

Fire on the prairie is just another season

On the Sappa
Steve Haynes



The fire moves in shimmering waves, unlike anything I've ever seen, lines of it licking the edge of the pasture, great columns advancing up the center with the wind, leaping and rushing ahead, circles of fire surrounding the center, constantly moving and advancing.

It blazes and crackles for miles across the prairie, through endless unfenced acres rolling away from the top of the ridge, the backbone of the Flint Hills. The smell and the sound are awesome.

Ranch hands in pickups and bale-hauling flatbeds move from place to place, setting fires, then settling back to watch them. Volunteer firemen out from town spend the night out on patrol, ready to protect a house or outbuilding that might be in the way should the wind shift. The blue and red lights of their beat-up trucks and tankers stand out among the flames.

The pasture to the east, nearly as huge as this one, has already burned to-night. Acres and sections of tall grass remain for the torch. You have to burn the grass when the time is right, not too early, not too far into the spring. You have to stay up all night sometimes.

My sister and I could see this fire when we left Emporia. Every ridge we crested, we could tell we were closer. We were miles past Cottonwood Falls, and a county away, before we got anywhere near the flames.

A fire department six-by-six tanker passes us, headed back to town. Roads don't follow section lines. They have names, not letters and numbers. They meander up the valley of some creek, past ranches and houses and trailers tucked down into the lee of the hills along the stream.

Finally, we turn again, running south a mile on a section line, then west to the top of the hill. The fire is before us. We park beside the blazing section, on a stretch where the flames have consumed all the grass already, and safely upwind.

Fire is a way of life here. Ranchers have been burning the bluestem pasture for more than a century. Fire thins the trees and kills cedar saplings. It renews the earth and fertilizes the green shoots that appear a week or two later.

Soon it will be time to turn cattle onto the grass again, begin another cycle of fattening for market. Trucks grind up into the hills to bring the cattle, take them away.

The fire seems endless along this ridge. It stretches miles to the southwest, one patch of brilliant orange after another, islands of grass, peaks of flame. In places where the bluestem is thick, flames leap 20 to 30 feet into the air. In the corners where it has to go against the wind, it seems to crawl, but all the grass is consumed nonetheless.

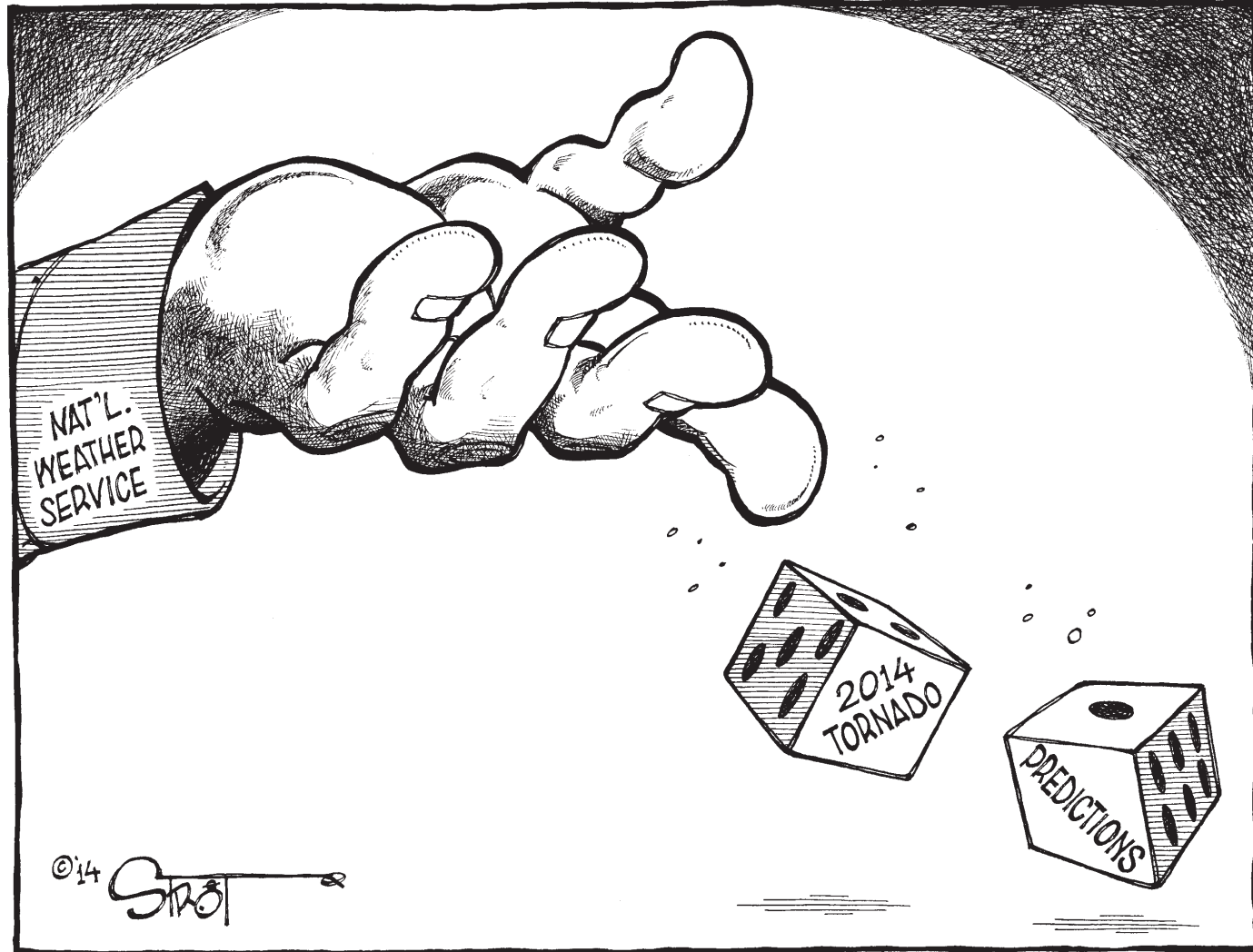
And off to the southwest, another fire, nearly as big, five to 10 miles distant and maybe more. Things are a lot farther away than you'd think in these hills. To the south lie more pastures, unburned and ready for tomorrow or the day after - if the weather is right.

You couldn't do this in the West. In the hills, roads and creeks form fire breaks. The wind can drive fire for miles and it never leaves your pasture, or at least, your neighbor's.

In the west, fire races along on the ground, burning everything, jumping roads, skipping fences. Here, it seems more orderly, at least when things go right. Isolated logs and stumps are left to smolder. With the grass burned, there's nothing for a spark to catch.

Soon, it'll be morning and maybe time for breakfast, some rest before the next fire. We could stay, rapt, and watch this all night, but not this time.

In these hills, though, there'll always be another fire season. Always.



The multifaceted use of a library

If you had the opportunity to invest in a business where 100 to 130 people a day came through the doors, I imagine your interest would be piqued. In addition, this place of business offers services, not just to the elderly or teens, but to a cross generational group of people. The same opportunity serves a population with a variety of interests.

From 1900 to 1917, the Scottish born philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, through his foundation, established nearly 1,700 libraries in the United States. There was only one condition. Each community had to guarantee tax support for their local library. This action paralleled with the initiation of public education and the need to integrate immigrants into their new surroundings.

But libraries offer more than just books in today's world. A 2010 U.S. survey reported more than 3.75 million programs were offered in public libraries. Over 60 percent of those programs focused on children. In Kansas alone, nearly 2 1/2 million people are served annually by our libraries. The 100 to 130 people per day statistic...is our local library.

Many communities throughout the country are discovering a multifaceted use of library facilities. For many individuals, computers and internet access are only available to them through their local library. The unemployed often find assistance from the librarian to locate possible job opportunities and the disabled are helped by library personnel in finding necessary forms.

Other facilities inside the libraries, such as community rooms, provide a meeting place for a variety of events i.e. family gatherings, community events or hobby enthusiasts. In our own library, the community room is home to the children's and infant's story hour, bridge lessons, Nex-Tech classes, and

Phase II
Mary Kay
Woodyard



family gatherings, to name a few. The genealogy room provides not only historical information and equipment to copy and print, but a place to network with other enthusiasts, as well.

The Norton Library hosts many events, all free, to enhance our community; from visiting authors to the children's summer reading program; from the art displays to collection exhibits; all for our common good.

We fund many things through our federal, state and local taxes and all for worthwhile causes, but someone once said, "Knowledge is power." True words. Better health, safer environments and stronger relationships are all enhanced by knowledge. Prejudice and discrimination are fueled by ignorance. A growing base of knowledge and a continuing desire to learn will contribute to a more inclusive society and we will be better for it. This week is National Library Week. Step inside and discover the treasure within the Norton Public Library. mkwoodyard@ruraltel.net

Ignore warnings and you suffer consequences

There are all sorts of reasons disasters strike. They occur accidentally and with malice afore thought, because of human action/error or force of nature.

Bad things happen without warning. But also when we ignore or do not believe the warnings.

Ignoring warnings is human nature. Observe a wet paint sign on a park bench. Everyone who walks by (whether they were going to sit down or not) will touch it. Just to make sure.

After numerous basement floods (each for a different reason making it impossible to anticipate what would happen next) we located some moisture alarms. We scattered them around the basement.

Just placing them on one's skin causes a high pitched noise. However; they are not very loud! The hubby says, "We'll never hear that!"

Maybe not but it made me feel better. One lovely April evening I had a sneezing attack about bedtime. I grabbed an allergy pill and blissfully dozed off, only to awaken a couple of hours later with a horrible ringing in my ears!

I popped my ears and jaw and yawned. I got up---I got a Q-tip. Of course I did not put that in my ear because we all know you are not supposed to do that. Question: What do they make Q-tips for exactly?

Then I realized the ringing was not just in my ears. It was louder by the

This Too
Shall Pass
Nancy
Hagman



basement door.

So I opened the basement door. Louder, yet.

My opening the door and turning on a light woke the hubby. "What's wrong?"

"I think one of the moisture detectors is going off in the basement." I explained.

Sometimes disaster strikes because we do not see or hear the warnings. The hubby said, "I don't hear anything!"

Huh---well you can hear me, right?????

Never mind, I got my slippers and went to investigate.

I understand he could not hear the alarm but the sound almost took me to my knees!

At least I did have to walk through ankle deep water (as happened one time) to find the source of the problem.

Someone had placed one of the alarms on top of the hot water heater. I'm not sure who or why. But it turns out that was genius. Because that little sucker was having a hissy!

Close examination revealed just a trickle coming from the tank where the water supply entered!

There was not enough a water to run to the floor, yet! But just think: if the detector had been on the floor things might have been very serious by the time we realized what was going on!

Disaster averted. With no one to consult, I made the executive decision a fix could be applied in the morning!

Things always look better in the light of day. Indeed, there was a tag on the hot water heater proclaiming it was installed 6-23-08. A call to our local plumber brought the happy news: our hot water heater was guaranteed for six years! A mere 69 days later and we would have been paying for a new hot water heater!

I could write another 500 words or so about planned obsolescence. Why, oh why, can't a hot water heater last more than six years?????

That topic might be more interesting this one which ended happily and where nothing really happened.

But there are a few lessons here: Some things are foreseeable. Positive actions insure positive results. Ignore warnings; suffer the consequences.

Most importantly there is always something to be thankful, for in this case, modern technology and the ability to hear annoyingly high pitches!

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Thumbs up to Andy Wescamp for paying it forward at McDonalds for the car behind him in line. You made my day. Brought in.

Remember there is no charge for rendering a Thumbs Up. Thumbs Up are meant to give recognition for a positive person or event in the community. Also remember all Letters to the Editor must be signed.