



Four proposals made to conserve water

By Kevin Bottrell

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Indications are that Gov. Sam Brownback's four proposals aimed at conserving the Ogallala Aquifer may have an easy time becoming law.

"I call them the governor's," Tracey Streeter, director of the Kansas Water Office, told a group at Colby Community College on Tuesday. "But a lot of folks had a hand in these things before they got to the governor."

The proposals started here in Colby, he said, at the economic summit in July, he said. There were more than 400 people at the summit. The Ogallala Aquifer Advisory Committee took their input plus online comments and after a lot of discussion and hard work, the committee made

its recommendations.

Gary Harshberger, chairman of both the Kansas Water Authority and the Ogallala committee, said they wanted to find recommendations that wouldn't cripple the state's economic output, but would provide mechanisms for conservation.

Harshberger and Streeter gave an overview of the four proposals that will be submitted to the legislature this year:

- Eliminate the "use it or lose it" doctrine in some areas.

Harshberger said the law has created a "culture of consumption" where water users think they have to pump all their water each year, even if they don't need it. The law says that after five years of non-use without a good reason, rights are forfeited. The proposed change would eliminate this doctrine in areas that are closed for new rights development.

Users in these closed areas would still be required to submit their usage reports, but being in a closed area would become a good reason for non-use.

Bossert said the proposed change would only be for areas officially closed for new rights development by the state engineer. These include portions of central and southeast Thomas County, western Sheridan County and four other areas in northwest Kansas. However, he said, the rest of Groundwater Management District Four is effectively closed because of the district's regulations.

Any time someone wants to do a new water right appropriation in District Four, they have to see if water is appropriated over the regulated amount within a two-mile radius. Because of over-appropriation in much of northwest Kansas, Bossert said, this effectively closes most

of it to new water right development.

- Create a process for making Local Enhancement Management Plans, that will allow people to develop water conservation plans at the local level with less interference.

The current program, Intensive Groundwater Use Control Areas, are difficult to put in place, and once a proposal was made, the chief engineer can alter it as he likes. Wayne Bossert, manager of Groundwater Management District Four, said that the management district wanted a program with more local control.

The old program will remain in place, however, even if the new one is adopted.

- Support establishing more groundwater banks. The banks provide a way for users to trade water rights, Streeter said, but any rights deposited in the bank are reduced by 10 percent for conservation.

There is one groundwater bank in central Kansas, but it doesn't have a lot of customers. Harshberger said that from conversations with stakeholders, the consensus is that the banks are viable, but there are some changes that need to be made, such as making them permanent and allowing more to be set up around the state. This proposal has been around for a year or more, but there was no movement on it at the 2011 legislative session.

Harshberger suggested the bank could be used by companies that want to do horizontal drilling for oil.

- Make five-year flex accounts easier to manage and more customizable to user's needs. The flex accounts currently take a 10 year average of water use, subtract 10 percent for conservation, and allow users

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College may move to alter schedule

By Kayla Cornett

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The Colby Community College board of trustees heard a proposal Wednesday from Joyce Washburn, dean of academic affairs, during its monthly meeting in Thomas Hall about moving to a four-day class schedule.

The students' schedule would go from Monday to Thursday while faculty and staff would still work on Fridays.

"We are trying to be creative and maybe be ahead of other schools," Washburn said. "Garden City is also looking at (doing) this."

She said they think it will be a good recruitment tool and would be a good way to do some creative things. For example, Washburn said they could have it set up so that a student could finish a degree just by attending classes on Fridays. She said they also think that attendance will be better because there are many athletic events on Fridays and athletes often miss those classes.

Washburn said they have had faculty turn in a four-day schedule and are planning to lay it out on a matrix to show everyone how it will work during the first week of January.

"Dr. Vacik has done this before and it's been very successful. We want to be one of the first schools to do this," Washburn said.

She said Nichols has recruiters in Colorado that have had students tell them that they would be very interested in coming to the college if they had this new schedule. Washburn said she has also received positive comments from current students.

Trustee Bill Shields asked if moving to this new schedule is mainly to appeal to non-traditional students and Washburn said she hopes that it does. Chairperson Kenton Krehbiel asked how ex-

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And the winners are...



KEVIN BOTTRELL/Colby Free Press

Shorty and Donna Kulhanek's home (above) located at 1210 E. Eighth St. won first place in the Christmas Light Contest in the residential category. Someplace Special also took first place in the non-residential category. More pictures and a story about the contest are on the back page.



Kansas Social Services official resigns less than year into tenure

By John Hanna

Associated Press

TOPEKA — The top social services official in Kansas is stepping down after less than a year in office, Gov. Sam Brownback's office announced Thursday, ending a tenure marked by controversy over administrative decisions and the governor's policies.

Brownback said Social and Rehabilitation Services Secretary Rob Siedlecki is leaving the administration, effective Dec. 31.

Siedlecki has held the job since January, when the Republican governor took office.

Some legislators, particularly Democrats, began criticizing Siedlecki even before he was confirmed in late March. One issue was his reorganization of top SRS management and another was the administration's pursuit of faith-based social services initiatives.

Senate Ways and Means Committee Chairwoman Carolyn McGinn said Siedlecki started discussions about how his agency

operates and provides services that were necessary because of the state's financial problems in recent years.

"He started the conversation in areas that have not started in the past," said McGinn, a Sedgwick Republican. "He probably proposed changes in organization or the agency that were larger than those proposed in the past."

But Senate Minority Leader Anthony Hensley, a Topeka Democrat, said he never thought Siedlecki could lead such an im-

portant department. Hensley was the only senator to vote against the SRS secretary's confirmation, though four colleagues abstained.

"His tenure was marked by incompetence and controversy," Hensley said. "It was just one controversy after another."

Siedlecki had previously served as a high-ranking Florida Department of Health official and in the U.S. Justice and Health and Human Services departments under Republican President George W. Bush. Brownback said Siedlecki

is returning to Florida to be closer to his family and take a job with the state there.

In a statement, the governor thanked Siedlecki for his service. The SRS secretary said he'd promised to spend a year with the administration to "transform" his department into a more efficient and effective agency.

Among his accomplishments, he listed initiating aggressive anti-fraud efforts and promoting adoption. SRS has estimated that changes in eligibility require-

ments for programs announced in September — designed in part to combat fraud but also to encourage participants to look for work — could save the state \$15 million a year.

McGinn said such efforts to fight fraud are important to taxpayers.

But Siedlecki sometimes re-

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