

S.D. Urges Water Conservation In Mo. River

PIERRE (AP) — South Dakota officials have urged the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to continue conserving water in Missouri River reservoirs as dry conditions limit water flows into the system.

State officials had planned to submit a letter at a Corps of Engineers meeting in Pierre that was canceled due to bad weather Wednesday. The letter recommending ways to manage the river now has been sent to the corps.

The letter, signed by state Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Steve Pirner and state Game, Fish and Parks Secretary Jeff Vonk, asks the corps not to release water from the reservoirs to downstream navigation in areas with no commercial barges.

The state also backs the corps' plan to maintain steady or rising water levels in Fort Peck, Sakakawea and Oahe lakes to support spring fish spawning. High releases during the 2011 flood flushed a lot of smelt through Oahe Dam.

"A rising pool during the April-to-May spawning period is important in rebuilding the population of this important prey species that supports a thriving sport fishery on which so many river communities rely," according to the letter.

In addition, state officials are asking the corps for accurate forecasts of water levels so they can take steps to keep boat ramps open in high-use areas of Lake Oahe.

The corps also will need to help public drinking water systems get water as reservoir levels drop, the letter says.

Lawmakers Advance Juvenile Sentencing Bill

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Juveniles convicted of first-degree murder in Nebraska would face a minimum 40-year prison sentence, under a bill that won initial approval from lawmakers.

Lawmakers voted 30-2 on Thursday to advance the bill, following more than eight hours of debate. The 40-to-life sentencing range represented a compromise between lawmakers who supported a 30-year minimum sentence and others who pushed for at least 60 years.

The bill's sponsor, Sen. Brad Ashford, says the 40-to-life range will give judges leeway to consider mitigating factors, such as a juvenile's maturity and efforts toward rehabilitation.

Sen. Ernie Chambers says he felt "a great sense of displeasure" about the 40-to-life range, which he opposes. But on Thursday, he withdrew his motion to kill the bill, which allowed the vote to proceed.

Noem Hasn't Decided On Possible Senate Run

PIERRE (AP) — Rep. Kristi Noem of South Dakota said Thursday she hasn't decided yet whether to seek the Republican nomination for U.S. Senate next year.

"I believe there's still time to consider political futures, but right now I'm focused on policy," Noem said in a telephone call with South Dakota news organizations.

Noem, in her second term as South Dakota's lone member of the House, said South Dakota's June 2014 primary is still more than a year away.

"I believe I've got time yet here to consider that and make a decision," Noem said.

Former Gov. Mike Rounds is the only announced Republican candidate for the seat now held by Democratic Sen. Tim Johnson, who announced last month he will not seek re-election next year.

Some conservative Republicans have said they are reluctant to support Rounds' Senate candidacy because they believe he is not conservative enough on budget and tax issues.

Rounds has said he was pragmatic but had a good record on taxes and spending during his two terms as governor. He has said he expects to have a primary opponent.

Officials: Nebraska Body Was That Of Fugitive

NORTH PLATTE, Neb. (AP) — A body found nearly a year ago in western Nebraska was that of a Wisconsin fugitive who'd been convicted of trying to produce a biological weapon, authorities say.

DNA samples and other evidence led investigators to conclude that the remains were those of 64-year-old Denys Ray Hughes, the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office said in a news release Thursday. Hughes was being transferred by bus from a Colorado prison to a halfway house in Milwaukee when he disappeared in May 2011; authorities believe he got off the bus somewhere in Nebraska.

The body was found April 20, 2012, on private land on the southern side of North Platte, along the South Platte River. Medical investigators said tests on the body showed the man probably died between November 2011 and February 2012. The cause of death was unclear, though Hughes had a handful of health problems.

Suspicions about Hughes were raised by a sheriff's deputy in Kansas who pulled over Hughes for a traffic violation in July 2005. Court documents say the deputy found evidence of bomb-making materials and a "to-do" list that included buying cannon fuse.

The Kansas authorities tipped off law enforcement in Arizona, where Hughes had an apartment in Phoenix. Authorities there found several castor bean plants, according to the documents. The beans can be used to make ricin, a poisonous protein.

A follow-up search of Hughes' home in Manitowish Waters, Wis., uncovered formulas for producing ricin and six bottles of castor beans.

Hughes was prosecuted in Phoenix and convicted of trying to produce a biological weapon and for possessing a pipe bomb and illegal gun silencers. Authorities said Hughes was working alone and was not a member of a terrorist organization.

Federal Cuts Hit 2 Neb. National Monuments

BEATRICE, Neb. (AP) — Officials at two national monuments in Nebraska are reducing staff and eliminating programming due to federal budget cuts, a move they worry will affect how many people visit the parks.

The automatic, across-the-board cuts have affected Homestead National Monument of America near Beatrice and Scotts Bluff National Monument in Gering, the *Lincoln Journal Star* reported.

Homestead Superintendent Mark Engler said 5 percent, or about \$62,000, has been taken from the park's annual budget of about \$1.2 million. Scotts Bluff Superintendent Ken Mabery said his park also is losing 5 percent, or about \$50,000, of its annual budget of about \$1 million.

Homestead's cuts include a popular campfire series, and some groundskeeping and janitorial services. The Freeman School also will be closed this year. The attraction allows visitors to learn about the history of children being taught in a one-room rural school.

Homestead attracted about 100,000 visitors last year. The reduced services could affect attendance and the local economy that relies on people spending money on gas, food and motel rooms, Engler said.

"We hope people still come to the park," he said. "We hope people know that we are open."

Nebraska Alcohol Enforcement Bill Hits A Budget Hurdle

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — An effort to boost state-level alcohol enforcement in Nebraska is colliding with budget realities in the Legislature.

Sen. Russ Karpisek of Wilber presented a bill Thursday to increase the number of alcohol-law investigators within the Nebraska State Patrol. But he acknowledged that his proposal will likely have to shrink to fit into the state's upcoming two-year budget.

Nebraska currently has nine State Patrol investigators who focus on enforcing laws, among other duties. The number has fallen over the last two decades, while the number of alcohol licenses has increased.

Karpisek said Nebraska now has 477 officers in the State Patrol, the lowest number since 1986. In 1987, a dozen investigators were transferred from the Nebraska Liquor Control Commission to the State Patrol. The number of alcohol licenses per investigator has grown from 345 in 1986, to 605 licenses per trooper this year.

"The State Patrol is doing a tremendous

"The State Patrol is doing a tremendous job with the resources that it has, but those resources aren't where they need to be."

RUSS KARPISEK

job with the resources that it has, but those resources aren't where they need to be," said Karpisek, chairman of the General Affairs Committee that oversees alcohol laws.

Lawmakers spent Thursday morning debating the proposal's costs without reaching a vote on the bill itself. Some questioned whether they should commit money specifically for alcohol-law investigators, as opposed to giving the State Patrol more money for officers in general.

"That seems to be a misallocation of resources," said Sen. Paul Schumacher, of Columbus. "We do not need to spend this kind of money on a simple regulatory function."

Son Says He Tried To Carry Mother In Neb. Storm

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A woman who died trying to trudge through a blinding snowstorm from her disabled car to her house a mile away had never experienced a blizzard before, her 19-year-old son says. The son suffered hypothermia and frost-bite trying to carry his mother through Tuesday's storm.

Lisa Conrad, her husband and her son had moved to western Nebraska from Vancouver, Wash., about two years ago, the *Lincoln Journal Star* reported. The 37-year-old woman was driving home from work just before 1 a.m. Tuesday when she became stuck in a snow drift about a mile from her house in Berea in the Nebraska Panhandle.

It was raining when she left for work Monday afternoon, her son, Brandon Conrad, said. But by the time she left to make the 10-mile trip home, it was snowing hard, and she had not taken a coat.

"I said, 'Do you want me to drive you home?'" Conrad told the *Journal Star*. "She said, 'I think I can make it.'"

The storm was bad enough by then that it was impossible to see the road, Nebraska State Patrol Capt. Mike Gaudreault said.

"It was a whiteout condition," he said.

Lisa Conrad called her house when she got stuck, and her son walked to the car to get her, bringing her coat. They both attempted to

walk back to the house, but became disoriented.

Her husband, Brandon Conrad Sr., arrived home from work a couple of hours later, the newspaper reported, but his wife and son were nowhere to be found. He called 911, and was told it was too treacherous for rescuers to go out.

His son was huddled in an abandoned farmhouse about two miles from where he had left his mother in a field. He was wearing a heavy coat and gloves, but wore only tennis shoes on his feet. Hours later, friends of Box Butte County Sheriff Tammy Mowry searched for the two on snowmobiles. They found Lisa's body in a field, and then found the 19-year-old nearly 18 hours after his mother first called for help, unable to stand on his own.

He already knew his mother was dead, the rescuers said.

"He said he helped her; he carried her for a while," said Brian Jelinek, a 31-year-old farmer who went out on his snowmobile to help find the mother and son.

"He knew she was dead before we told him, but he kept going because he didn't want to die out there," Jelinek said.

Authorities said Lisa Conrad died of exposure, and Brandon Conrad Jr. was in stable condition late Wednesday at Box Butte General Hospital in Alliance.

South Dakota Gun Club Dispute Nears End

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — A gun club in the Sioux Falls area has received permission from Minnehaha County to add a handgun range, as long as the club adds safety equipment on its existing rifle range to keep bullets from going astray.

Some neighbors of the Big Sioux Rifle and Pistol Club complained to the County Commission last fall about bullets flying beyond the range. Rural Brandon homeowner Kellee Valnes said her home was struck by two bullets in the summer of 2011.

Valnes and other gun range neighbors turned to county officials when they could not reach an agreement with the gun club on improving safety.

"I am offended we are being made the bad guy," she said.

The gun club balked when the county's planning commission in March approved the new handgun range but added new requirements to the existing rifle range. The club said it was prepared to go to court to oppose any changes to the 1981

permit for the rifle range.

The County Commission worked to come up with a solution that would address neighbors' safety while also honoring the idea that county officials should not arbitrarily change an existing permit, according to the *Argus Leader* newspaper.

Commission Chairman Gerald Beninga said the group's action Wednesday — approving the handgun range addition with an understanding but not a requirement that safety upgrades will be made to the rifle range — will give the club and its neighbors a framework for a compromise.

"I don't think it has to go to court," he told gun club proponents and concerned neighbors.

Valnes agreed, saying "that's what we've been trying for since the beginning."

Gun club attorney Jon Haverly said he will present the County Commission's decision to gun club members, and he thinks a workable agreement can be reached.



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