the hill that sits behind the college's football stadium. Once you get to the top you can look down and see Horsetooth Reservoir. If I understand correctly where the fire is located, we would have had an incredible view of the smoke plumes from the top of that hill.

My parents, who still live in Loveland, said they can often smell the smoke depending on which the way the wind is blowing.

And there's more. It isn't often you see a bull moose wandering around I-25 up by Loveland, but apparently one was found wandering by all the shops and dealerships that have sprung up by the interstate (which at that point is many miles from the mountains). The pictures on the Loveland Reporter-Herald's website show it wandering around next to the Harley Davidson dealership, which is right by the BMW dealership where my cousin works.

State Fish and Wildlife personnel suspect it may have been driven down from the foothills by the fire. It is just one of many large animals that people have reported fleeing the fire.

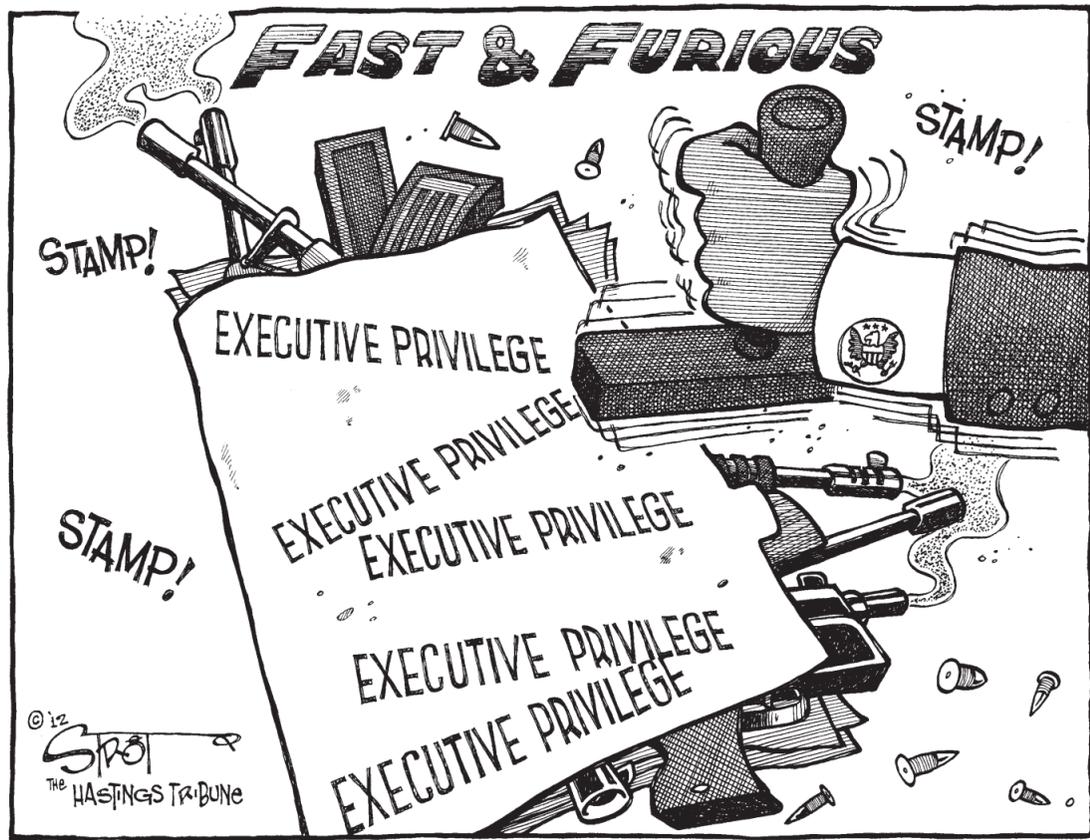
My mom always joked about how she has lived in Colorado for nearly 40 years and, despite many trips to the mountains, she had never seen a moose until she went on vacation to Alaska. Apparently all you have to do to see one these days is go to your local motorcycle dealership.

Its sad to see so many people lose their homes. However, there should be some good coming out of this and similar fires. For one thing, part of why the fire spread so quickly was because there were a lot of dead or dying trees in the area, trees killed by parasitic beetles. It's not a bad thing to get rid of that.

For another, fires like this one can be beneficial to the environment. Lodgepole Pine trees, a predominant species in the area, are dependent on forest fires to grow new trees. Their pinecones need high temperatures to open and drop their seeds.

By all accounts, the fire was a natural fire. It was started by a lightning strike, rather than by any human actions. This fire would have started whether there were people living in the area or not.

Out here on the plains we face just as much danger from wildfires, especially this year with how hot, dry and windy its been. The county commissioners put in place a burn ban earlier this week along with a ban on shooting off fireworks outside of Goodland. I urge everyone to follow those bans. If we limit the fires we cause, then our firefighters can focus all their energy on ones caused by nature.



## Be thankful for all kinds of weather

The heat claimed two victims at our house this week. Sunday morning I checked on our chicks and found two dead. That leaves one lone chick out of the five we hatched. It's a cruel, cruel world and only the strong survive.

But still, I really hated to lose them. Not that I get emotionally attached to chickens, but I had cared for them from their month in the incubator; through their struggle to hatch; their daily care; and their graduation to the outside world and their coop.

It looks like we will strike out completely with the last batch we set. They should have begun hatching by now and there is nothing. Nada. Zilch. Zero. Zip. Not a single hole in a single egg. I stand and stare at the eggs as though I can will them to do something.

I will not be discouraged, however. I will set 20 or so more. I would love my granddaughter, Taylor, to have the fun of seeing chicks hatch. If I set eggs later this week, they should be ready to hatch when she comes in July.

Harvest is essentially over. There are a few fields, here and there, that are getting mopped up. We've heard yields that are off the charts and then we've

Out Back  
Carolyn Plotts



heard of some disappointing ones, too. But I guess that's the nature of farming. It's always a gamble. And, no one's ever totally happy. We don't want it to rain during harvest, but the corn is drying up. If you're a farmer who happens to raise both crops, you're really torn. You don't know what to pray for.

Monday morning you didn't know if your prayers had worked or not. It was as humid as it can be without raining. Fog so thick you could cut it with a knife. For a moment I thought I was back in Ohio. That's the way it was almost every morning. Nothing against Ohio, but I needed to see some sun.

Weather has always been a good topic when there doesn't seem to be anything else to write about. My mother talked about the weather a lot.

In April of 1942 she wrote about losing an overshoe in the mud between the house and the barn. She said instead of cussing the rain - to remember when dust clouds would roll in from the northwest and she would have to scoop dust off the stove before she could even start breakfast. She said they had to tie dishtowels over the milk buckets before they could even begin to milk. And finally, she said, "Instead of getting up on your ear because it's so muddy you can't get anything done, get down on your knees and give thanks because it's that way."

I'm sure if the rest of us had lived through the Dust Bowl years we would have felt the same way.

I've made three batches of cherry jam, so far. There are enough cherries left to make a pie, but Jim is boycotting that idea because he can't pick enough mullberries to mix in for a cherry/mullberry pie - his favorite.

As it happened, I had just such a pie in the freezer. He's happy and so am I. I'll work the rest of the cherries into jam and won't have to heat the oven to do it.

## Kansas farmers help keep your family fed

All across our country Americans are checking their cars and SUVs, studying road maps, installing GPS devices and adding another item to their to-do lists in preparation for their long-awaited summer vacations.

Anticipation will soar and tempers will flare as husband and wife teams take to the great American highways and byways in search of rest, peace and tranquility. Children will ensure this dream remains only partially fulfilled with road questions like: "Mommy, I want a snack." "I need to go to the bathroom." "Daddy, Bethany pulled my hair." "Are we there yet?" and "I don't want to go on this dumb vacation, I want to go home."

Regardless of such comments, moms and dads everywhere will set their jaws and push ahead. After all, the money spent for the family vacation often represents cash left over after paying the family's food, clothing, fuel and other necessities throughout the year.

Parents will remind their children, "We worked hard for this time off. We deserve it and we're going to enjoy it." Americans remain some of the most

Insight  
John Schlageck



fortunate inhabitants of our planet. Try to imagine what it would be like if we had to all be self-sufficient. What would happen to leisure time if family needs were not produced for them by others?

Although we all work hard throughout the year, we should not forget those people who also work hard to free up time so we can vacation with loved ones. One such group are Kansas farmers and ranchers. They meet our food, fiber and fuel needs. These needs are met without worry of availability.

The next time you walk into your local supermarket, remember milk comes from carefully cared for dairy cows on someone's Kansas farm. Remember, the butcher performs a service by cut-

ting and packaging the hamburger and steak we grill for our families while the Kansas rancher cares for and produces this beef. Styrofoam cartons only hold the eggs that are laid by hens on farms.

Few other countries enjoy the wide selection and availability of such wholesome, good tasting food. Few other countries can claim that so few people feed so many. Today, little more than 1 percent of our nation's population are farmers and ranchers. They supply the other 98 percent of us with most of the food and fiber.

Remember as you plot your vacation course this summer, and as you motor through the Kansas countryside to notice the fields of corn, milo, soybeans, sunflowers and alfalfa. Take a look at the cattle, hogs, and sheep grazing in the pastures.

Don't forget, the Kansas farmer and rancher helps fulfill our family's food needs. These professionals also care for the livestock and crops you see as you drive by. They do so carefully and with as much care as possible.

Travel safely.

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