



Gov. Sam Brownback toured low water levels at Cedar Bluff Reservoir. The boat docks are about 15 feet behind the governor.

Governor takes tour of moisture-hungry areas

Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback continued his tour of areas of Kansas hardest hit by drought conditions Tuesday with stops in Trego, Graham and Sheridan counties.

Along with Kansas Water Office Director Tracy Streeter and Kansas Department of Agriculture Chief Counsel Kim Christiansen, the governor met with local officials, farmers, ranchers and business owners to learn how the northwestern part of the state was dealing with the heat and dry weather.

"You can really see the effects of the drought here in northwest Kansas. Despite the brutal heat and dry conditions, I have been impressed at the level of cooperation among communities," Gov. Brownback said. "The tools that were passed this last legislative session to help Kansans deal with drought conditions like these couldn't have been

more timely. I want to thank the local leadership for what they have done to assist farmers and ranchers in this drought."

The tour of western portions of the state began at Cedar Bluff Reservoir near WaKeeney where the group viewed the reduced water levels, followed by a visit to the farm of Larry Hixson to view the impact of the drought on agricultural production.

Following a meeting with area farmers and agribusiness leaders at a Hill City restaurant, the governor toured the Hoxie Feedyard to discuss how the drought is affecting the cattle feeding industry.

"This region of the state is certainly drier than it was last year. I appreciate the work USDA has done to make assistance available to the farmers and ranchers here," said Director Streeter. "I also want

to acknowledge local leadership who sees the benefit of implementing available water management tools, such as the proposed Local Enhanced Management Area for Sheridan County to deal with limited water resources."

"Kansas farmers and ranchers are resilient in their ability to overcome challenges and this drought is no different," Kansas Department of Agriculture Secretary Dale Rodman said. "The Kansas Department of Agriculture continues working to assure our farmers and ranchers have information about all resources they need to adjust and recover from this drought."

Gov. Brownback began his tour of drought-affected areas of the state last week with two stops in Saline County in central Kansas, followed by a trip to Allen and Neosho Counties in southeast Kansas.

Farmers, ranchers urged to meet with their insurance appraisers

As drought conditions continue worsening across the state, the Kansas Department of Agriculture urged farmers and ranchers to meet immediately with their crop insurance appraisers to determine how best to manage their drought-damaged crops.

In order to help producers, the Topeka regional office for the U.S.D.A.'s Risk management Agency has issued repeated updates for farmers whose crops have been damaged statewide by the drought.

Recently, Governor Sam Brownback declared a drought emergency in all 105 Kansas counties. This allows for emergency use of water from Corps of Engineers reservoirs and state fishing lakes in those counties.

Most of the counties have been declared federal disaster areas and approved for emergency haying

and grazing of acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program.

Kansas Secretary of Agriculture Dale Rodman said the department is working with its state and federal partners to give farmers and ranchers the resources to cope with the drought.

"As I travel across the state and see firsthand the impacts of the drought and hear from farmers and ranchers about the challenges they are facing, it is clear this drought is having significant, devastating impacts on Kansas agriculture," Rodman said.

"In the past, crop insurance rules on drought-damaged crops have been confusing for producers. Rather than dealing with unclear, bureaucratic red tape, farmers and ranchers need to spend their time caring for their crops and livestock. In order to improve crop insur-

ance delivery on drought-damaged crops, my agency has worked with RMA to address and clarify the rules to assure farmers and ranchers have a clear and concise set of rules to follow."

The updated information defines steps producers must take if they put their spring-planted crops to another use, including diverting or shutting off irrigation. The agency said that farmers should immediately talk with their appraisers before they do this.

Additionally, the agency clarified that when a policyholder chooses to divert water, recommendations that doing so is the most appropriate action can be based on conditions in the local area, not a specific farming operation. The agency noted that the area extension or a local Natural Resources Conservation Service office can make that recommendation.

Insurance department answers questions

One part of our mission at the Kansas Insurance Department is to help educate consumers about insurance issues. Our new releases, consumer alerts and these Commissioner's Corner columns are all written to provide correct information on complicated insurance topics.

With that in mind, we have put together questions (and answers) that we often hear about the Affordable Care Act, the national health reform law passed in 2010. Department staff members have intensely studied the law, with help from Kansas consumers, small business owners, insurance companies, insurance agents and federal officials. Our goal is to provide useful, objective information. We begin here with five Q&A's, and we will continue to provide others during the next few weeks.

Q: Will Medicare change?

A: The law does not cut benefits to regular Medicare beneficiaries. It is supposed to save \$500 billion over the next 10 years. The savings is to come from (1) reducing federal payments to insurance companies that offer Medicare Advantage plans (which are private Medicare plans that offer regular Medicare benefits plus other company benefits); (2) reduced increase in provider payments' and (3) actions to reduce waste, fraud and abuse. Also, more preventive services are now covered, and the "doughnut hole" for prescription drug coverage get smaller each year until it closes completely by 2020.



sandy praeger

• insurance comm.

Q: What major parts of the law are in effect right now?

A: Under most health insurance plans today, you can receive preventive services with no out-of-pocket costs; children with pre-existing conditions can't be turned down for coverage; insurance companies can no longer cancel your coverage just because you made an honest mistake; young adults up to age 26 can stay on their family health insurance; lifetime dollar limits on health benefits no longer exist; and insurers must give refunds to consumers if companies spend less than 80 or 85 percent of their premium dollars on medical care (the percentage depends on what kind of coverage you have).

Q: I own a small business with few the 50 full-time employees. Do I have to provide health insurance for them?

A: No. The law says starting in 2014 any company with 50 or more full-time employees has to provide coverage or pay a penalty. Under the law, about 50,000 Kansas businesses will not be required to provide coverage for their employees. The law does offer small companies with fewer than 25 full-time employees a tax credit, however, if they pay at least half the cost of their employees' health insurance coverage.

Q: What is a health insurance exchange?

A: A health insurance exchange is an online marketplace set up under the law where individuals and small businesses can shop

for health plans from private insurance companies. The plans have to meet the law's requirements and other standards established by the operator of the exchange. Each state's exchange is set to offer coverage beginning Jan. 1, 2014. People may seek federal financial assistance when they apply, and the exchange operators will determine their eligibility. If a person qualifies for Medicaid instead, he or she will be referred to the state Medicaid program.

Q: Why are the insurance department and you so involved in this law?

A: The Kansas Insurance Department is the state agency that regulates insurance in the state. With the law, we have a lot of information to gather so that government and legislative leaders can make informed decisions. We want to work to provide the best options for Kansans, and that means planning. And, I've always said, "It's easier to shut off the engine than to jump-start it."

Watch for more Q&A on the act from us in the coming weeks. If you have questions about any of these answers, please call our consumer assistance hotline (in Kansas) (800) 432-2484.

Hansen Museum has 40 art works of Curry on display

The Dane G. Hansen Memorial Museum presents "Between Fear and Faith: John Steuart Curry." The Kiechel Fine Arts out of Lincoln, Neb., organized the exhibit. This exhibit opened Friday, July 6, and will run through Sunday, Aug. 26. It consists of approximately 40 works with an emphasis on the force of nature.

Born in Dunavant, Curry trained at the Chicago Art Institute and the Academie Julian in Paris. Like many American artists who found their voice during the troubled years between World War I and World War II, Curry turned to the familiar: life in rural America. His experience growing up on a farm provided a rich source of subjects,

especially animals. He was particularly interested in dramatic scene of confrontation between predator and prey, or animals of the same species vying for dominance.

Our July Artist of the Month is Nancy Williams from Stockton. Williams has mosaics on display and for sale.

corrections

The Goodland Star-News will correct any mistake or misunderstanding in a news story.

Please call our office at (785) 899-2338 to report errors.

We believe that news should be fair and factual.

We want to keep an accurate record and appreciate you calling to our attention any failure to live up to this standard.

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Hepatitis-C Carrier at Hays Medical Center May Have Infected You

You may be at risk if you had a heart catheterization at Hays Medical Center from May 24, 2010 to Sept. 22, 2010, when a lab tech infected with Hepatitis-C worked in the catheterization lab.

Hepatitis-C is a blood-borne virus that damages the liver and can lead to death.

STAN BASGALL, a Hays attorney, along with HUTTON & HUTTON, a premiere medical malpractice, class action, and multi-district litigation law firm in Wichita, urge you to call to protect your rights.

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