

Hays scheduled as site for Water Issues Forum

The annual Kansas Water Issues Forum is scheduled for Thursday, March 1, in Hays, following a Wednesday, Feb. 29, session in Wichita. The theme is "Just Add Water: Kansas and the Economy."

Water has always been key to Kansas' economy, and that is especially true with oil and gas development. This year's forum will explore the energy development in Kansas, particularly the new technologies of horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing (fracking) and its potential impact on water supplies. The economic boom from the new development is welcome, yet there are questions as to the impacts on water and land. Industry experts and state agencies will present fact based information on this topic.

The forum will also include Oklahoma's experiences with the recent boom of the shale gas development, how an energy company determines the mix of energy sources to meet future demands and what the role of government should be in energy development.

The forums are co-sponsored by the Kansas Water Office and K-State' Kansas Center for Agricultural Resources and the Environment.

Registration is available online at www.kwo.org or by mail. The deadline to register is Wednesday. The \$15 registration fee includes a catered lunch and meeting materials.

'Soil is more than dirt' slogan of new awareness campaign

People walk on it, plant their gardens in it and build foundations over it. Yet most people do not give soil a second thought. To many, it is just dirt.

But Chuck Rice, distinguished professor of soil microbiology at Kansas State University, disagrees. "Dirt is misplaced soil," he said. "Soil is more than dirt. When people see water, they can see clean water or dirty water. But soil is just something people walk on without thinking about what's in it."

That is why the Soil Science Society of America has embarked on a general awareness campaign to help people understand the importance of soil to daily life. The campaign, called "The Story of Soil," was launched last October in conjunction with the soil society's 75th anniversary. It consists mainly of three video public service announcements, available in both English and Spanish, and a website with more information.

Rice was the 2011 president of Soil Science Society of America and head of the committee responsible for the campaign. Gary Pierzynski, interim dean, K-State College of Agriculture and director, K-State Research and Extension, is the 2012 president of the soil society and was also involved on the committee.

"The role of the PSAs was to make the non-agriculture community, the urban communities, aware of the value of soils," Rice said.

Each announcement focuses on a specific benefit of healthy soil.

The first explains how soil acts as a filtering agent for water, cleaning out human or industrial waste from water. Whether it comes out of a bottle or out of the tap, all water has passed through soil at some point.

The second focuses on the importance of healthy soil in producing nutritious food. Soil that is healthy and has a good balance of organic matter will produce more nutritious crops - like wheat - for people to eat in bread, breakfast cereal, pasta and other food staples. Healthy soil even indirectly influences meat, for example, by producing high quality forages for cattle to graze.

The final announcement directly ties the health of soil to the health of people with one simple, little-known fact: There are more organisms in a tablespoon of soil than there are people on the planet, and those organisms are used to treat human diseases.

Rice said antibiotics such as penicillin and streptomycin come from soil microbes. Other drugs, like immunosuppressants or anti-cancer drugs, are also made from natural products derived from soil.

According to Rice, the scientific community has barely even begun to tap into the diversity of soil microbes.

"We only know one percent of those organisms in that spoonful of soil," Rice said. "It's kind of an untapped reservoir."

The direct tie between soil and human drugs emphasizes the importance of maintaining and en-

hancing the health of our soil.

So, how healthy is the soil?

According to Rice, healthy soil has high organic matter. "Black or brown soils indicate high organic matter," he said. "The more organic matter, the healthier that soil is from a microbial point of view."

Rice said soil in the U.S. is relatively healthy when compared to other areas, like southeast Asia or Africa. Nevertheless, he estimated Kansas soil has lost approximately half of the organic matter it had when it was primarily grasslands. Still more soil is being lost to what Rice called urban sprawl, or the expansion of cities.

Degraded soil can often be restored - with time and proper management. Some areas of land with high erosion are placed in the conservation reserve program, or taken out of production and put back into grasses to restore soil by giving organic matter time to rebuild. Rice said planting high residue crops, such as wheat or corn, and using minimum tillage practices also helps to rejuvenate the organic matter.

Rice is hopeful the soil science society will do a follow-up campaign with outside funding. "The first thing is making people think that soils are important," he said, "just as important as water or air." Once that idea is planted, Rice said he believes the follow-up should help people understand what degrades soil or makes it better.

To find more about the campaign, go to www.iheartsoil.org.

Building while the sun shines



KAYLA CORNETT/Colby Free Press

A construction worker measured framing on the east side of Casey's General Store on Tuesday. Casey's is expanding so that it can put in a kitchen, among other things.

On the Beat

COLBY POLICE

Saturday

12:16 a.m. - Walk-through at B-Hive.

4 a.m. - Loud music at Sunflower Apartments. Spoke with subjects.

4:23 a.m. - Walk-through at Walmart.

4:57 a.m. - Open door: caller requested walk-through at business. Everything OK.

11:22 a.m. - Caller reported car parked in Crown Hotel parking lot not belonging to any guest. Told manager to call a wrecking company to remove vehicle.

12:03 p.m. - Found cell phone at Grant and Plum. Report filed.

3:04 p.m. - 911 caller wanted officer to respond, then hung up; unknown problem. Report filed.

3:56 p.m. - Helped Sheriff's Office on drug traffic stop.

Sunday

12:55 a.m. - Walk through at Twister's.

1:58 a.m. - Driving under the influence report filed on traffic stop.

12:10 p.m. - Helped motorist in the 1000 block of S. Range.

1:14 p.m. - Welfare check.

THOMAS COUNTY SHERIFF

Saturday

3:16 p.m. - Assisted Highway Patrol on drug traffic stop at east-bound I-70 mile 90.

3:40 p.m. - Narcotics violation report filed on traffic stop in parking lot at Oasis Travel Plaza.

5:09 p.m. - Booked Kriss Evan Barton.

5:56 p.m. - Booked Kayla Marie Watkins.

7:24 p.m. - Caller reported five horses loose in yard at 562 County Rd. W. Report filed; owner contacted to handle.

7:36 p.m. - Booked Sharla

Shawnta Cotton.

7:44 p.m. - Engineer with Kyle Railroad called about car playing around near tracks earlier in Sheridan County; thinks will occur again to the west of Rexford. Not found; vehicle located parked at 525 Main, Rexford.

9 p.m. - Checked on stalled vehicle in the 500 block of Hastings Road, Brewster; all everything OK.

Sunday

3:35 a.m. - Booked Janna L. Cook.

5:19 a.m. - Released Cook.

3:52 p.m. - Report filed on warrant arrest by Goodland Police Department.

6:48 p.m. - Booked Frederick Michael Karrer.

7:12 p.m. - Warrant found from Newton Municipal Court on Ricky Meril Vanzant.

8:19 p.m. - Booked Vanzant.

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