

Some relief for the Colorado firefighters

The fires are all but out now. The summer monsoons have begun in the Rockies, replacing hot winds with cool rains. More rain is expected in the coming days.

The two "type 1" incident command teams fighting the fires east and west of the Continental Divide gave way to a single replacement team, and that team stood down on Sunday, giving way to a smaller "type 3" command team.

There are still plenty of fire fighters on the scene, but nothing compared to the 1,500 men and women mobilized as of two weeks ago. By Sunday, the crew included two "hand crews," 14 fire engines, two water tenders and 136 "overhead personnel," with the desk pounders likely outnumbering the field personnel.

Crews had hauled back all the sprinklers, hose lines and other fire-suppression equipment so carefully placed around cabins and lodges just days ago. Two helicopters remained at the Creede Airport to douse hotspots and run errands.

The command team noted that people could expect to see smoke in the burn area into the fall. Crews were working to cut down "snags," dead or burned trees that might fall onto a road or a trail, to make it safe for people to re-enter the forest. Much of the area remains closed to public use.

So, barring a return of hot, dry winds, this fire is over, having burned 109,000 acres. (Compare that to 7,000 acres burned in Decatur County's largest fire last year.)

The fires this summer in Colorado may be only the beginning, however, since much of the state west of Denver is covered with the same standing dead spruce trees that proved so flammable this time.

Why? Blame Smoky Bear. Blame the environmental movement and Woodsy Owl. Blame mankind's naive belief that we are in charge.

For nearly a century, we've suppressed nearly every fire that erupted in the West. Smoky taught us to be careful with campfires and matches. Our culture demanded that we protect the forest.

The environmental movement came along, and with it, a premium value placed on wilderness tracts and "old-growth" forests. Logging was suppressed, along with fire. Woodsy told us to protect the forest.

And while experts said it was good sometimes for fires to be allowed to burn, in practice, most fires in the lower 48 states threatened enough property that allowing them to burn was out of the question.

What that got us was a huge swath of overmature forest, ripe for a blowdown, insect infestation – or fire. What it amounts to is that trees just don't live forever, anymore than we do. And nature's way of renewing a forest tends to the dramatic.

If the forest couldn't burn, then either the tress would blow over or bugs and disease would kill them. Or, in the nastiest possible combination, first the insects would kill the trees, destroying the beauty of the forest, then fire would clean up after them.

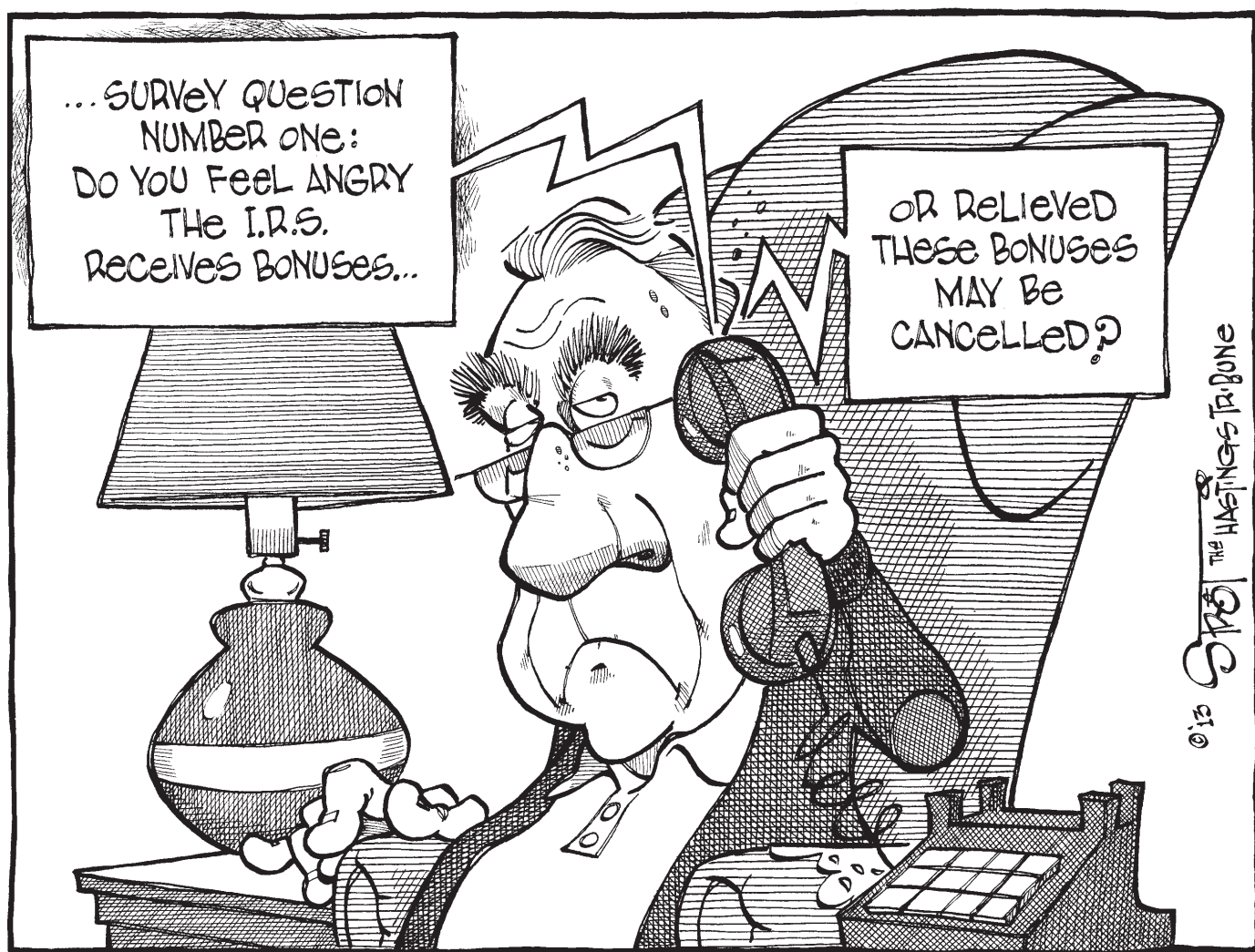
A standing dead spruce is a 100-foot tower of kindling waiting for a match. The needles die and drop off, then the bark sheds, loosened by insects and the predators, including birds and animals, that prey on grubs. What's left is a combustible combination of dry twigs and branches. When one flares, it's spectacular; when the winds comes up, they all burn at the same time.

There was nothing fire crews could do to stop this fire until nature – terrain and weather – got in the way. There will be more, until we learn to let nature stay in balance and stop trying to preserve a forest state that was not meant to be.

The forest will survive and recover, but it could be a century or more before it is anything like what we have known.

And as long as we believe that we can "manage" nature and preserve things in the wild the way we like them, we are setting ourselves up for disaster after disaster.

On the Prairie Dog
Steve Haynes



Part II: The closet disaster

When I left you last week, it was two days before I was to host my ladies club and a long-time girlfriend was to visit. I discovered that a leaky pipe had flooded the closet and most everything had to be hauled out to either be dried or washed.

Here we are one week later and life is pretty much back to normal. The leak was fixed, the carpet torn out and everything returned, in a more orderly fashion, to the closet. Oh, the closet still needs to be purged of all that does not belong in a closet, but I have Jim's promise that we will tackle it together.

Which is how we tackled the whole house-cleaning project – together.

"If you'll go up into Nebraska with me to pick up a counter top," he said, "I'll help you get the house ready for club. Just make a list of things I can do."

"You've got a deal," I said.

On cleaning day, I made my list on a small dry-erase board. Now, husbands are a little like children, but I've raised teenagers, so I knew better than to request something vague like, "Clean the living room."

It wasn't long before I had a list 44 items long, each specific to the task at hand:

1. Sweep bathroom floor

Out Back
Carolyn Plotts



2. Sweep utility room floor.
3. Sweep kitchen floor
4. Empty dishwasher.
5. Fill dishwasher.
6. Dust library shelves on south side.
7. Dust library shelves on north side.

And so on, and so on.

Just for fun, I slipped a special assignment into the list at No. 36: "Kiss your wife 10 times." The day was slipping by with many tasks being completed, but nary a kiss. Finally, I asked Jim, "Have you read the entire list?"

"No," he answered, "I'm doing each one as it's on the list."

That must be another one of the differences between men and women: to do things in order. Men are right-minded and task oriented. A woman, on the other hand, would scan the entire list, prioritize in her mind, tackle

the easiest jobs first and work her way, hop-scotch style, through the entire list.

Finally, at my insistence, Jim read the entire list and I finally got the smooch I had requested. In fact, I kept getting kisses all day. Jim would say, "Hey, I'm just doing my job. It was on the list."

I am pleased to report that everything was in readiness for club and we had the usual good time together. We played a trivia game, learned a little something about why we celebrate the Fourth of July and had refreshments.

As for my friend showing up, that has been postponed for awhile. I got the hint from her text message that said, "I'm not in charge." She was riding with her daughter and two of her grandchildren to Wyoming for the National High School Rodeo Association Finals. Her grandson, Kaleb, is ranked as the No. 3 bareback bronc rider in the state of Louisiana and he qualified for the finals. Their focus was getting to Wyoming and not stopping for trips down memory lane with Grandma's old friends. It's all right We'll make the connection later.

At least now, I'm really ready for company. Barring any more water leaks.

Where has the summer gone?

Life is Good
Rita Speer



Here it is, nearly the middle of July, and I hear myself (and others, as well) asking where summer has gone. I feel as though I have "lost" May and June. They just zoomed by me. I looked at the calendar, and both were busy months. In May we made back-to-back trips to Brady, Nebraska for our younger grandson's graduation party and then his high school graduation. While we were at the party, we had an opportunity to spend some time with his siblings, which makes any grandmother's heart beat faster!

When we got home from the party, the rest of our family was at the house. Allison had arrived from Georgia with her two dogs, and Matt and his family had driven in from Lawrence. I was able to spend time with all five of my grandkids in one day! What a blessing. When we got out of the car and headed for the front door, Annabella (four years old) said with excitement, "Grammy and Grampy are home!" My day was complete.

The next day was Kaleb's graduation. He received a scholarship no one in the family knew was being awarded, plus some scholarships from the college he will attend in the fall. Our three granddaughters spent time together just having fun. We ate quickly at our daughter's house and headed for

home.

That night we had more company. My brother and sister-in-law had arrived for our anniversary celebration, so they came to the house to meet Annabella and Lillyanne (two years old). What a wonderful evening. I felt totally filled with love.

Sunday was the day we celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. It was, as Allison said, the "perfect event" for us. People came and visited with us and others. I "showed off" our grandkids (the oldest, Christian, had returned to college as he had an eight-page paper due Monday morning; his brother had had an all-night campout with his graduating class and was sleeping when his parents left for Norton), and our children. One thing we did that worked out well was to ask friends not to bring us gifts (I once heard of a couple receiving three sets of gold salt-and-pepper shakers) but to bring something for God's Pantry. We were

so pleased to have a trunk-load of food to give to the pantry.

Everyone left on Monday, except Allison, who stayed several days. After she left, other events came along as life resumed a more typical rhythm. The end of the school year meant I had more sewing time. Memorial Day weekend saw us spending time in Kearney with friends, having a photography lesson as Bob had a new camera.

June had out-of-town doctors' appointments, the actual date of our anniversary, attempts to get flowers planted and watered, plans to spend some time outside, soaking in Vitamin D. I found time to work on quilting projects and ended the month at a five-day quilting marathon retreat at Manna House in Concordia. I got lots of things done, but I also bought more fabric for projects, so I am not sure I am really ahead.

The warm months of the year are my favorite, and of course they just zip by. Those of you who like winter can look forward because, for me at least, the cold, snow, ice and wind will return too quickly. Those months drag by and I don't get any more done than when I leave my sewing machine to go outside to water or just enjoy the beauty of summer.



Letters to the Editor and Thumbs Up:
e-mail dpaxton@nwkansas.com
or to write 215 S. Kansas Ave.



THE NORTON TELEGRAM

E-mail: nortontelegram@nwkansas.com

ISSN 1063-701X

215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, KS 67654

Published each Tuesday and Friday by Haynes Publishing Co., 215 S. Kansas Ave., Norton, Kan. 67654. Periodicals mail postage paid at Norton, Kan. 67654.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Norton Telegram, 215 S. Kansas, Norton, Kan. 67654

Official newspaper of Norton and Norton County. Member of the Kansas Press Association, National Newspaper Association, and the Nebraska Press Association

OFFICE HOURS:
8 a.m.- 5:30 p.m. Mon.-Thur.
8 a.m.-5:00 p.m. Friday
Phone: (785) 877-3361
Fax: (785) 877-3732

STAFF

Dana Paxton..... General Manager
Advertising Director/Managing Editor
email: dpaxton@nwkansas.com
Dick Boyd..... Blue Jay Sports
nortontelegram@nwkansas.com
Michael Stephens..... Reporter
Society Editor/Area Sports
mstephens@nwkansas.com
Vicki Henderson..... Computer Production
Marcia Shelton..... Office Manager

Nor'West Newspapers
Dick and Mary Beth Boyd
Publishers, 1970-2002

Kansas Press Association



Call Dana for your next ad. 785 - 877-3361!