

Warm weather not a record yet

By Tisha Cox

Colby Free Press

Unseasonably warm weather is getting attention, forecasters say, but temperatures in the area haven't broken any records yet.

Meteorologist Dave Floyd with the National Weather Service office in Goodland said the high of 70 on Tuesday was notable, but no record.

Mary Knapp, a weather data librarian with K-State Extension in Manhattan, said the record for Jan. 3 was 71 in 1997. Jan. 2, 1997, set a record of 72 degrees.

"That was a warm year," she said. Floyd said the warm weather the past few weeks can be attributed to a change in the wind.

"It really is dependent on which way the upper wind is blowing," he said, adding that this time of year, the winds in the upper atmosphere normally come out of the north-northwest, as they did during the unusually cold snap in December.

That week, he said, there was a "persistent northerly flow of air" that pulled down Arctic air from Canada.

Recently, the upper winds have been pulling in the mild, warmer air of the Pacific and American Southwest. The warm air has been sitting over the region, and Floyd said. Basically, he said, it's all a matter of chance during the winter.

"Someone somewhere else is

paying for it," he added.

The warmth has persisted because the snow from November and December has all melted off, the forecaster noted. With no snow to reflect back the sunlight, the ground has been able to warm up, and it's made it easier for the weather to stay warm.

"It can be a self-feeding pattern," Floyd said.

Over the short term, he added, temperatures should stay in the low 50s, and continue to be above normal. The highs have been 25 to 30 degrees above normal.

"That's pretty significant," he said. "No doubt about it."

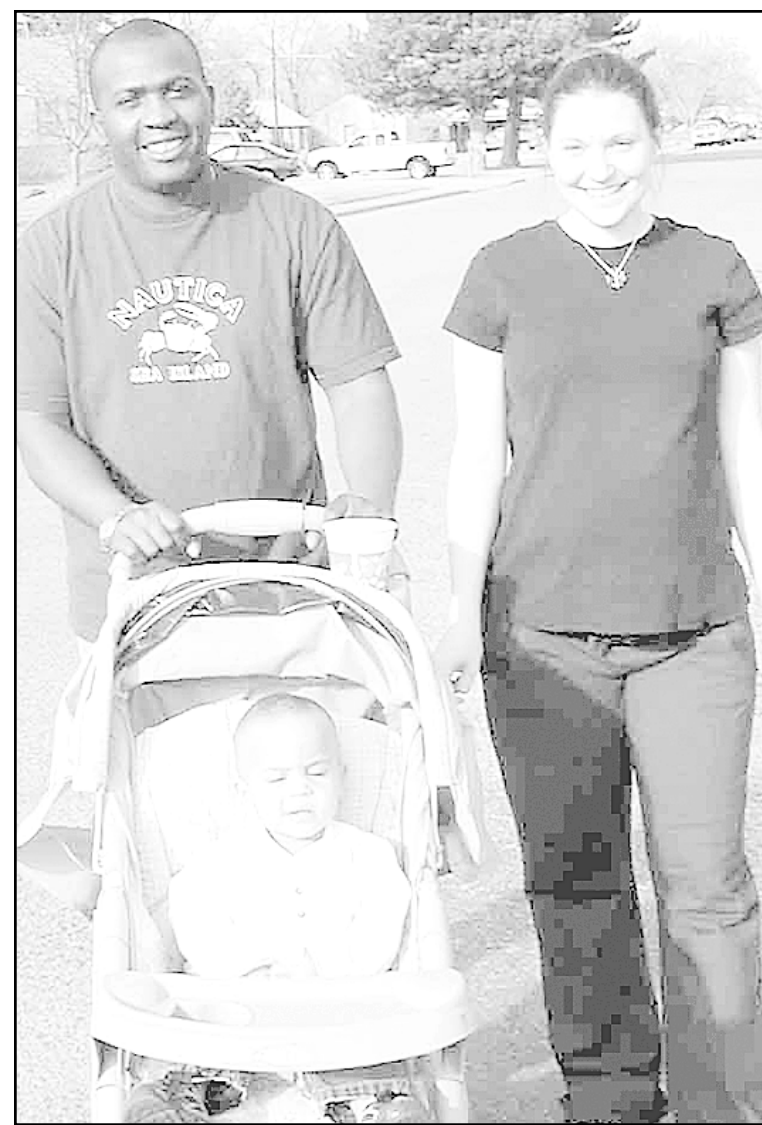
There will be inevitable cold

pushes, Floyd said, so people can expect normal winter weather to return over the next couple of months, but patterns indicate the weather will be more mild than cold.

Floyd said Goodland precipitation over the 2000-2005 period is down 25 inches from normal.

"That's fairly representative of the area," he said. "On average, it's been dry over the long haul."

The area doesn't normally get much precipitation this time of year, he said. The average for January is just .43 of an inch. For December, January and February, he said, it's typically less than a half-inch per month.



Isaiah, 1, enjoyed the warm weather Saturday afternoon in the company of his short-sleeved parents C.J. and Jackie Shinette. The temperatures dropped a bit Sunday and Monday, but were expected to rebound into the high 50s on Wednesday.

Photo by Tom Betz/The Goodland Star-News

First-class postage stamps go up two cents

Check your stamps. Mailing a letter will cost you 39 cents to mail this week, an increase of two cents.

First-class postage went up 5.4 percent increase on Sunday. The price had not increased since June 2002, the Postal Service said, when it cost 34 cents to mail a letter. Postcards went up one cent, from 23 to 24 cents.

Every cent increase in gasoline prices costs the post office about a million dollars, said Steve Schultz, postmaster in Goodland.

The new stamps feature a picture of the Statue of Liberty with a flag.

They don't have a price on them as yet, he said, because they were produced before the new rates were set.

The Postal Service made money last year, but officials say costs are going up. Most of the blame for this year's increase, though, goes to Congress and the Bush Administration.

A federal law approved in 2003 requires the Postal Service to pay \$3.1 billion a year into an escrow account, with use of the money to be determined by Congress. The money represents excess pension contributions the service has not been paying and doesn't owe. How-

ever the overpayment goes into the treasury and makes the federal deficit look smaller, so the administration has opposed changing the law.

"There were also some financial things the post office was told by the Postal Rate Commission to take care of," said Schultz.

Late last year, the Postal Service governors accepted a recommendation to raise the cost of a letter, along with most other postal rates. Priority and express mail will also increase.

"The Goodland Post Office ran out of 37 cent stamps about two weeks ago and we began selling the

new ones," said Schultz.

The post office has two-cent and one-cent stamps to bring old stamps up to the correct amount, Schultz said.

Many post offices have automated machines and changing the rates is not a big deal, he said.

The postmaster said anything with Saturday's postmark would fall under the old rates. Anything mailed after that need the new postage.

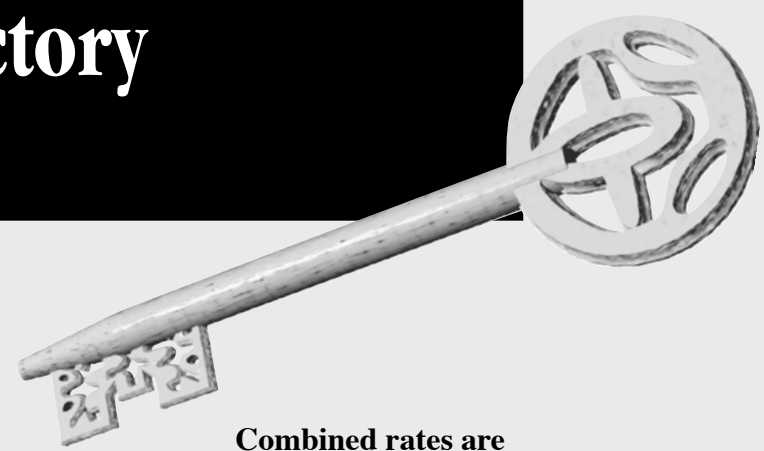
"The new rates went into effect Sunday," Schultz said. "After we closed Saturday, our new rates were implemented."

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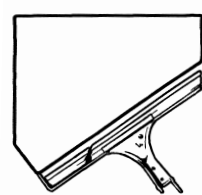
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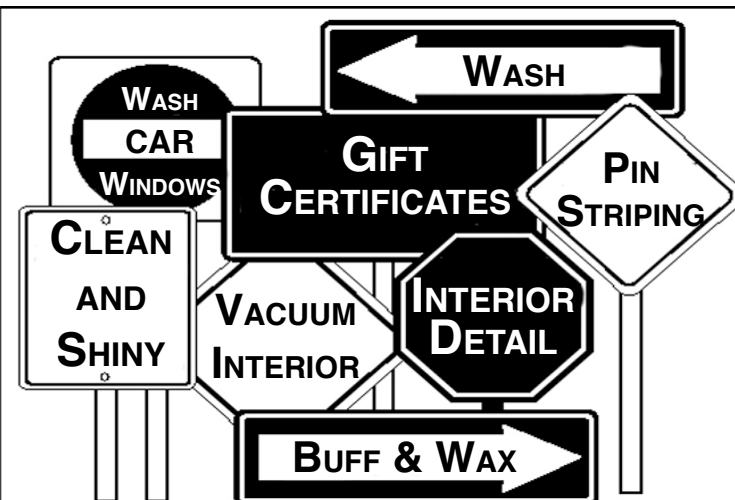
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