

Legislature works on river basin



STEVE JENKINS and other work on the new emergency building. Deadline is March 15.

Herald photo by Karen Krien

Water conservation program deadline is set for Feb. 8

Western Kansas landowners who irrigate in designated priority areas have until Feb. 8 to complete their application for a voluntary, incentive-based program to conserve groundwater.

Selected applicants will receive upfront annual payments of \$100 an irrigated acre for three years in exchange for foregoing irrigation pumping for four years. Crops or forages may be produced and harvested. At the end of the four-year contract period, irrigation may be resumed.

The program, administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, places the emphasis on Quick Response Areas identified by the western Kansas Groundwater Management Districts and the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Water Resources. It's funded through the Environmental Quality Incentive Program Groundwater and Surface Water Conservation.

"We have had a great response in Groundwater Management District No. 1 the past two years," says David Brenn, executive director of District No. 1 in Scott

City. "We were able to conserve a significant amount of water. Interest this year may not be as great given higher commodity prices and the short deadline." The Groundwater Management No. 1 board's Quick Response Area is within a 2-mile radius of public water supply wells.

In 2006 and 2007, overall applications in Kansas exceeded the money available for the program. Farmers with water conservation concerns who applied then are encouraged to apply again. Each Quick Response Area has an equal share of the money and applications are judged within an area, not between areas. Should one Quick Response Area not use its full allocation, the money may be redistributed.

The Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5 added the Pawnee Valley in Pawnee County to the Rattlesnake and Middle Arkansas River corridors in its Quick Response Area.

In Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 3, the emphasis is on the districts' high priority areas identified in

Sterling Journal-Advocate
DENVER — This week is a big one in the Colorado Legislature for efforts to bring Colorado into compliance with requirements to deliver Republican River Basin water into Nebraska and Kansas.

A hearing is scheduled Thursday before the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Natural Resources and Energy on Sen. Greg Brophy's bill to drain Bonny Reservoir by converting state-held storage rights to state-held in-stream flow rights. "Passage of this bill will keep us from needlessly pumping 1.6 billion gallons of water a year out of the Ogallala Aquifer to offset the evaporative and seepage losses at Bonny Reservoir," Brophy, R-Wray, said Monday. "We can't value fish over farmers." As of Dec. 31, 2007, Colorado is about 50,000 acre feet short of complying with the compact. Deputy State Engineer Ken Knox said at Bonny's current level of 10,000 acre feet, about 3,500 acre feet is being lost to evaporation. Brophy and the House sponsor of Senate Bill 28, Rep. Cory Gardner, R-Yuma, are hoping to overcome expected opposition from two state agencies — the Division of Wildlife and the Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation — which currently lease the water in Bonny Reservoir from the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

The Department of Natural

Resources, the home for both the parks and wildlife divisions, describes Bonny Reservoir as a "recreational oasis" on Colorado's eastern plains. "Bonny Lake State Park is the perfect destination for swimmers, water-skiers and windsurfers," the DNR Web site proclaims. "The surface-acre reservoir is known for excellent fishing for walleye, channel catfish and a variety of bass. Hunters come to Bonny Lake for deer, turkey, waterfowl, dove, pheasant, quail, rabbit and squirrel." Brophy, Gardner and Rep. Jerry Sonnenberg, R-Sterling, all agree, however, that maintaining the lake for recreation and wildlife comes at the expense of food producers, who are being forced to reduce well pumping and dry up irrigated land. "DNR will fight this because water is important to their mission," Sonnenberg said. "But we (lawmakers) agree that people are more important than fish." The Colorado Water Conservation Board also is meeting this week to finalize the annual "projects" bill, which outlines water projects that are recommended to the Legislature for grants or low-interest loans funded through severance tax revenue. The Republican River Conservation District is seeking a \$50 million loan to build a pipeline that would move water directly from the aquifer to the state line without evaporative losses. "The pipeline is by no means a panacea, but it is our hope it would be a safety valve that's only used when we are going to be out of compliance," said Gardner, who planned to attend the CWCB meeting to push for the loan's approval. Gardner said the conservation district is in the process of buying water rights to be used in the pipeline. Meanwhile, an alternate plan for moving water from the South Platte River to the Republican River Basin is being shopped around the Capitol, even though the legislature would not be involved. Arvada water lawyer Tim Buchanan said he is representing a group of about 20 senior water right holders in Logan County who are willing to sell enough water to the Republican River Conservation District to put Colorado into compliance with the compact. The group has formed a

limited partnership called South Platte Resources to sell about 10,000 acre feet of water for \$60 million that could be piped in the first phase into Frenchman Creek and later about 50 miles away into Chief Creek. "This plan would address both declining water levels in the aquifer and the compact call that Colorado needs to deliver to Kansas and Nebraska," Buchanan said. He noted that the plan also would help keep farmers in business in the event a petition to de-designate the Northern High Plains Designated Basin is successful. A hearing is scheduled later this year on the Pioneer Irrigation District's petition to put Republican River wells under the same augmentation rules that now govern the South Platte. "If all or a portion of the designated basin is de-designated, the wells withdrawing water from the High Plains (Ogallala) Aquifer and alluvial aquifer of the Republican River will be required to terminate irrigation," Buchanan said. Buchanan said

the Republican River Conservancy District declined the South Platte group's offer, deciding to proceed instead with its own pipeline project, so he is looking for other potential buyers in the neighboring river basin. "Water users in the Harmony and Farmers ditch companies asked to find some options for sale of their senior water rights," Buchanan said. "We considered bringing it to the Denver metropolitan area and other options, but this appeared to be the best alternative — farmers helping farmers." Buchanan said the water was not offered to South Platte irrigators whose wells have been shut down because they would have to use it as augmentation water to replace depletions from prior pumping. "We have offered other deals to them to lease water, all of which were turned down," said Buchanan, who represented surface water rights holders in their objections to continued well pumping along the Platte in Weld, Adams and Morgan counties.

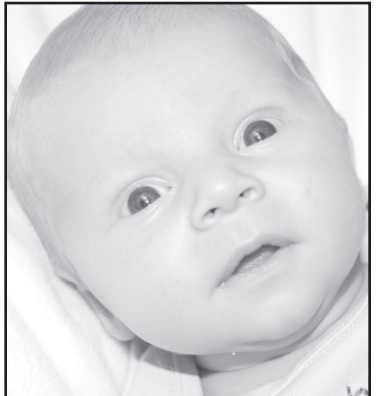
— Introducing —

Oliver Matthew Likens

Greg and Erika Likens of Leawood are happy to announce the birth of their son, Oliver Matthew, on Friday, Dec. 7, 2007 at Shawnee Mission Medical Center. He weighed 8 pounds, 6 ounces and was 20-inches long. He was welcomed home by his two big sisters Audrey Lee, 5, and Amelia Lyn, 2.

Grandparents are John and Darla Deeds of Bird City, Nancie and Tom Stelle of Lenexa, and Chris and Cynthia Likens of Leawood.

Great-grandparents are Richard and Darlene Brubaker of Bird



Oliver Matthew Likens

City, Joan Hatch of Atwood, Peggy Likens of Overland Park, and Wade and Connie Bauer of Clay Center.



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Coming Soon:



Conservation Section

This section will feature the Conservation Award Winner in Cheyenne County.

BANKER'S AWARD DINNER
FEB. 28TH

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Coming the first of February!

THIS SECTION

IS PACKED WITH ADS FEATURING WOMEN.

For more details, contact Casey McCormick at the Saint Francis Herald at 785-332-3162

Bird City Times

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