

Prairie blaze keeps firemen busy night, day

Wind and lightning that swept through the area Wednesday evening igniting a prairie fire two miles west of Jennings kept firemen from all three county departments busy most of the night and again the next day.

The Jennings Fire Department was paged at 7:48 p.m. and then the Oberlin rural and Norcatu departments about 10 minutes later.

"It was a kind of a bear to get put out," said Oberlin Fire Chief Bill Cathcart. "It was in real tall, real dry CRP (Conservation Reserve Program) grass and it was going pretty good. Then the wind switched around, and it calmed down."

Some of the firemen didn't get back to Oberlin until 10:45 p.m. In Jennings, it was after midnight when the last truck rolled home.

Jennings Fire Chief Kerry Green said that the fire was on grass that had belonged to the late J.L. Spreser. The blaze moved onto a corner of Vendla Tacha's pasture, he said.

The next day, as the wind came up, so did the fire. At 12:45 p.m., the Jennings crew was called out to the same fire and in about 10 minutes,



firefighters on top of the hill saw smoke to the north, and we took off again."

He said that he thought the second fire had been caused by lightning hitting a tree.

On Saturday, Oberlin firemen were called to a pickup on fire at Stevens Avenue, the dirt road just south of the old port of entry. The vehicle had a fuel leak, Chief Cathcart said.

Sunday morning at 1:16 a.m., the crew was called to help with a rollover accident about eight miles out of town northeast on the Cemetery Road, Mr. Cathcart said.

The wind wasn't done with the tired firefighters yet, however. At 10:15 a.m. Sunday, they were called to a fire at 105 S. Buffalo. A falling tree had downed power lines, which set grass and bushes afire, the chief said.

both Oberlin and Norcatu were asked to help. Sheridan County firemen also came to help. This time the fire crossed the road, Chief Green said, and got into the roots of a grove of trees. The firemen had to use a tractor to pull out the burning roots.

As things started to die down, firemen scanned the area for hot spots. "We just got it put out when there was another fire near Jennings," Chief Cathcart said. "They were watching for flare-ups when they spotted smoke from the other fire."

Chief Green said, "One of my



A JENNINGS FIREMAN (above) walked toward the flames Thursday as volunteers fought a lightning-caused blaze for the second time in two days. Crews from all three county departments and neighboring volunteers helped fight the fire, set by a fast-moving storm Wednesday night. Sheridan County firemen (left) came to help. — Herald staff photos by Kimberly Brandt

25 attend water meeting

Around 25 people at The Gateway got an update Thursday on the Republican River Riparian Project and the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams.

Chairwoman Sue Jarrett said the idea is to get people involved in improving the water supply.

There are three goals, she said, developing a landowner partnership, enhancing quantity and quality of water in the Republican River Basin and educating people about water in the river basin.

The meeting included a presentation by Linda Henderson, Western Kansas coordinator with the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams.

Ms. Henderson said the alliance brings groups together through its board. Members come from the Kansas Farm Bureau, engineering firms, the state Department of Wildlife and Parks and Pheasants Forever, among others.

The state, she said, is divided into chapters. Decatur County is part of the Prairie Wetlands Chapter. The chapters are to identify projects.

One of the critical parts of doing a project is if the landowner is will-



EXPLAINING HER GROUP, Linda Henderson of the Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams talked at a meeting of the Republican River Riparian Project at the Gateway on Thursday. — Herald staff photo by Kimberly Brandt

ing to have it as a demonstration site. This year, said Ms. Henderson, she anticipates 100 projects, around \$550,000 in grant money and \$3.13 million in non-federal money.

The Sappa Lake Restoration Project is on the list.

Another project the alliance is working on is playa lakes. Ms. Henderson said these can be found all over farms. Basically they look like mud holes. They are a great place for migratory birds.

Research shows that playa lakes are the only way to recharge the

Ogallala Aquifer, she said. She said the alliance is working on putting those lakes into easement programs. She said the alliance needs to educate farmers about their value.

Playas have a clay basin, she said. If it's been dry, water goes through cracks in the clay and gets to the aquifer, which underlies much of western Kansas and is important for irrigation. If it stays wet for long enough, she said, the clay will seal itself off. She said the lakes are a natural formation.

States sue each other over river resources

Those present at the Republican River Riparian Project meeting last Thursday got an update on the Republican River Compact.

Doug Christensen from Nebraska said Kansas filed a lawsuit in 1998 claiming Nebraska had not followed the original compact. In 1999, the U.S. Supreme Court accepted the

lawsuit.

In December 2001, a special master who heard evidence in the case granted a stay allowing the three states in the compact — Kansas, Nebraska and Colorado — to negotiate. The states had to form the Republican River Compact Conservation Committee, of which Mr.

Christensen is a member.

The committee has to produce a study plan by April 30 to look at quantitative effects of non-federal reservoirs and land terraces on the water supply in the river basin.

The study will last for four to five years. Mr. Christensen said the committee is working on that plan now.

Courthouse to get new tree

Decatur County commissioners will mark Arbor Day by planting a tree on the west side of the courthouse Tuesday.

The flowering crab tree will be purchased by the county and then the commissioners will reimburse the fund.

County Clerk Marilyn Horn said that a tree that had been planted several years ago died, so this will be a replacement.

Mrs. Horn said the public and school children will be invited to the planting.

The commissioners talked with Ambulance Director Patrick Pomeroy about charging for standby services.

Mr. Pomeroy said he wouldn't be opposed to charging when the ambulance stands by, usually at school events, races and the like.

Commissioner Ralph Unger said the price should be reasonable.

Mr. Pomeroy said the ambulance stood by at a kids wrestling meet and the crew ran the public address system. He said the group gave the service a donation.

Mr. Unger said he thought Decatur County was the only one in this area that doesn't charge for standbys. He suggested checking with other counties and see what they are charging.

Vi Krizek, with High Plains Mental Health, stopped in. She said commissioners will be getting the county mental health audit at their meeting on Tuesday, May 4.

Mrs. Krizek said she had some concern that the state hospital is trying to close its children's beds. She said their new director has really been stepping into the political part of the job.

The commissioners didn't have any questions, so Mrs. Krizek said she would be back in May.

County Roundup

At their meeting last Tuesday, Decatur County commissioners:

- Decided to mark Arbor Day by planting a tree on the west side of the courthouse on Tuesday. Story to left.

- Approved free days at the landfill starting Monday and going through Saturday, May 1, and a household hazardous waste collection this weekend. Story below.

Dump free for next week

The Decatur County commissioners approved free days at the landfill starting Monday and going through Saturday, May 1, and a household hazardous waste day this weekend.

The landfill will be open from 8 a.m. to noon the first Saturday of the month and then the rest of the week from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The household hazardous waste day will be from 8 to noon this Saturday at the county shop at the east edge of Oberlin.

Road and Bridge Supervisor Tim Stallman gave the commissioners a

contract with Vance Construction to store road materials they will be using on a state job at the county's Jennings shop. The commissioners approved it.

Mr. Stallman said that he is working on getting a tire purchase together. He said the voucher will be around \$2,500 for eight tires.

He said that Darroll Banzet will be retiring from the crew the first of May and he will be going through a transition period with Kirk Ulery. The commissioners approved Mr. Ulery to drive a county pickup as road foreman.

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- 1 - Buick Century (Silver)
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