

Decatur County firefighters battle two blazes caused by lightning

OBERLIN — Lightning caused a pair of fire last weekend, one right after the other, as the first storms in some time rolled through the county.

Decatur County rural firemen were called out Sunday for a lightning-caused fire at the old Frank Urban homestead five miles north and two west of Oberlin. Fire Chief Bill Cathcart said that lightning struck an electric line, blowing the transformer. Sparks from the transformer set grass and trees on fire near the uninhabited farmstead. Firemen were able to save the house, but several older trees in the

windbreak were destroyed. Using hoses and shovels, they kept the fire out of a large stubblefield to the west.

The four trucks started back for the station and the two quick-attack pickups had made it when the second alarm went off at 6:46 p.m.

"The tanker was out of water and I had to fill it before we could go," Cathcart said.

The second blaze was on pasture owned by Clarence Ketterl. When the firemen arrived, several neighbors were trying to contain the fire using tractors to make fire breaks, Cathcart

said. About 10 acres were burned on land 1.5 miles south of Traer near Elephant Rock.

The Rawlins County Rural Fire Department out of Herndon helped with the blaze, which was also started by lightning. Mother Nature lent a hand in putting out the fire as the rain hit, Cathcart said, but the resulting mud mired many of the fire trucks and the last one didn't get back to the station until 8:23 p.m.

Ketterl said they received around 3 inches of rain with strong winds and some hail.



Fireman Trent Townsend of Oberlin sprayed water on burning grass around a seed drill at the old Frank Urban home place north of Oberlin on Sunday. Lightning started a fire in grass and deadwood in a windbreak around the house, but firemen kept in away from the structure and a stubble field to the west.

Sherman County Commissioners charge county to help with electric costs

By TOM BETZ

The Goodland Daily News
GOODLAND — Arena users like the Sherman County Racing Association and the county fair board will not have to cough up all the money to pay the increased electrical charges from the city's change in the demand-meter billing.

Tuesday, Sherman County commissioners agreed to pay part of the higher electric costs and to upgrade the arena lights to help use less power.

The demand-meter charges began appearing in May when the racing association began its season, part of a change in electrical rates the city had filed on March 4. Under the old rates, the demand charges for government entities such as Sherman County were waived by the city, but the new rate structure removed that subsidy.

At a previous meeting, Ed Wolak, city public works director, explained that a demand meter measured the highest amount of energy used in a 15-minute period over a month. The city has to supply power whenever someone flips a switch, he said, and it costs money to keep energy at standby.

The city has a tiered rate structure, Wolak said, and the higher the peak demand, the higher the rate will be. He explained that a demand charge is billed only once a month, at the highest energy peak.

The racing association and the county have appealed to the city for some relief, but the city did not come

up with a way to change the rates. The city did say they might look at contributing to the groups to help pay the costs.

Saying it was an economic development benefit to have groups like the racing association and the fair board use the facility and bring people to the city, the commissioners voted to take \$6,000 from the county economic development fund to pay half the demand meter costs. They also voted to put at least \$3,000 into upgrading the arena lights, which is expected to help reduce costs.

Steve Duell, fair board president, told the commissioners he had been in contact with an electrician about upgrading the arena lights, and talking to the city and Midwest Energy about some new poles and helping with the setting them.

Duell said the estimate for the project was about \$1,800, and that would come out of the fairgrounds building repair budget.

The commissioners asked Duell to add grandstand lights to the project, and said any additional cost could come from the \$6,000 they had set aside.

Mary Ann Snethen, deputy county clerk, asked if the commissioners were going to include the use of the lights by the county 4-H groups, which have not paid anything in the past. The commissioners, by consensus, agreed to continue paying these costs out of the money they had set aside.

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