



COLBY FREE PRESS

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Mountain lion talk surfacing

By PATTY DECKER

Free Press Editor

The idea of a mountain lion living in the Colby area might sound preposterous, but for residents north of the city it's something many of them have been concerned about in recent weeks.

Apparently, some people in that area have been talking amongst themselves about sightings or evidence that would indicate a large predator has been roaming around in the Prairie Dog Creek region just north of the viaduct. "There has been no official report of mountain lion sightings filed with the Wildlife and Parks Department in this region," said Mike Hopper, game warden assisting in this area on Thursday. "To my knowledge, and having been with the department for just over a year, we haven't ever had a confirmed mountain lion sighting in this area."

As to whether or not Hopper believes the reports, he said that while it is possible, he also believes it's not probable.

The reason for his skepticism is because in most cases, mountain lions are an elusive and solitary animal and the last place they would want to be is near a town or populated area.

"From an evolutionary standpoint," he said, "these animals have been bred over time to avoid man if at all possible." Yet, on the other hand, Hopper was quick to say that he won't discount such talk of a mountain lion in the area either. "The reason I say that is because in the last six months there have been 13 confirmed sightings of mountain lions in the Platte River region of Nebraska," he said. Historically, he said, these animals will move from one drainage area to the next, similar to the way people travel on highway systems. As a game warden, Hopper said he is open minded when it comes to all aspects of wildlife and probabilities.

"We do see a lot of migrations of different species such as deer and smaller animals and it's not impossible for a larger predator, like a mountain lion, to follow them — that's simply within the laws of nature." As for the recent rumor of a mountain lion residing in the area, Hopper offered a few suggestions.

"If someone comes up with any type of evidence that would indicate this animal is living here, we want to know that," he said. "Evidence can be a track, prints, hair, taking a picture, getting a video or even road kill."

He also urged people to call the Thomas County Sheriff's Department or Colby Police Department as well.

As a precaution in case someone would ever find themselves face-to-face with this type predator, Hopper also suggested they not panic.

"If confronted with wildlife, and that goes for skunk, bobcat or mountain lion, don't run," he said. "Face the animal and back away slowly."

According to Hopper, in nature, animals don't like confrontations and it's just a matter of using some common sense and not losing your head.

"Although mountain lions are opportunists and will use rocks or trees to their advantage," he said, "people just need to be aware of their nature."

To report a sighting, Hopper urges residents to call him at (785) 899-5199 or Leonard Hopper, district wildlife biologist at (785) 462 3367.

Hopper is the game warden in the counties of Cheyenne, Sherman, Wallace and has been assisting with responsibilities in Thomas and Atwood recently.

A 'beary' nice gesture



PATTY DECKER/Colby Free Press

Valentine's Day parties and other expressions of love were apparent throughout the city on Thursday as witnessed above when Ralph Jain, a resident of Prairie Senior Living Complex, along with his daughter, Rebecca Kersenbrock, spent time together during a special activity in the afternoon. As part of the Valentine Day celebration, residents and their families were entertained by Michael Boyles, chief executive officer at Citizens Medical Center, and treated to snacks and as a special surprise were showered with more than 30 teddy bears, said Alva Horn, social services coordinator at the complex. The bears were a Valentine's Day gift from 16-year-old Amber Dempewolf's private collection, Horn said. "Amber wanted to do something nice for the people here and the bears were well received."

House approves amendments on controversial redistricting bill

TOPEKA (AP) — With a few members still unhappy about the process as a whole and their own futures in particular, the House overwhelmingly approved a bill redrawing the 125 representative districts.

The 105-16 vote Thursday the measure to the Senate.

After a long debate Wednesday, the House added several amendments to the bill, which pairs four Democrats in two new districts — and put incumbent Republicans against Democratic incumbents in two other new districts.

Not all Republicans were pleased with the final map.

It splits the city of Fort Scott and puts Reps. Dennis Pyle, R-Hiawatha, and Bruce Larkin, D-Baileyville, in the same district in northeast Kansas.

The Pyle-Larkin matchup resulted from an amendment offered by Democratic Rep. Bill Reardon of Kansas City, the chamber's longest-serving member. The amendment passed 59-55 on Wednesday.

"They definitely don't have the musketeer motto, 'all for one and one for all,'" Pyle, who voted against the final

bill, said of his GOP House colleagues. "I'm very disappointed."

Larkin thought Reardon's amendment was good for northeast Kansas, but voted against the final plan. He has said the redistricting process has been partisan, with majority Republicans being heavy-handed.

The map also removes part of Fort Scott, in southeast Kansas, from the 4th District now represented by Andrew Howell and places it in the 2nd District.

Howell, R-Fort Scott, serves on the House Redistricting Committee, which had endorsed a different map. He, too, voted against the bill.

"I don't like splitting a town," Howell said. "I think we could have done a better job."

But the bill passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, including that of Rep. Laura McClure, D-Osborne, who had promised Republicans not to run if it was passed.

McClure voted for the map, which she said was better for Democrats than earlier versions had been, despite the denials of Republicans that they sought the promise from her.

Rep. Clay Aurand, R-Courtland, told the House Wednesday that the promise was the result of miscommunication. Before the House, McClure asked both Aurand and Rep. Mike O'Neal, R-Hutchinson, the chairman of the redistricting committee, if they would release her from the promise — if it resulted from a misunderstanding.

Neither answered her question directly, saying they had not asked for it.

O'Neal said he was pleased with the Thursday's vote because it represented a good bipartisan showing.

"That's very acceptable," he said. "I like those numbers."

The Senate is expected to pass the bill without debate because, by tradition, one chamber does not interfere with the other's map.

From the Senate the bill would go to Gov. Bill Graves, then to the Kansas Supreme Court for an automatic review. Legislators this year are redrawing all of the state's Kansas House, Kansas Senate, State Board of Education and U.S. House districts to adjust for population changes reflected in the 2000 census.

Fair board peppered with comments relating to exhibits

By MAXINE NELSON

Colby Free Press

The decision to not release fair exhibits until Sunday morning brought several persons to the Thomas County Fair Board meeting Thursday night. Previously, the animals had been released on Saturday morning, after the 4-H livestock sale on Friday afternoon.

4-H parents John and Jennifer Mazanec, Lyman Bear of Brewster, and Kenneth Johnston of Rexford, and Chamber Ag Committee representative Harold Sulzman offered comments.

Jennifer Mazanec said the decision would cause difficulties because it would put more stress on the animals to be there longer, and more stress on the children who care for them. It would disrupt the plans of people who leave on vacation on Saturday after the fair.

She said it would interfere with people who go to church, and asked if people would have to clean up after the animals on Sunday. She questioned whether the processing plants would want to pick up the animals on Sunday, and asked who would be responsible for the animals between the time they are released and they are picked up.

Sulzman said he expected he would have trouble getting the members of the Chamber Ag Committee to help on Sunday.

Board member Marty Crampton said the decision was made because the fair board wanted to move the fair parade to Saturday morning, and wanted to have more exhibits available for viewing after the parade.

Board member Nancy Rundel said the fair board was trying to increase cash flow, and needed the support of the community to make the fair more successful. "We need to make some sacrifices as a group," she said.

Board member Sue Draper said meat inspectors would not work on Sunday, and she thought there would be a problem getting the animals picked up and slaughtered. She also said she had heard some people say they would not exhibit if the animals were kept that long. Board President Mark Miller said the board was trying to keep more exhibits at the fairgrounds on Saturday.

The commercial exhibitors are required to stay until Saturday night, and the board wants to try keeping the 4-H exhibits also. "We can always change it back if we don't like it," he said.

Miller appointed Sulzman to chair a committee consisting of three from the Chamber Ag Committee, three from 4-H, and Darrel Dible, Marty Crampton, and Sue Draper from the fair board to explore options.

In other business:

• Miller said he still did not have a carnival signed up, not from lack of trying. He said the timing conflicts with other carnivals, and the carnivals has talked to are all signed up. Several have said if the fair were a week earlier or later, they would be able to come. Miller reminded the fair is set to attract rodeo riders who compete at the Cheyenne (Wyo.) Rodeo before, and then at the Dodge City Rodeo after the Thomas County Fair. He said it might be possible to have the fair earlier and have the rodeo as a closing, rather than an opening event, but it is too late for 2002.

• Mazanec requested and received permission for the 4-H Club Lamb Sale

// We need to make some sacrifices as a group."

Nancy Rundel
Fair board member

to be April 13 at the fairgrounds, and the Spring Livestock show to be April 27 at the fairgrounds.

• Carrie Bredemeier brought some changes to the fair book to update rules for the dog show to conform to state rules.

She asked to add agility at the 4-H level. Troy Bielser had made an agility training course as an Eagle project. She wanted the event at a different time than the regular dog show. The board decided to have the agility show the Monday before the fair, July 29, at 7 p.m.

Bredemeier said she had booked the National Guard Armory for the dog show, which will be July 22, because the 4-H Building is too small. She has 16 dogs and kids enrolled in the 4-H dog club. The fair board will pay the \$125 rent for the armory.

• The board voted to not make any change in requirements that a 4-H member must attend five meetings before being allowed to participate in the fair. The meetings can be regular meetings or project meetings, as long as they are educational, said Miller.

The issue had come up because D'Ette Scholtz, Extension agent, had said the ruling conflicted with state guidelines. All agreed they wanted what was good for the children, and for them to learn from 4-H.

• David Pabst, buildings and grounds committee chairman, said he had a couple interested in taking the position of custodian of the fairgrounds when Fred Stephenson retires. Stephenson has not decided when he is going to retire.

• Pabst said he thought the rent for storage at the fairgrounds, which is \$10 a month, should be more, because the commercial storage business downtown is charging more. No action was taken.

• He reported on the David Keller memorial. He said the committee was looking at a 200 x 400 foot indoor arena. They have some money, but are looking into the possibility of getting some grants.

He said they were considering putting the building on city property north of the fairgrounds, but there are some legal issues.

He reminded that if there is no fair for three years, ownership of the fairgrounds will revert to the state. Mark Anderson, Marty Crampton, Mark Miller and John Cranston are the committee to help with the memorial.

• The board approved the use of the pig barn and arena for a pig sale on March 27-29. In case of bad weather the sheep barn can be used.

• The board discussed reducing the money for the Rodeo Queen and Princess Pageant from \$2,100 to \$1,000, in line with the economy.

• The board approved a contract with the Lions Club for the Demolition Derby. The contract includes permission for the club to have a concession stand in the arena.

Briefly

Weather: Moisture on the way

The Colby region might get some needed moisture Monday night and into Tuesday, but until then this nice weather is expected to hold firm. Tonight, clear, lows 20-25 and west winds 5-15 mph, turning to the northwest late. Saturday, sunny, highs in the upper 50s and light and variable winds. Saturday night, clear, lows in the upper 20s. Sunday, partly sunny, highs near 60. Monday, partly cloudy early, the becoming cloudy, rain showers likely during the day, rain, snow mixture at night; lows near 30 and highs near 50. Colby's high temperature Thursday was 51 and the overnight low this morning was 17. The soil temperature at the 4-inch depth is averaging 32 degrees. Precipitation remains at 0.19 inches and snow at 2.5 inches for the month. The records for Feb. 15: 76 in 1967 and —13 in 1895. Today's high is expected to top out at 55. (The daily temperatures, precipitation and records are provided by the Northwest

Kansas Research-Extension Center, Colby.)

Wichita mayor schedules stop

Wichita Mayor Bob Knight, Republican candidate for governor, will host a news conference at 1:30 p.m. Saturday at the airport in Colby. The public is welcome.

Booster club fundraiser Saturday

The Booster Club will have a Lube-A-Thon Saturday from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Kansas Quick Lube. Part of the proceeds will go to the Booster Club. For information contact Kathy Elliott, Booster Club president.

School board to meet Monday

The Colby School Board will hear a curriculum presentation on history and English, along with reports and new business, at its regular meeting on Monday at 7 p.m. in the

board room of the administration building, 210 S. Range. Other items on the agenda include building level administrative reports, district insurance, school bus discussion and driver's education proposal. In personnel matters, board members will consider employment recommendations, resignations, supplemental contracts and extending administrative contracts.

Some Monday closings noted

The Thomas County Courthouse, banks, state and federal offices and the post office will be closed Monday in observance of Presidents' Day. The Thomas County landfill will also be closed. The Colby Free Press will publish on Monday.

Commissioners to meet Tuesday

The Thomas County Commissioners will meet at 9 a.m.

Tuesday in the commissioners room of the courthouse. Randy Dick, Kaw Valley Insurance will give an update on health insurance at 9 a.m. Marc Gilman will discuss concrete work in front of the courthouse at 9:30 a.m. as some sidewalk/curb needs to be replaced.

Brewster board changes meeting

The Brewster School board meeting scheduled for Monday, Feb. 18, has been changed to Thursday, Feb. 21, beginning at 5:30 p.m. The board plans to meet in the school cafeteria, 127 Kansas St. Items on the agenda include reports from insurance committee, Washington D.C. trip, Northwest Kansas Technical School, and calendar review. New business items listed were weightlifting purchase recommendations, volleyball uniforms, cheerleader, drill team, and flag team tryout regulations and approval of tractor bid.

