



Housing shortage remains critical

By Sam Dieter
Colby Free Press
sdieter@nwkansas.com

A Thomas County dairy farmer joined other representatives in Topeka last Wednesday to speak with a group that advises Gov. Sam Brownback about the shortage of housing in western Kansas.

"I just basically outlined the impact that the shortage of housing has had on this business," said Ken McCarty, a partner in McCarty Family Farms. "We just recognized the lack of housing in all these communities."

McCarty said the group went to the quarterly meeting of the Governor's Council of Economic Advisors last Wednesday. Also attending were a real estate agent, the assistant city manager of Dodge City, a bank president and representatives from a public housing corporation.

Lee Harris, president of Cohen-Esery, which is renovating the St. Thomas Hospital into an apartment building, spoke with the group at a luncheon the same day.

Stan Alherich, executive director of the council, said the group comprises business leaders from across the state.

It hinders our ability to hire individuals that have families and thus put kids in the schools," McCarty said of the housing situation.

He said his family's operation is not having trouble

See "HOUSING," Page 2



Shopping, browsing for season

Jo DeYoung (above) helped a brother and sister select Christmas gifts for their parents at Santa's Workshop sponsored by the Thomas County Community Foundation Saturday at the Office Complex.

SAM DIETER and EVAN BARNUM/Colby Free Press



Governors show wildlife maps

By Scott Sonner
Associated Press

RENO, Nev. - Governors in 16 states are unveiling a high-tech wildlife habitat mapping project they hope will encourage economic development across the West while protecting the region's environmental treasures from Puget Sound to the Rocky Mountains.

least regulatory resistance and threat of litigation as they draft plans to build highways, dig gold mines and erect power lines, pipelines or wind farms.

Five years in the making, the database will connect 16 western states from California and Alaska to Montana and Oklahoma with a first-of-its-kind online system of colorful GIS maps displaying wildlife habitat, wetlands and other valuable natural resources - much of it detailed down to square-mile increments.

The Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool provides layers of data that rate the resources on a scale of one to six, from most to least "crucial." Individual states determine those priorities based on information about such things as the condition of the habitat and the species' economic and recreational importance.

"The governors' intent back in 2008 really was to cater to industries within their states who need data while at the same time conserving the resources.

Recycling helps keep landfill open

By Sam Dieter
Colby Free Press
sdieter@nwkansas.com

Just a handful of people attended the annual meeting of the Thomas County Landfill Advisory Committee Wednesday in the student union at Colby Community College.

Supervisor Larry Jumper talked about the landfill, including a discussion of what it would cost to shut down.

Colby City Manager Tyson McGreer; Paul Steele, chairman of the Thomas County Commission; and Commissioner Byron Sowers rounded out the crowd. The group talked about how to reduce the amount of trash coming into the landfill.

Jumper talked about the increased cost of closing the landfill under state regulations. He said he went to a meeting in Garden City earlier with Leah MacNeil, a geologist for Milco Environmental Services, the firm that handles engineering for the landfill. They learned that the Kansas Department of Health and Environment has changed the way it calculates the cost of closing a landfill.

The state updated an old model for calculating the cost which had not changed since 1995, Jumper said. MacNeil said she was still

calculating the new closure cost for Thomas County, but that it will probably be just over \$1 million.

At the Garden City meeting, MacNeil said, she learned of several Kansas landfills that have gone bankrupt from the costs of closing. If the county could not close the landfill on its own, it would be shut down, Jumper said, but can stay open as long as the county has enough money to close it. He said the landfill itself has about \$120,000 in its reserves for closing costs. He said they started with a \$6,000 closure fund to which \$6,000 was added each year.

The landfill itself and its storage site for household hazardous waste both passed inspections by the department in the past year, Jumper said. About half of the landfill inspection was devoted to how they keep its books, he said, but it also covered all kinds of trash storage, including compost, trees, even methane monitoring.

Jumper, McGreer and Steele talked about setting up a system between the city and county to recycle more of the trash going into the landfill. They ended up talking about designing dumpsters for recyclable items.

The landfill is not taking too much trash overall, Jumper said,

See "RECYCLING," Page 2

Republicans back budget

By Andrew Taylor
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) - Speaker John Boehner sharply criticized outside conservative groups opposed to year-end budget legislation today and said the measure "takes great steps in the right direction."

Hours before a scheduled vote on the bill, Boehner repeatedly denounced tea party-aligned organizations for their opposition, saying they were seeking to further their own objectives, not those of the Republican Party or the country.

"Frankly, I think they're misleading their followers. I think they're pushing our members into places where they don't want to be. And frankly, I just think that they've lost all credibility," Boehner said at a news conference.

"You know, one of them, they pushed us into the fight to defund Obamacare and shut down the government," he said in an apparent reference to Heritage Action.

Heritage Action, Club for Growth and other groups have urged lawmakers to oppose the measure, some issuing their appeals before the legislation had been made public.

The legislation is designed to eliminate the threat of future government shutdowns like the one that took place in October and erase \$65 billion in across-the-

board spending cuts this year and next in areas ranging from defense to education. It substitutes about \$85 billion in savings from elsewhere in the budget over a 10-year period. The \$65 billion would restore about one-third of the automatic cuts slated to hit agency operating budgets over 2014-2015; the cuts would fully resume in 2016 and run through 2021.

The effect is to push deficits higher in the current budget year and the next two before it begins to reduce red ink.

With the White House supporting the measure, GOP aides betrayed no nervousness about its chances for passage in the Republican-controlled House.

A Senate vote would likely wait until next week, and it was not yet clear whether tea party-aligned conservatives would require supporters to amass a 60-vote majority in order to pass it.

Boehner's remarks marked the second day in a row he has taken a swipe at outside groups, reflecting a deep frustration on the part of many party leaders.

Asked about somewhat weaker criticism he leveled on Wednesday, he said, "I thought it was my obligation to stand up for conservatives in Congress."

