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City water use hits peak on June 29

By Kevin Bottrell

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With only half the summer gone, Colby has already surpassed last year's water peak water usage.

The city begins monitoring water use more closely on May 31 each year. Water use includes water used in homes and businesses as well as on public property. This year, Colby started off with 2.39 million gallons used on May 31 and 2.09 million the next day.

Water use steadily increased through the beginning of June, but fell to a season-low 1.39 million gallons on June 20. The dip corresponds with a severe thunderstorm that parked over Colby for most of the day, dropping 1.41 inches of rain. That storm caused flooding and tornadoes elsewhere in north-

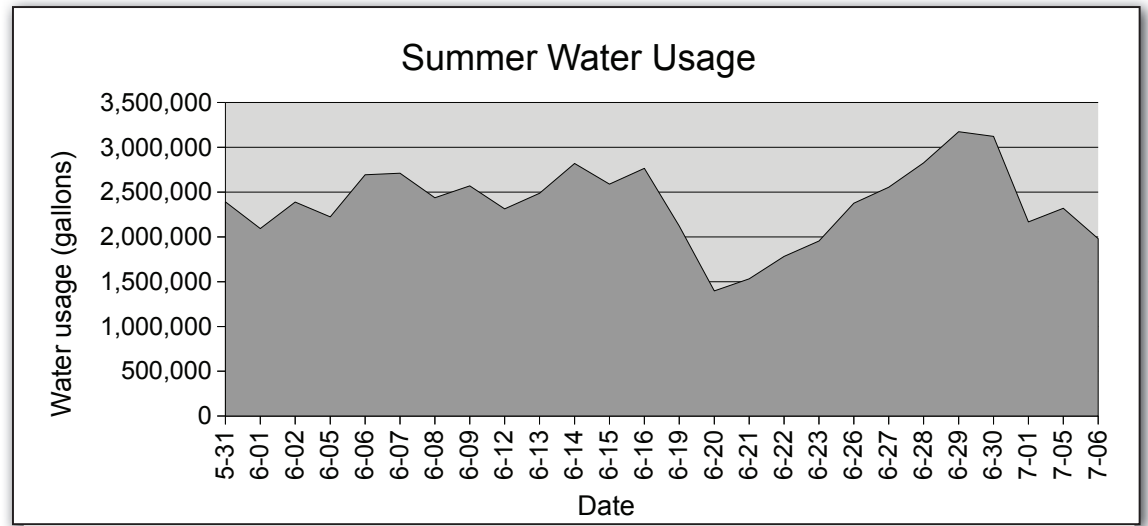
west Kansas. Several smaller storms moved through early in the day.

A week and a half of hot, dry weather followed, however, pushing water use higher as more people ran sprinklers. Water use hit its highest point so far this summer on June 29 with 3.17 million gallons. June 30 was also high with 3.12 million gallons. Last year's high came on June 30 with 3.10 million gallons.

Since then usage has gone back down thanks to several evening storms, such as one Wednesday night, which dropped .55 inches of rain. Wednesday's water usage was 1.97 million gallons.

The city uses three alert levels when water usage gets too high. When demand exceeds 3.5 million gallons a day for three days, the city is put under a water watch. City crews stop flushing fire hydrants

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KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Recreational vehicle burns on I-70

A modified 1980s recreational vehicle caught fire while driving on I-70 Saturday. Assistant Fire Chief Sean Hankin, who responded to the scene, said the owners, a couple from Longmont, Colo., were driving to Oklahoma when they noticed flames and smoke. They pulled off at the Mingo exit and parked at the gas station there so they and their dog could get out of the vehicle. Hankin said the vehicle was engulfed in flames by the time the

fire department got there. Firefighters put out the fire and made sure it didn't spread to the nearby field or get close to the underground gas tanks. Most of the vehicle and everything in it was destroyed in the fire. Two out of three bikes mounted on a rack at the rear of the vehicle survived, but the third was melted. Neither the owners nor the dog were injured.



New bank to open here soon

By Christina Beringer

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Western State Bank will soon open a new banking center in Colby with plans to be ready for business by mid-July.

The bank will occupy the southern-most unit in a new building complex on South Franklin near Walmart. It will staff three full-time employees: Janice Cates, from Colby; Amy Hilt, who is transferring to Colby from the banking center in St. Francis; and J.L. Evins, who has lived in Thomas County for the past two years.

Evins is a western Kansas native and will serve as Colby's banking center president. He has been

with the company since April and has over 10 years banking experience.

The bank's main location is in Garden City, with other banking centers in Ulysses, Dodge City, Scott City, Leoti, St. Francis and Goodland.

Colby's center will be a full-service bank and will provide deposit, teller services and Internet banking with future plans for drive-up service.

The bank's president and chief executive officer, Jeff Whitham, said that most of their assets are related to agriculture, commercial and ag-related businesses but that they are looking forward to the opportunity to associate with other businesses, as well.

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Governor says cuts possible to state's Medicaid program

By John Hanna

The Associated Press

TOPEKA (AP) — Gov. Sam Brownback wouldn't rule out cutting payments to Kansas health care providers under the state's Medicaid program, and he defended his administration's recent decision to close nine social services offices, including a site in one of the state's largest communities.

Brownback said he's waiting to see what proposals emerge from public meetings this summer on overhauling the Medicaid program, which covers medical services for the poor, disabled and elderly. He also said his goal remains cutting administrative costs without denying services to the more than 300,000 Kansans currently covered by the program.

But he declined several times to say definitively that his administration won't eventually cut payments to providers, and he didn't contradict Rob Siedlecki, his sec-

retary of social and rehabilitation services, when Siedlecki told reporters, "We're looking at everything."

Brownback and Siedlecki also defended the closing of Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services offices to cut costs. SRS has faced its most intense criticism for plans to shut down the office in Lawrence, the state's sixth-largest city, with about 88,000 residents and, local officials say, a sizeable homeless population.

The governor called a news conference with Cabinet secretaries and other top officials to tout the administration's efforts in its first six months to improve the state's economy, create private industry jobs and eliminate a budget shortfall without a tax increase. Brownback, a Republican, took office in January.

"We're working to right-size state government," Brownback said. "The end objective is to not cut any clients that are receiving

Medicaid support. That's what we want to try to protect."

Brownback critics have said for several weeks that his administration plans to cut payments to Medicaid providers, perhaps by 2.5 percent. But there's been no announcement by his administration, leading to suggestions that the governor has backed off.

"I think we spooked him," said Kansas Democratic Party Chairwoman Joan Wagnon.

Democrats noted Wednesday that the SRS office closings and the talk of cutting Medicaid comes after the GOP-controlled Legislature approved a \$13.8 billion budget that cuts general aid to public schools by 5.6 percent to help eliminate a projected shortfall. They also said Brownback

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Senators look to end ethanol subsidies

By Mary Clare Jalonick

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two senators from ethanol-producing states are proposing to immediately end a tax credit for the corn-based fuel, agreeing to support shifting some of that money to the debt reduction.

Sens. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota and John Thune of South Dakota, along with ethanol opponent Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, have proposed diverting \$1.3 billion of the money remaining for the tax break this year to pay for based fuel, agreeing to support shifting some of that money to the ethanol and biofuels industries.

If accepted by the White House and the House, the compromise could provide a quick path to end the ethanol credit as part of budget negotiations between Congress and the White House. The Senate voted last month to end it, but the fate of that legislation is uncertain.

