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Arizona wildfire smoke reaches Colby

By Bob Christie and Susan Montoya Bryan

The Associated Press

SPRINGERVILLE, Ariz. — Smoke from a large wildfire burning in the scenic mountain towns of eastern Arizona stretched into nearby states, creating hazy conditions as far as Iowa and prompting officials to issue health advisories Tuesday in New Mexico and Colorado.

A particularly thick cloud of smoke blew over Colby about 11:30 a.m. Tues-

day. Haze was being carried by a ridge of high pressure as far as central Iowa, said Kyle Fredin, a National Weather Service meteorologist in Denver. The smoke was also visible in New Mexico, Colorado and Nebraska. Colorado health officials issued a smoke health advisory Tuesday, saying that the southern half of the state could see moderate to heavy smoke through noon.

The 486-square-mile blaze has been burning in ponderosa forests for more than a week, consuming hundreds of thou-

sands of acres and destroying five buildings since it started May 29. It marched north Monday, aided by wind gusts of more than 60 mph.

Fire officials said the blaze laid down a bit overnight and crews planned to work on its northeast side Tuesday.

New mapping showed some lines have held but the fire was considered zero percent contained. A giant smoke plume that lingered over Springerville a day ago had dissipated, leaving behind haze.

The wind, forecast at 35 mph, remained

a concern, said fire information officer Kelly Wood. "It's going to kick up again," Wood said.

The fire has forced people to leave their homes in Alpine, Nutrioso and Greer, a picturesque town where most of the 200 full-time residents had already fled by the time deputies started going door-to-door. Authorities also ordered to leave anyone left in the nearby area known as Sunrise.

"It's heartbreaking," said Allan Johnson, owner of Greer's 101-year-old Molly Butler Lodge, the oldest in the state. He

was pessimistic about the chances of saving the lodge and the hundreds of vacation homes in the area.

"We're numb. Our entire family and our friends are just numb," he said.

Residents of Eagar, Ariz., are also bracing for a possible evacuation.

"If given the word, then I'm gonna go," Gerald McCardle, told Associated Press Radio. "We're already packed. We packed last night, and we're out of here."

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Area senator to be involved in redistricting

By Kevin Bottrell

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With 2010 Census data in, the state Legislature has begun the process of redrawing the district lines to reflect Kansas' population trends, and Thomas County's state senator is at the center of the effort.

Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer is serving on the Senate committee in charge of redistricting. Ostmeyer said he had asked Senate President Steve Morris to put him on the committee at the beginning of the session, wanting to make sure western Kansas was represented.

2010 Census data, released earlier this year, showed population loss in every northwest Kansas county except Ellis county. Because of that, some legislators now have populations lower than they should, Ostmeyer said, and will have to gain territory.

"It don't look good," he said.

The number of senators and representatives won't change, but their district boundaries will. There are 40 senators and 125 representatives.

However, because the overall population in Kansas increased by 6 percent, each district will have to have even more people. Ostmeyer said he hasn't seen the final numbers yet, but likely each senator will have about 71,000 people in his or her new district. Ostmeyer's 40th district currently has about 67,500 people, he said, but it lost about 5,500 in the last census. He will have to absorb more territory to make that up and add an extra 3,500. Ostmeyer's district already has 18 counties, including Thomas.

See "SENATOR," Page 3



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Work crews begin road construction

Milling machines (above) were taking up the top inch of U.S. 24 near Levant on Tuesday. Venture Corp of Great Bend is resurfacing the entire stretch of road from Colby to the I-70 exit near Levant. The company is running a pilot car (right) to ferry traffic through the area. Drivers can expect delays of 10-15 minutes. Crews are also working on I-70 bridges near Mingo, and while traffic is reduced to one lane on the bridges, there are currently no delays.



KAYLA CORNETT/Colby Free Press

Ready, aim, fire



SHARON FRIEDLANDER/Colby Free Press

Shooter Bruce Johnson prepared to complete his timed shoot at Sunday's Combat Shoot at the Cactus Creek Shooting Range. Competitors shot against the clock with 10-second penalties for missed shots.

County to combat thistles on property south of Colby

By Christina Beringer
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After hearing testimony from several local landowners, Thomas County commissioners are taking action against musk thistle on one property south of Colby.

Invasive musk thistle had been a problem on the late John Urban's property for at least seven years when it was first brought to the commissioners' attention by Clair Schrock, noxious weed supervi-

sor. Most of the 80 acres owned by the family is affected and it has crept into neighboring properties as well. An estimated 900 acres has been overwhelmed by the aggressive weed because it is not being properly maintained.

Schrock said the family has been notified twice that they need to control the weed and so far nothing has been done.

"It is such an ongoing problem year after year," said neighbor Larry Curtin, who was present at the commissioners' meeting. "A

program needs to be in place to take care of the musk thistle before it's too late."

Curtin was just one of four landowners who talked about how the Urban's musk thistle has affected their property.

"Kansas has a noxious weed statute that gives counties the authority to go in and take action when landowners don't take care of it themselves," said County Attorney Kevin Berens.

See "COUNTY," Page 3

Railroad plans two road closures

Union Pacific Railroad will close College Drive east of the Red River Commodities sunflower plant on Friday to repair the railroad crossing. The company will also close Country Club

Drive for three days beginning Sunday for crossing repair. Traffic will be routed into Pine and Hill Streets.

Briefly

Church offers day camp

Colby Wesleyan Church will hold a free summer day camp for children ages 4 to 12 called "Tuesdays @ 10" from 10 a.m. to noon every Tuesday until July 26, at the church, 320 W. Pine. Children will participate in object lessons, stories and crafts. Lunch will be provided. For information, call the church office at 462-8391.

Coalition plans Thursday meeting

Come join the Thomas County Coalition at El Dos De Oros at noon Thursday. You will have a chance to win a delicious meal and become a partner in building a healthy community. For information call 460-8177.

RC Flyers to have fun fly

The Colby RC Flyers will have a remote control

plane fun fly from daylight to dusk on Saturday and Sunday at the club's field seven miles north of Colby on K-25 and 1/8th mile east. There will be open flying and contests, along with a club trainer to fly. Admission is free for the public. For information, call Nick Nichols at (785) 460-6357 or Marvin Farmer at (785) 443-3593.

Oldest church celebrates birthday

First Christian Church, the first church established in Colby, will celebrate its 125th anniversary with a special worship service at 10 a.m. Sunday at the church, 385 W. Third, followed by dinner and fellowship time. For information, call 460-2718.

Mingo church offers concert

The Echoes of Hope quartet from Rio Grande Bible Institute in Edinburg, Texas, will perform a

gospel concert at 10:45 a.m. Sunday at Mingo Bible Church. The four women accompany themselves with guitar and violin. Bob Kracht, their sponsor, will present a Bible message. The concert is open to the public. For information contact Pastor Tom Peyton at 462-2930.

Food sign up open now

Prairie Land Food sign up is open until Monday at State Farm Insurance, 905 E. Fourth St. Delivery will be Saturday, June 25, at the Sacred Heart School Gym. For information, call Gene Griffon at 460-3579.

Hospital to hold diabetes class

The Citizens Medical Center will have a diabetes support class, "Journey for Control: On the Road to Better Managing Your Diabetes," from 7 to 8:30

p.m. Tuesday in the hospital conference room. The beginning of a four-class series, it is free but pre-registration is requested. For information or to register, call Jeanene Brown at 460-4850.

Pick up grave decorations

All Memorial Day or other temporary grave decorations at Beulah Cemetery must be picked up by 5 p.m. next Wednesday so the staff can resume regular mowing. For information, call caretaker Deb Henry at 462-3188.



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