

Chilly Temps Provide Few Days For Fieldwork

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Below normal temperatures have limited the ability for snow to melt and kept soil temperatures at or below freezing across South Dakota.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture says in its weekly crop report that farmers and ranchers had 1.7 days suitable for fieldwork. Activities included applying fertilizer to wheat, alfalfa and pastures.

Winter wheat conditions were rated 20 percent very poor, 56 percent poor, 22 percent fair, 2 percent good and 0 percent excellent.

Calving was 39 percent, while lambing was 64 percent complete. Two percent of cattle have been reported as moved to pasture.

Cattle and calf conditions were rated 4 percent poor, 26 percent fair, 64 percent good and 6 percent excellent.

SD Man Pleads Guilty To Weapons Charge

PIERRE (AP) — A Presho man has pleaded guilty to a federal weapons charge.

KCCR reports that 36-year-old Clint Brown entered the guilty plea to one count of being a Felon and Drug User in Possession of a Firearm. A superseding indictment was needed to correct typographical errors on the initial document.

Judge Roberto Lange ordered a pre-sentence investigation. Sentencing is set for June 12. Brown faces up to 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Brown, who remains in custody, also faces state charges. He is accused of being under the influence of drugs when he kidnapped his 10-year-old daughter last August and abused her.

That case is expected to proceed after the federal case is resolved. Brown has pleaded not guilty to the state charges.

Error Causes Confusion With S. Dakota Inmate

RAPID CITY (AP) — Authorities say an inmate who they believed went missing briefly Monday morning was actually never missing and was where he was supposed to be.

State prison officials had said 35-year-old Aaron Olson left the prison Monday morning to go to his work-release job but didn't show up there and was found a short time later in the city.

Officials now say that a record-keeping error caused confusion and that Olson had been where he was supposed to be.

Olson is serving a 2-year sentence on a Hughes County drug charge.

Panel Moves Neb. Bill For Veteran Plates, IDs

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A bill that would allow military veterans in Nebraska to display their status on license plates and state identification cards is headed to the floor of the Legislature.

The Transportation and Telecommunications Committee advanced the proposal last week, 6-0, and designated it as a priority bill. The committee's chairwoman, Sen. Annette Dubas of Fullerton, is expected to speak about the bill during a press conference Tuesday at the Capitol.

The bill creates a "veteran" designation for driver's licenses and identification cards. An amendment would allow "Military Honor" license plates for active service members and veterans.

Supporters say the designation could help veterans receive discounts offered by businesses, or signal to law enforcement that a person may suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

3 Who Snuck Onto Racetrack Hurt In Crash

JEFFERSON (AP) — Three 19-year-old males who authorities say snuck onto a dirt racetrack in the southeastern South Dakota town of Jefferson to turn some laps were injured when their car rolled.

Union County sheriff's deputies and South Dakota Highway Patrol officers responded to the crash Sunday afternoon at the Park Jefferson Speedway. Authorities say two of the three males were thrown from the car when it went out of control and rolled, and all three were hurt.

They were taken to a hospital in Sioux City, Iowa. KCAU-TV reports that they have since been released.

The sheriff's office says the owner of the track has indicated he will not press trespassing charges.

Banquet

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The banquet, open to members only, will feature raffles, a meal and live and silent auctions. Memberships will be sold at the door and cost \$35. A youth membership for children 15 and younger is also offered and costs \$20, which will include a meal at the banquet.

Pheasants Forever will also be sponsoring a few area youth to attend a wildlife camp this June in the Black Hills.

"We had a meeting and decided we will sponsor up to four kids from the area to go to the camp," Pesek said. "Kids can send in a letter to be sponsored and go to the camp. It's primarily a learning camp, but also is fun for anyone who enjoys wildlife and the outdoors."

The camp will last for one week and features a number of outdoor activities including canoeing, archery, conservation, game management and fishing and shooting skills.

Youth who want to be considered for sponsorship must write a letter on why they would like to go. All letters, which must be postmarked by April 12, can be mailed to P.O. Box 757, Yankton, SD 57078.

Because of the drought, Pesek said pheasants have faced bad conditions in the immediate area.

"The drought has been tough on a lot of birds and other wildlife," he said. "All wildlife has been impacted by the drought and it's really been a difficult situation. The numbers of pheasants in the area are down as well."

Kevin Heiman, chair president of the group, said they work to do everything they can to improve the habitat for pheasants and increase their numbers in the area.

"We have to play within Mother Nature's guidelines, and we can't control that too much," Pesek said. "It has been the driest it's been here in 50 years. Our ultimate goal is to give wildlife a place it can live and thrive in the area."

He added that Pheasants Forever is a particularly unique organization because it is one of the only groups that allows local chapters to keep all their profits at the local level.

"For other organizations, if local groups profit, their money will go back to the national organi-

zation," Pesek said. "Here, aside from membership fees, whatever we profit stays within our control and is kept here locally."

As of last year, the Yankton area chapter of Pheasants Forever was the all-time leader in habitat expenditures among all chapters in the state. A large portion of the profits it's had has gone into getting more land for hunting.

"When it comes to acquiring public hunting grounds, usually it's because the land owner wants their grounds to become a public hunting place," Pesek said. "Usually we're not going to auctions to get lands. We're working with individuals."

The group recently lent a hand in purchasing an old tractor ground outside of Tabor.

"We really played a minimal role in that process; we let everyone else do their staff and we acted as the 'clean-up batter' in order to make the land acquisition work," Pesek said. "A lot of different organizations put up money to get that to become public hunting land."

The area, which encompasses more than 190 acres, features fishing, duck, deer and dove hunting, and has song birds for people to watch.

Pheasants Forever also puts an emphasis on getting kids exposed to the outdoors.

"We put on a number of youth events throughout the year to get kids interested in being outside, hunting and fishing," Pesek said. "We want to introduce the sport of pheasant hunting to new generations. The sport is so vital to the state economy — more pheasants are shot in South Dakota than in any other state. We hope that we can help to continue that trend."

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Nebraska

Audit: \$8M In Aid Was Misspent

BY GRANT SCHULTE
 Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — A Nebraska agency mis-spent nearly \$8 million in federal aid when it sent energy-assistance payments directly to customers instead of their utility companies, and some of the checks were later cashed at Wal-Mart stores, restaurants, a liquor store and a keno parlor, state auditors said Monday.

Auditor Mike Foley said the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services violated its own rules when it mailed the checks to recipients. Department officials knew that some of the recipients were dead, and in some cases hadn't been alive for more than a year, Foley said.

Foley said the payments were made in an apparent scramble to beat a looming federal deadline to spend the money. The payments were made in haste in late August 2011, five weeks before the cutoff.

"Nebraska taxpayers are also federal taxpayers, and I think they will be very disappointed," Foley said. "Sometimes, these programs are not administered as well as they should be, and the monies that are supposed to go to the social safety net are not spent properly."

Foley made the announcement in a joint press conference with Kerry Winterer, the chief executive of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The department managed \$42.1 million in federal program dollars during

the 2011 federal fiscal year.

Winterer acknowledged that the department made mistakes, first by delaying a decision on how to make the payments and then by sending the money directly to recipients. He said he had no explanation as to why the decision was delayed, but added that administrators who were involved in the decision no longer work for the state.

"Where we have made mistakes, we will be accountable, we will take responsibility and we will in fact own those mistakes," Winterer said. "Most important, we will fix them. In this case, errors were made."

At issue is the federally funded Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, commonly known as LIHEAP. The program allocates money to help low-income Nebraska residents with their heating and cooling bills, and to avoid "crisis" situations in which their energy could be cut off during extreme temperatures.

Auditors found that the state made nearly 19,000 payments of either \$250 or \$500 directly to customers who had previously qualified for "crisis assistance." The payments should have gone to their energy companies, to ensure they were used as intended.

Foley said much of the questionable spending occurred in late August 2011, about five weeks before the end of the federal fiscal year. The state sent \$17.6 million in more than 43,000 payments throughout the state.

"When we spend money quickly, sometimes

you don't spend it as wisely as you should," Foley said.

Foley said there's no way to confirm how the money was spent. But a random sampling of 135 payments found that checks had been cashed at restaurants, grocery stores, funeral homes, paycheck-advance businesses, Wal-Mart and a keno parlor.

In some cases, auditors found that payments were sent to customers who had positive balances on their utility bills. State rules prohibit crisis energy payments in excess of what is needed to address the immediate problem. It's unclear whether any recipients lost service due to a failure to pay, or whether any utilities were short-changed because of the payments that went directly to customers.

Winterer said the money was distributed after the previous heating season ended, and the payments were intended to reimburse households for bills already paid. He said there is no state or federal requirement that recipients spend the money on utility bills.

Auditors found 261 payments, totaling nearly \$112,000, were issued to people who were dead. Foley said the fact that many were still cashed is a likely sign that signatures were forged.

The department sent one check to a man who had died in May 2011. Foley said state officials knew that the man was no longer alive. His check was cashed at an Omaha liquor store, six months after his death.

SD Popcorn Manufacturer Making A Name For Itself

LOWER BRULE (AP) — A tribally owned popcorn manufacturer in South Dakota is gaining accolades for its products and job opportunities.

Situated on the Lower Brule Indian Reservation, Lakota Foods is the first and only Native American-owned company that produces, packages and distributes popcorn.

The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe started the business about seven years ago and now produces about 17 million pounds of popcorn each year.

Barry Heiss is the manager of the Lower Brule Farm Corp. He says Lakota Foods is unique because the popcorn is raised, cleaned and packaged in South Dakota.

Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan recently toured the Lakota Foods plant while learning about South Dakota's agriculture industry.

She boasted about Lakota Foods' ability to take a basic product and add value to it.



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What: **Yankton Morning Optimist Tri-Star Basketball Contest**

Where: **Cimpl Arena Gym at Mount Marty College**

When: **Saturday, April 6th • 10am-Noon**



The Tri-Star Basketball Skills Contest consists of three skills: Dribbling, passing, and shooting. Awards will be presented for the first three place winners in each age group. 7-9 years, 10-11 years, 12-13 years. Each contestant must submit an entry form signed by a parent or legal guardian. Forms will be available at the Summit Center during the previous week and at the Cimpl Arena on the morning of the event. There is no charge for the event.

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