

Western S.D. Forest Fire 5 Percent Contained

SPEARFISH (AP) — The Crow Peak Trail in western South Dakota’s Black Hills remains closed as crews battle a forest fire.

The Crow Peak Fire sparked by lightning on Saturday had grown to 70 acres Monday evening and was only 5 percent contained.

The blaze is in rugged terrain southwest of Spearfish. Firefighters are working on the ground and in the air. No evacuations have been ordered.

Officials say lightning also touched off two smaller fires over the weekend. The National Weather Service has issued a fire weather watch for western South Dakota for much of Tuesday due to anticipated low humidity and gusty winds.

Warm Weather Starting To Stress Some Crops

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — Crop development continues to be well ahead of the average in South Dakota, but a lack of moisture caused some crop conditions to decline.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture says in its weekly crop and weather report that temperatures were warmer than average for the third consecutive week. Warm temperatures are starting to cause stress on some crops.

Corn had an average height of 28 inches, ahead of the five year average of 16 inches, with 97 percent of the crop cultivated or sprayed once and 50 percent cultivated or sprayed twice.

Soybeans were at 11 percent blooming, ahead of the five year average of 1 percent.

Neb. Woman Accused Of Hiding Death Freed

MADISON, Neb. (AP) — A prosecutor has dropped the case filed against a northeast Nebraska woman accused of concealing her husband’s death.

A judge granted a motion on Monday to dismiss the charge facing Jeanne Fry, of Madison.

County Attorney Joe Smith says the 64-year-old Fry has already spent six months in jail while her case was working its way through the courts. He also says Fry had been released on bond and was doing well in a community-based mental health program in Norfolk.

Fry had pleaded not guilty to a felony charge of concealing human remains.

Fry was arrested in November after the decomposing body of her 63-year-old husband, Jack, was found under a blanket in their camper at a Madison campground.

Schrempp: Regs Could Have Saved Fighter’s Life

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — A South Dakota lawmaker says a Sturgis man who died after a mixed martial arts match last month could still be alive if the state had a commission that regulates boxing and other fighting sports.

Democratic Rep. Dean Schrempp tells The *Argus Leader* that the death of 26-year-old Dustin Jensen in Rapid City shows why the state needs a commission. Schrempp has been involved in the sport for 50 years, both as a boxer and trainer. He also referees sanctioned matches in North Dakota.

Schrempp says Jensen would not have been allowed to fight in sanctioned matches, based on the number of fights he’d been in and the fact he had been knocked out less than three months before his last fight.

Professor Experiments With Grassy Roots

BY NANCY HICKS
Lincoln Journal Star

LINCOLN, Neb. — Students from western Nebraska will feel right at home on the newest green roof in downtown Lincoln.

They will wander through a meadow of native grasses — much of it from the Sandhills — atop Parkhaus, the apartment and parking garage complex being built at 13th and Q streets.

Richard Sutton, agronomy, horticulture and landscape architect professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, is using the 6,000-square-foot area on top of the parking garage for his research.

Sutton planted the first seeds this spring during construction of the building that eventually will be home to about 180 residents — most likely UNL students.

Some students with apartments on the eighth floor will look out over the hairy grama, sun sedge and little bluestem in the green roof garden.

For five years, Sutton has been planting grass on three other Lincoln rooftops, looking for native grasses that will flourish in that environment and provide a less expensive alternative to the traditional sedum.

The ultimate goal is to develop seeds for native grasses that flourish on rooftops, then market the seeds, much like the university does for wheat and corn.

It’s a long process that includes sending out the seeds to others for trials.

“Maybe by the time I retire we will have some of these (seeds) released,” he said.

The Parkhaus green roof, atop the parking garage area, will have a sedum border against the building for a fire break.

The interior of the rooftop will be an assortment of low-maintenance native grasses, requiring once-a-year mowing, and watering on demand, generally only in a drought.

The Parkhaus soil, from 4 to more than 6 inches deep, is a mixture of expanded shale and clay (looks like gravel but is much lighter), plus bits of sand and some compost.

On the Parkhaus roof, Sutton experimented in the planting itself, using a garden seeder that drops the seeds into the ground, spacing them.

He’s hoping that will be faster and more effective than hand planting, where seeds tend to get clumped, resulting in competition and smaller plants.

Sutton used a stopwatch to time the planting at Parkhaus. He doesn’t have the actual comparisons finished, but he’s guessing the garden seeder is three times faster than on-your-knees hand planting.

And Sutton is focusing on seeds because they’re cheaper than plants. Think about the cost of sodding or seeding a lawn.

One goal of his research is to reduce the cost of rooftop planting from \$15 per square foot to closer to \$5, so more buildings will be topped by an environmentally friendly green.

Green roofs originated in Germany in the early 1970s, where they initially were used to clean rainwater of pollution, Sutton said.

In downtown Lincoln, where 99 percent of the surface is hard street, sidewalk and building, green roofs help slow rain runoff and help avoid flash flooding.

Sutton remembers a big storm several years ago when the stormwater lapped against the Grand Theater wall.

The soil on rooftops soaks up the rain, and the plants keep the soil from blowing away.

Plants also help keep rooftops cool, providing potential energy savings, Sutton said.

The early green roofs in the United States used what the Germans used — sedum — a succulent leafed ground cover that retains moisture.

Sutton remembers a retired professor who suggested at a 1985 prairie conference that green roofs should be prairie grass.

Sutton, who has worked on prairie restoration, was inspired by a Minneapolis green roof planted in a native grass that grew on the cliffs along the Mississippi.

The Parkhaus is Sutton’s first experimental green roof with people living nearby.

He is concerned about the combination of people and research.

“I sure hope they don’t throw Frisbees on it.”

Neb. College Uses ‘Bait Bikes’ To Catch Crooks

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus police have been using GPS-equipped “bait bikes” to catch thieves.

Sgt. John Backer told the *Lincoln Journal Star* that the department has been using the GPS trackers since late 2010.

Stolen bikes aren’t the biggest problem on campus, Backer said, but he described it as “one of the most prevalent and persistent.”

“We try to focus our efforts on the crimes students have to deal with, and (bike theft) is a top spot for that,” Backer said.

Ninety-three bicycle thefts were reported on campus in 2011, down from 115 the year before. Backer said it’s too soon to say whether the drop will continue. The annual average is 94.5 bike thefts.

There’s always a jump in the thefts each fall, Backer said, and another, smaller spike in April and May as the spring semester draws to a close.

The use of bait bikes isn’t new on campus, he said. Previously, one officer would watch the bait bike while another was stationed nearby to chase down and catch the thief.

The GPS unit makes the process more efficient, Backer said.

The department doesn’t run the GPS operation during cold winter days, lest the GPS units be damaged. The theft rate also slows in winter, he said.

The department uses bicycles it has acquired as abandoned property. They’re just average bikes, Backer said, because average bikes are what are being stolen.

The bikes are left unlocked in public spots and usually are stolen within five hours.

When the GPS unit shows a bike has moved beyond a set perimeter, police dispatch is notified and officers move in, often catching the thief still astride the stolen prize.

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