



Weather Corner



Tonight...Partly cloudy. Lows in the mid 20s. Southwest winds around 10 mph.

Friday...Partly sunny in the morning then becoming mostly cloudy. Highs in the upper 30s. Northwest winds 10 to 20 mph. Gusts up to 35 mph in the afternoon. Friday night...Breezy. Mostly cloudy with a 50 percent chance of light snow. Lows around 18. North winds 20 to 25 mph.

Saturday...Partly sunny in the morning then becoming mostly sunny. Breezy. Highs in the lower 30s. Northwest winds 15 to 25 mph. Saturday night...Partly cloudy. Lows around 12.

Sunday...Partly sunny. Highs in the upper 30s. Sunday night...Mostly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of light snow. Lows around 16.

Monday...Partly sunny with a 20 percent chance of light snow in the morning...Then mostly sunny in the afternoon. Highs in the mid 30s. Monday night through Tuesday night...Partly cloudy. Breezy. Lows around 19. Highs in the mid 40s.

Wednesday...Mostly sunny. Highs in the upper 30s. Wednesday's low, high: 22, 44.

Sherman County ponders road

By Tom Betz
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Sherman County commissioners got a lesson last Tuesday on the regulations and requirements for striping rural highways, and decided to put the issue on the agenda for their meeting today.

Darin Neufeld, an engineer for Evans, Bierly, Hutchison and Associates, said at a meeting Dec. 11 he brought in the information at the request of Commissioner Mitch Tiede, who had been out to his office at the city airport to see him.

The commissioners have been looking into whether they should stripe old U.S. 24, which runs for 35 miles across Sherman County. Citizens have complained that the new asphalt applied this year is hard to see at night or in bad weather.

The commissioners had been told that if the road is marked, it would have to be done over and over. The cost could be as high as \$74,000 a time, depending on the type of paint used.

Neufeld handed out copied pages from a 2001 book, "A Policy on Geometric Design of Highways and Streets," put out by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

He said the book, which he called an "engineering resource," has a section about traffic control devices. Neufeld said it refers the engineer to the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices for Streets and Highways, published by the Federal Highway Administration.

He also gave each commissioner a map of Sherman County from the Kansas Department of Transportation showing the traffic counts at various points along old U.S. 24.

The first part of the manual

Neufeld talked about was a section on "Do Not Pass" signs, which says the sign "may be used in addition to pavement markings to emphasize the restriction on passing."

He said the section does not say the signs "shall" be used, but says "Pass With Care" signs should be installed at the end of a no-passing zone if "Do Not Pass" signs are being used.

Neufeld said it does not require a center line, but says one should be placed on all rural arterials and collectors that have a traveled way of 18 feet or more and an average daily traffic count greater than 3,000. He said old U.S. 24 is more than 24 feet wide, but that based on the map of traffic counts, the highest are 1,097 west of Goodland, 877 near Kanorado and 882 between Edson and Brewster.

"The road does not have that much traffic on, so you do not have to do the stripe," Neufeld said "It is totally up to your judgment."

"If you do the centerline stripe, you do have to do the no passing sections."

Commissioner Chuck Thomas asked how the no passing zones would be determined. Neufeld said his firm can do it off their computer software.

"Engineering firms do this," Thomas said. "The company doing the striping doesn't do it."

"Yes," Neufeld said. "We have survey shots down the centerline, and based on the 3.5-foot height for line of sight and the 900 feet distance, we'd let the computer software figure out where the no passing zone should begin and end."

Thomas asked about edge stripes. Neufeld said the manual leaves that up to the county's judgment also.

"Nowhere does it say you have

to do this under any traffic regulation," he said.

"Is this a liability situation?" Thomas asked.

"I am not an attorney," Neufeld said, "but it would be up to the attorney involved to show how well you as commissioners reviewed the need to protect the traveling public."

"What about only doing the center stripe," Thomas asked.

"There is nothing in the manuals that says you have to do this," Neufeld said. "The county as the owner is taking the liability."

"It is also not required to use the signs and you do not have to stripe the whole 35 miles. Based on the traffic count, you would stripe all the way to Kanorado if you were looking at 300 cars a day. Then you might only stripe to halfway between Edson and Brewster."

"What if we stripe it once?" Thomas asked. Do we have to do it all the time?"

Neufeld said under the requirements set out in the manual, that, too, would be up to the commissioners.

Because of the low traffic volume, there is no requirement to say what kind of paint has to be used, either. He said there are recommendations on reflective paint, but refer to highways with more than 3,000 vehicles per day.

Commissioner Kevin Rasure said the commissioners had been discussing the striping because people have asked about it, including the mother of a young man recently killed on the road west of town.

Thomas said he has been paying more attention to the highway as he is driving, and can see where the lack of striping might be a problem.

Fa, la, la, la, la la, la, la, la



HANNAH PYLE/Colby Free Press

Members of Colby middle and high school choir perform Tuesday during the schools' annual winter concert at Colby High School. The next scheduled concert for Colby students is the fifth-grade program Jan. 24. The choirs are under the direction of Jill Nickols, Joe Nickols and were accompanied by Katie Rose.

Kansas demands cuts in water usage, damages from Nebraska

TOPEKA (AP) — Kansas threatened a court fight Wednesday unless Nebraska cuts its use of water from the Republican River and pays millions of dollars for taking too much in 2005 and 2006.

But Nebraska officials said their state already is trying to come into compliance with rules on water use set by the U.S. Supreme Court. And Kansas' demands would force Nebraska to shut down wells for more than 40 percent of the irrigated acres in its part of the river basin.

Kansas alleges that Nebraska's water use exceeded what was allowed for the two years by about 27 billion gallons — or enough to supply a city of 100,000 for 10 years.

Kansas Attorney General Paul Morrison and the state Division of Water Resources sent letters to Nebraska Attorney General Jon Bruning and Ann Bleed, director of that state's Department of Natural Resources.

Morrison spokeswoman Ashley Anstaett said Kansas attorneys are still trying to determine exactly how much Nebraska should pay Kansas. She said the amount will represent either the harm suffered by Kansas or the gain to Nebraska from using too much water.

But David Barfield, the chief engineer for the Division of Water Resources, said the money sought by Kansas is "certainly in the tens of millions."

Barfield said cutting irrigation as much as Kansas demands would require shutting down wells that water about 500,000 acres of the roughly 1.2 million irrigated acres in its portion of the Republican River basin. Kansas seeks the immediate shutdown of wells within 2.5 miles of the Republican River and its tributaries, as well as land in the basin where irrigation started after 2000.

Bleed declined comment, but Bruning called the letters from Kansas "another step in the process of resolving this dispute."

He said he hopes it can be resolved without a lawsuit and that he is confident Nebraska will achieve compliance without the "drastic actions" proposed by Kansas.

"However, if Kansas decides to pursue litigation, we are prepared to vigorously defend the interests of Nebraska and our citizens," Bruning said.

Nebraska Gov. Dave Heineman said state and local officials have imposed plans for managing water use that will resolve Kansas' concerns.

"The State of Nebraska agreed to a process with Kansas that will resolve compact accountability," he said. "We intend to continue in good faith with that effort."

While Colorado officials will receive copies of the letters to Nebraska officials, Kansas has no plans to make similar demands of Colorado because it is not out of compliance, Anstaett said.

Even though the three states settled the lawsuit, Nebraska and Kansas officials have disagreed over how to calculate how much water each state is using when determining whether they're complying with the compact.

During a compact commission meeting in August, Morrison said he contemplated "fairly quick and fairly decisive" action to force compliance with the consent decree.

"Our most urgent need is to get Nebraska to comply with the settlement so Kansas gets the water

we are entitled to," Barfield said. "However, sanctions are appropriate for the violations in 2005 and 2006."

North and south forks of the Republican flow from northeast Colorado into Nebraska, converging just over the border. The river then flows through southern Nebraska into north-central Kansas and Milford Lake northwest of Junction City. Its basin covers almost 25,000 square miles.

In 1943, the three states signed a compact allocating 49 percent of the river's water to Nebraska, 40 percent to Kansas and 11 percent to Colorado. In 1998, Kansas sued Nebraska, alleging its neighbor to the north violated the compact by allowing thousands of wells to tap the river and its tributaries.

"Steps currently being contemplated by Nebraska will continue to be insufficient and continue to deprive Kansans of the water they need," Morrison said in announcing his state's demands. "It is time Nebraska took real action to meet its obligations."

On the Net:
Kansas attorney general: <http://www.ksag.org>
Kansas Division of Water Resources: <http://www.ksda.gov/interstate%5Fwater%5Fissues/>
Nebraska attorney general: <http://www.ago.ne.gov/>
Nebraska Department of Natural Resources: <http://www.dnr.state.ne.us/>

State patrols for unbuckled teens

Teenage passengers who aren't buckled up can expect a ticket from Kansas Highway Patrol troopers starting next month.

The state's seat belt law was changed by the Legislature to require all drivers and all passengers 14 to 17 to buckle up at all times, regardless of where they are sitting in the car.

The change is an addition to the existing state law requiring children under age of 4 and to 8, weighing less than 80 pounds or less than 4 feet 9 inches tall, to be in a child safety restraining seat. Children 8, but under the age of 14, weighing more than 80 pounds and more than 4 feet 9 inches tall must wear a safety belt.

The Highway Patrol has been issuing warnings since the law went into effect in July, but beginning in January, troopers will write tickets to teens who are not buckled up.

Under the law the driver may not be the one getting the ticket, said Highway Patrol Lt. Art Wilburn, but those teenagers who are not buckled up could get a ticket. He said the driver can be ticketed for not wearing a seat belt under the existing state law, but the new change will effect other teenagers who are riding in the car without a seat belt.

The law allows the officers to pull a driver over and write a ticket solely for the seat belt violation. The fine is \$60, including court costs.

"Seat belts save lives. It's that simple," said patrol Superintendent William R. Seck. "Highway Patrol troopers are dedicated to saving lives through enforcement and education. Recent amendments to our seat belt law demonstrate the state's commitment to protecting the lives of our teens."

Motor vehicle accident are the leading cause of death for youth age 15 to 18, he said. Changes in the seat belt law were designed to protect drivers, in particular young, inexperienced drivers. And with the likelihood of teen drivers being involved in a crash, it is particularly important for this age group to buckle up.



Happy HOLLYdays!

Hope you have a wonderful holiday season!

Our office will be closing Monday, December 24th at 11 a.m. and we will be closed all day on Tuesday to observe the holiday!

THERE WILL BE NO PAPER DECEMBER 24TH!

We will be back to serve you on Wednesday, December 26th!

THANKS FOR YOUR BUSINESS THIS PAST YEAR!





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