

State Parks Set Records In 2013

PIERRE (AP) — Visitation and camping in South Dakota's state parks reached all-time highs in 2013 for the second year in a row.

The biggest draws were Custer State Park in the Black Hills, and Lewis and Clark Recreation Area near Yankton, the state Department of Game, Fish and Parks said Wednesday. The two parks also set their own records for number of visitors, at 1.9 million and 1.2 million, respectively.

Both parks are major draws for out-of-state visitors. Visitation there made up nearly 40 percent of the 7.8 million park visitors statewide last year.

Camping numbers also increased across the state, up 3.2 percent from 2012.

"A lot of people took to the outdoors in 2013," State Parks Director Doug Hofer said in a statement. "Plus, it was a great year for fishing, which boosted use especially at the Missouri River parks."

South Dakota's newest park, Good Earth State Park at Blood Run, near Sioux Falls, officially became a state park last July. It attracted more than 20,000 visitors in its first year.

"For 20,000 people to visit the park, without any facilities or services yet, indicates a bright future," Hofer said.

Blood Run was designated a national historic landmark in 1970. The area along the Big Sioux River was used by thousands of Oneota Indians into the early 1700s. Archaeologists believe that Blood Run, a term coined by European explorers because of the nearby creek's reddish-colored water, was used as early as 6,500 B.C. The area includes a large oak forest, rolling hills, flood plains, riverside bluffs and burial mounds.

Ex-Sioux Falls Teacher Arrested

SIoux FALLS (AP) — A former Sioux Falls middle school teacher is accused of having a sexual relationship with a 14-year-old girl.

Sioux Falls police say 33-year-old Tonya Marie Drueppel, of Sioux Falls, is charged with three counts of 4th-degree rape and two counts of sexual contact with a child under 16.

The investigation started Jan. 22 when police received a referral from the Department of Social Services.

According to a court document, the relationship started in 2012 when Drueppel was an Axtell Park Middle School teacher. The district says she was with the district from 2009 through the end of the last school year.

Drueppel is in jail on a \$500,000 cash bond. Her first court appearance is scheduled for Thursday. It wasn't clear if she had an attorney.

Regulators OK Tweak In Neb. Nuke Plant's Flood Plan

BY JOSH FUNK

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — Federal regulators have approved a small change in a Fort Calhoun's flood preparations and they plan to re-examine the worst-case scenario for flooding at the Nebraska nuclear plant.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission license change issued Wednesday should ensure Fort Calhoun shuts down quickly enough to be protected in a flood. NRC spokeswoman Lara Uselding said the change reflects an issue identified before the 2011 Missouri River flooding and it will make the nuclear plant's flood plan more conservative.

The Omaha Public Power District-owned plant will now shut down whenever the river rises to 1,004 feet above sea level. Previously, the plan didn't require shutdown until the water reached 1,009 feet above sea level.

In 2011, flood waters reached 1,006 feet above sea level and surrounded the nuclear plant on the banks of the Missouri River, which had already been shut down for maintenance and several safety violations. Fort Calhoun's main power plant buildings are at 1,004 feet above sea level.

At the height of the flooding, OPPD erected a network of barriers and set up an assortment of pumps to help protect its buildings. But the plant, 20 miles north of Omaha, remained dry inside.

The concern with flooding is that the water could damage a nuclear plant's equipment and possibly disable its electrical and cooling systems. Without cooling for an extended period, a nuclear plant core could be damaged and harmful radiation might be released.

Fort Calhoun remained shut down

from April 2011 until December while officials assessed and repaired flood damage and addressed regulatory violations.

OPPD had to deal with a small electrical fire in June 2011, address structural concerns and retrain workers to respond aggressively to safety concerns.

OPPD officials did not immediately respond to questions Wednesday.

Uselding said OPPD has plans in place to protect Fort Calhoun in a flood at least up to 1,014 feet above sea level.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers estimates that floodwaters would reach 1,014 feet above sea level if either the Oahe or Fort Randall dams fail at a time when there is already flooding near Fort Calhoun.

But that flood estimate doesn't address what might happen in the unlikely event of the dam closest to the nuclear power plant — Gavin's Point dam on the South Dakota-Nebraska border — failing.

An internal NRC memo examining the flood threat at Fort Calhoun that environmental groups obtained in 2012 said that dam failure upriver from Fort Calhoun could create flooding as high as 1,060 feet above sea level.

NRC officials have said that worst-case scenario report was preliminary. The agency is in the process of reviewing the threat that flooding and other natural disasters present to the nation's nuclear plants. Nebraska's two nuclear plant operators are due to submit a report on the risks to regulators this spring.

The state's other nuclear power plant, Nebraska Public Power District's Cooper station, also sits along the Missouri River, but it faces less risk of flooding because it sits on higher ground next to the river near Brownville, Neb. Cooper nuclear power plant is also about 100 miles downriver from Fort Calhoun.

School Employee 'Evals' OK'd To Be Confidential

BY BOB MERCER

State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — The general public wouldn't be allowed to view evaluations of teachers, principals and other employees of public schools in South Dakota under a measure approved Wednesday by the state House of Representatives.

State law requires school districts to conduct the evaluations. The confidentiality protection was requested by the state Department of Education.

Rep. Tim Johns, R-Lead, said most personnel information already is exempt from disclosure under South Dakota public-records laws.

Johns said the evaluation process would be inhibited if the evaluation records were open to public inspection.

The vote was 48-17 in favor. The legislation, HB 1030, moves to the Senate.

Rep. Isaac Latterell, R-Tea, offered an amendment that the confidentiality would be waived if an evaluation record were used for some other purpose.

But Rep. Christine Erickson, R-Sioux Falls, said the amendment could inadvertently open the way to compromising information about students. "It's my right to protect my child," she said.

Opposition also rose from Rep. Kathy Tyler, R-Big Stone City, and from Johns. He said the amendment was too broad and state law already provides the opportunity to appeal for disclosure of a confidential record.

Latterell responded that the original legislation is too broad in its protection. House Speaker Brian Gosch ruled that the amendment failed on a voice vote.

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5-7pm – Domestic Beers \$1.50
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Friday
Glazed Pork Loin Serving 5:30-8:00
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5th Annual Lesterville Winter Ball
Saturday, February 8th
Social Time: 7:00-7:30pm
Dance: 7:30-11:30pm
Formal attire preferred, casual dress accepted.
Special Guests
5th Anniversary Drawing
Advance Tickets:
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