



Mother Nature delivers a one-two punch

Winds, water invade region

By **PATTY DECKER**

Free Press Editor

High winds, flooding, power outages, and minor damage resulted early Monday evening following a torrential downpour that pummeled Colby and northwest Kansas.

In the Colby area, there were varying amounts of rain and flooding as public works and public power crews spent the bulk of their evening troubleshooting in one area of town to the other.

“We had a lot of tree branches down,” said Gerry Bieker, director of public works, “but no serious damage anywhere.”

City crews closed off Villa High Park and barricaded Fike Park during the height of the storm at about 7 p.m., as the rain continued to flood many thoroughfares.

Some street flooding was measured at 12 to 14 inches, he said, and crews were prepared to block off Fifth Street and Country Club and Martin at one point during the storm.

Public works employees were also called to Second Street near the law enforcement center to remove a tree branch that was blocking the street, he said.

“Fortunately, the tree branch missed hitting any buildings and considering the amount of rain we got, we were lucky,” Bieker said today.

While the public works department stayed busy, the city’s public power department had their share of problems as well.

There were three different incidents that caused power outages in the city as a result of the storm, said Rick Carter, one of the line crew chiefs.

The first outage occurred around 8 p.m. in the area of Copeland, down to the sewer disposal plant by Colby Country Club, when tree branches fell on a power line causing sparking and concern of fire.

“Rather than let the wires burn up,” Carter said, “we decided to shut the power down until we could get the branches removed.”

That outage, he said, took about 20 minutes to correct.

The second outage was located behind T.O. Haas and the Range Avenue area to include north and down behind F&M Bank. The cause of that power loss in that area was due to a lightning strike that knocked out a major circuit for about 30 minutes.

Carter said that as crews were finishing up on restoring power to the first two outages, they became aware of a third outage in the southeast substation that includes Cornerstone Ag and back toward the Sunflower plant, with Lantern Park Manor and half of College Drive and Arrowhead on that substation.

“In order to fix the problem at the southeast substation,” said Gordon Gilbert, another line crew chief, “we had to re-route circuits to the power plant in town.”

Although that outage occurred around 8 p.m., Gilbert said they weren’t made aware of it until 9:15 p.m.

“With so many circuits out last night, we weren’t made aware of the problems at the southeast substation until a call came in nearly one hour later,” he said.

Both Gilbert and Carter said they wanted to remind residents that when a power outage occurs, people should call the problem in immediately.

In the event of outages, they said to call either the Colby Police Department at 462-4460 or the city’s public power department at 462-4432.

Overall, Carter said this storm wasn’t too bad and as of today everything is back on line. “The majority of outages this year have been at night when everyone else is sleeping,” he said.

Thomas County Sheriff Tom Jones said the majority of damage in the county was caused from downed tree limbs and in some areas there were utility poles broken off.

“We did have reports of several accidents east on I-70 between here and Oakley,” he said, “but most of those were handled by the Kansas Highway Patrol.”

In addition to tree damage and power outages caused by the wind, Jones also said there were reports that Sappa Creek, located seven miles north on Kansas Highway 25 and cuts southwest to northeast across the county, along with Prairie Dog Creek, that runs through the Colby County Club, were both up from the rainfall.

Reports from outlying areas, from the National Weather Service office in Goodland, indicated softball size hail south of Goodland with confirmed sightings of golfball size hail north of Bird City from the undersheriff in St. Francis, who while checking cattle in that area, had his car windshield smashed from the hail.

Grapefruit size hail was reported in Hitchcock County in Nebraska, reports said.

The high winds also played a major role in destroying storage buildings and damaging concrete block structures some three miles east of Sharon Springs in Wallace County.

Gusts reported from that damage were at 75 mph and 12 miles west of Goodland, the strongest gusts came in at 89 mph.

Closer to home, wind gusts were clocked at 60 mph two miles east of Colby, with the same reports for Mingo and Oakley, officials said.



DARREL PATTILLO/Colby Free Press

Strong winds uprooted an Aspen tree from the front yard of Lonnie and Brenda Kinderknecht at 340 E. Cherry Street. Just east of the Kinderknecht residence, King’s Court was flooded, with water rushing down the street, according to eyewitness Cecilia Cooper, who lives across the street from the Kinderknechts.

Colby didn’t float away, but many people were wondering

By **TOM (TD) DREILING**

Free Press Publisher

Colby didn’t float away as a result of Monday’s severe thunderstorms, but it might have looked like that was going to happen — for a while, anyway.

Rainfall totals ranged from 2.10 inches at the Northwest Research-Extension Center, to slightly more than 4 inches in the northeast part of town.

Many reports of anywhere from 1.20 inches upwards of 3 to 3 3/4 inches in the city were received.

Sheriff Tom Jones said his farm, 6 miles northeast of town, received 1.90 inches.

The city of Atwood itself, according to the Rawlins County Sheriff’s Department, received amounts up to half an inch, but heavier rainfall was re-

ported west and southwest, ranging from 1.20 inches to 3 1/2 to 5 1/2 inches.

A spokesman said this morning that the lake at Atwood was running over and that Beaver Creek was out of its banks. Oakley also reported in with 2.70 inches

The primary path of the heaviest rainfall was from southwest of

Atwood, down through Colby and into the immediate Oakley area.

Brewster and Bird City both exceeded an inch — Brewster with 1.03 and Bird City with 1.35. Gove measured 1.27 and Benkelman, Neb. reported 2.89.

Flash flood warnings kept a lot of people in this area on their toes for quite a while Monday night.

Hoxie received only 0.14 inches and Oberlin could do no better than 0.03, said the National Weather Service at Goodland.

Goodland managed 0.34 inches and Quinter could manage no more than 0.29.

Colby’s official rainfall for the month to date now stands at 4.08 inches, as of 8 a.m. today.

Midwest discusses rate hikes at Colby meeting

By **MICHELLE L. HAWKINS**

Colby Free Press

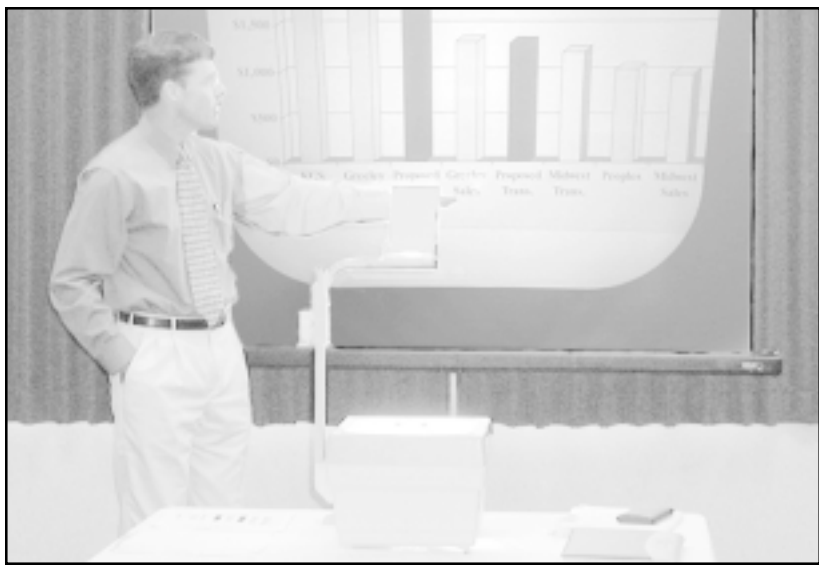
Patrick Parke and Michael Volker, both with Midwest Energy of Hays, were in Colby on Monday at the Ramada Inn to address the public over the proposed rate hikes for gas and electric. Parke is vice-president of marketing and rates, while Volker is manager of pricing and market research

The proposed increase in the electric rates for residential customers would be a 2.7 percent jump over the 2001 rates. The gas hike would go up 12.9 percent.

Volker said that all the figures for the proposal are based on the actual figures of 2001, the last full year before the proposal was sent in.

Parke reminded consumers that the increases are just preliminary proposals, but the necessary paperwork has been filed in Topeka and Midwest is currently waiting for a response. Midwest has requested a \$1.7 million increase for electrical rates and a \$5.7 million increase for gas rates.

Midwest Energy filed a request with the Kansas Corporation Commission



MICHELLE L. HAWKINS/Colby Free Press

Michael Volker of Midwest Energy showed several charts during his presentation dealing with possible energy rate hikes that could affect customers as early as the spring on 2003.

on May 31 for an increase in gas rates and on July 1 for electric rates. The Kansas Corporation Commission by law has a 240-day limit to review the requests. This deadline would be Oct.

25 for electrical and Dec. 2 for gas. After a rebuttal by Midwest Energy, a settlement discussion and technical hearing, the Kansas Corporation Commission will render its final decision.

Parke says the earliest customers can expect to see the increases effective on bills would be February 2003 for gas and March 2003 for electric.

He said that Midwest has kept their rates as steady as possible. The last rate hike for electricity was 13 years ago in January of 1990.

At that time, a 7.1 percent increase was assessed to customers. Parke said, however, that in 1998 Midwest had negotiations with their electric providers and gave customers in the Colby and Goodland area a 25 to 30 percent decrease. Nine years ago Midwest had a 7 percent gas increase.

Parke and Volker in their presentation said that periodic rate increases provide resources for the long term. The main proposal is driven by operating expenses, system expansion and replacement, and to build and return customers’ equity.

“Direct feedback from the customers is what we need to head in the right direction,” said Parke.

He encourages those with questions to e-mail him or Volker at patparke@mwenergy.com or mvolker@mwenergy.com.

West Nile virus found in 28 counties

TOPEKA (AP) — State health officials have confirmed the presence of West Nile virus in 28 Kansas counties, although there have been no reports of any human cases of the disease.

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment said Monday that animals in the following counties have tested positive for the virus.

Horses tested positive in Barton, Comanche, Cowley, Dickinson, Ellsworth, Ford, Jewell, Meade, Pawnee, Phillips, Pratt, Reno, Rice, Ottawa, Seward, Stafford, Wallace and Washington.

Mules tested positive in Montgomery and Sedgwick. The virus in birds was found Douglas, Johnson, McPherson, Republic, Sedgwick, Shawnee, Reno and Wyandotte. Mosquito pools were also found in Barton.

Briefly

Landfill to close for holiday

The Thomas County Landfill will be closed on Sunday, Sept. 1 and Monday, Sept. 2 in observance of Labor Day. Regular hours will resume on Tuesday. For information or questions, contact Larry Jumper at 462-8139.

Gem readies for hog roast

The Gem Lions Club will host their annual Hog Roast at the Gem Community Building on Wednesday evening from 5 to 8 p.m. There will be blue grass, folk, and country music entertainment.

Free will donations will be accepted with the net proceeds used for community betterment projects. The Lions Club

will also be accepting used eyeglasses and hearing aids for recycling.

No newspaper on Monday

The Colby Free Press will not publish a newspaper and the office will be closed on Monday, Sept. 2 in observance of Labor Day. Normal business hours will resume on Tuesday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Amusement meeting Wednesday

The Thomas County Amusement Association has rescheduled its meeting from Monday night to Wednesday at 8 p.m. at the Thomas County Office Complex. The pu-

blic is encouraged to attend.

Girl Scout registration set

Registration for Girl Scouts will be Thursday, Aug. 26, from 6 to 7 p.m. at the Colby Girl Scout Center, 520 West Fifth, in the basement of Puddle Duck Preschool. For information contact Shannon Koon at 462-6662.

Meeting planned to recruit EMTs

The Thomas County Emergency Medical Services will have an informational meeting on Thursday, beginning at 7 p.m. for the purpose of recruiting interested people in becoming emergency medical technicians. Everyone is

invited to attend. For questions or information, call Kathi Wright, director, at 462-4585.

Floats wanted for parade

The Rexford-Golden Plains Alumni are planning a special celebration on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, Aug. 30-31 and Sept. 1, said Kathi Hapke, chairman of the association. In an effort to make this millenium alumni weekend even more successful, Hapke is encouraging businesses, individuals and organizations to enter floats or anything related to the theme of the event, “Blast From the Past,” for the parade on Saturday. For questions, call Hapke at (785) 687-3340.

