

Officials At Mount Rushmore Urge Fire Caution

MOUNT RUSHMORE NATIONAL MEMORIAL (AP) — Officials at Mount Rushmore National Memorial are urging visitors to use fire caution around the park because of the high to extreme fire danger throughout the central and southern Black Hills.

They say that current conditions have the potential to bring about wildfires that can present a threat to both visitors and the park.

There are no current fire-related backcountry closures but visitors are urged to use caution as a small spark during dry conditions can easily spread into a wildfire.

Officials say smokers should be careful to properly extinguish and dispose of all smoking materials in an appropriate receptacle a safe distance from combustible materials.

Open fires are not permitted at the memorial.

Regents To Meet This Week In Aberdeen

ABERDEEN (AP) — The South Dakota Board of Regents is meeting this week in Aberdeen.

The regents plan to begin at 6 p.m. Tuesday with private executive sessions that run through 1:30 p.m. Wednesday.

The board's business meeting begins at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday at the Walter A. Hack Activities Building on the School for the Blind and Visually Impaired campus near Northern State University.

Topics will include a report on the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship, approval of new programs and site delivery requests and approval of tuition and fees for the new academic year starting July 2012.

Only 1 interested In 2 School Board Seats

BALTIC (AP) — Baltic is again canceling its school board election because of a lack of interest.

The *Argus Leader* reports that in 2010 and 2011, the number of available seats matched the number of candidates so no election was necessary.

This year, only one candidate is interested in two soon-to-be-open seats.

Veteran board members Ron Krogstad and Char Johnson are leaving at the end of their terms. Darin Larson is the lone candidate to turn in a petition before the Feb. 24 deadline, so he gets a three-year term.

The board is recruiting people for a one-year appointment.

Board president David Haagenson says he's disappointed that people seem less interested in getting involved.

Superintendent Bob Sittig says he sees it as a vote of confidence because there are no community concerns.

Nebraska Walleye Egg Collecting Begins Early

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Nebraska officials will be collecting walleye eggs earlier this year because of the recent warm weather.

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission says staffers will begin collecting walleyes Monday night at Sherman Reservoir, when the dam is closed, and then during that week at Merritt Reservoir and Lake McConaughy.

Anglers and boaters must avoid Game and Parks boats and nets at all three reservoirs.

At Lake McConaughy, a portion of the face of Kingsley Dam will be closed to fishing from sunset to sunrise. The northern third of the dam will be barred to bank and boat anglers.

It could take up to 10 days to gather the nearly 73.5 million eggs needed to meet walleye stocking requests for Nebraska waters this year.

Man Develops Smartphone 9-1-1 App

RAPID CITY (AP) — A graduate student has developed a smartphone application to provide medical information to emergency responders when someone calls 911.

Developer Peter Franz says when someone has the Notify application on his or her phone, the person's emergency contacts will be sent a text message if the person dials 911.

The message can pinpoint the person's location. It can also relay medical information about the caller — such as whether he or she has allergies.

Franz is chief executive officer of Quid Fit LLC of Rapid City. He's a graduate student at the South Dakota School of Mines. The application is making its debut Thursday.

Rapid City Fire Department training chief John Niehaus says the technology will help emergency responders get information "that's crucial to help save a life."

Nebraska

Budget Priorities Still Elusive

BY GRANT SCHULTE
Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — In a year with rising employment and a state cash surplus, Nebraska lawmakers are having a tougher time setting budget priorities than they did at the height of the recession.

Lawmakers have tangled this year over university project funding, payments for child welfare services and Gov. Dave Heineman's tax cut plan. Many entered the session hoping to use the state's \$63 million surplus for services aimed at helping poor or disabled residents, or to push tax incentives for businesses.

But the proposals have contributed to a logjam in the Legislature, and many bills have been scaled back. The governor's tax cut proposal, for example, has shrunk to one-third of its original size and triggered intense debates about what the state can afford.

Of the 104 measures chosen as "priority bills" this year, only three have won final legislative approval, leaving uncertainty about what will survive.

"Over the last few years, we were fighting because we didn't have any money," said state Sen. Lavon Heidemann, chairman of the budget-writing Appropriations Committee.

"Everybody stood up so well and became part of the solution, to make it all work."

"This year, there are all of these different ways people want to spend it. You throw the tax cut plan on top of that, and it's just been a difficult year."

"This year, there are all of these different ways people want to spend (state money). You throw the tax cut plan on top of that, and it's just been a difficult year."

SEN. LAVON HEIDEMANN

The economic downturn forced lawmakers into a special session in 2009, to slice \$334 million from the two-year budget that they had passed earlier that year. Heineman called the session after a sharp decline in state revenue and proposed a 2.5 percent across-the-board cut to most state agencies. Those cuts deepened to 5 percent the following fiscal year.

Speaker of the Legislature Mike Flood said many lawmakers began this year's legislative session with an expectation that the state's revenue projections would improve. The Nebraska Economic Forecasting Advisory Board voted in February to leave its estimates unchanged, citing a strong farm economy but weak retail sales.

Lawmakers, as a result, will have no more money at their disposal than what was shown in earlier forecasts. Plus, there's a projected \$460 million shortfall for the next budget cycle, which has prompted a debate over what they can afford right now.

Flood, of Norfolk, said the Appropriations

Committee submitted a "very responsible, fair budget" to lawmakers.

"In the last four years, we've been on the downside of the economy and there hasn't been much to fight about, other than where do we cut," Flood said. "When you have four years of trimmed budgets, you have folks who want to make sure we're taking care of our core responsibilities, and some who would like to restore funding for some of the cuts have been made."

Flood said lawmakers have spent more time on the budget this year than in his previous five years as speaker. Uncertainty about many of the proposals and extensive debate has contributed to the backlog of legislation deemed priorities, and senators have only 11 days remaining in the scheduled 60-session.

"We're not behind schedule yet, but this coming week is going to be very important," Flood said. "I think that's an understatement."

Bellevue Sen. Abbie Cornett, chairwoman of the Legislature's Revenue Committee, said she expects more debate on the governor's tax-cut bill, which she introduced on his behalf. Lawmakers advanced the measure last week, 36-6, through the first of three required votes. She said she was unsure whether the budget issues would generate more debate.

"One side of me says I'd like to be optimistic that we are through a lot of the tough, tough discussion," Cornett said. "But I don't want to be too optimistic and get surprised."

Nebraska lawmakers are set to vote one final time Tuesday on their main, budget-adjusting bills.

Neb. Ethanol Plants Still Boosting Production

BY JOSH FUNK
AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. — Nebraska's ethanol industry continues to expand along with the overall industry, but unlike a few years ago when new plants were being announced on a regular basis, the expansion today has taken on a new form.

Now the state's 24 ethanol plants are gradually adding to their roughly 2 billion gallon annual capacity by becoming more efficient.

"The most efficient way to add production is at existing plants," said Todd Sneller, Nebraska Ethanol Board administrator.

Nebraska continues to rank second nationally in ethanol production, with the capacity to make 2.1 billion gallons of the fuel from 700 million bushels of corn each year.

The Renewable Fuels Association trade group doesn't list any new ethanol plants under construction in Nebraska currently. Just five years ago, more ethanol plants were under construction than were operating in the state. In January 2007, Nebraska plants had 655.5 million gallons capacity while plants capable of producing 965

million gallons were under construction.

One way Nebraska's ethanol plants are improving their capacity is by upgrading their railroad shipping facilities so they'll be able to load more cars at once.

The KAAPA Ethanol plant near Minden is completing a 20,000 foot rail loop that will allow it to load a 96-car train with ethanol instead of just a single car.

That translates into a significant improvement in efficiency for KAAPA, CEO Chuck Woodside told the *Hastings Tribune*.

Shipping entire trains of ethanol cuts the transit time to 10 days. Previously, a single car of ethanol from the KAAPA plant might take more than 30 days to reach its destination.

"In the case of the 96-car train, it's hooked up here and it's not disconnected till it gets there," Woodside said.

Most Nebraska ethanol plants either have the capacity to load entire trains now or have included land for the needed rail track within their plant design, Sneller said.

Another way ethanol capacity is growing is plants that closed when some companies failed during the recession are now being

renovated and reopened. It's cheaper to use those existing facilities than to build new.

Right now, Kansas City, Mo.-based Spectrum Business Ventures is working to revive a shuttered ethanol plant near Mead in eastern Nebraska that will add 25 million gallons capacity when it reopens this spring.

The state's corn-based ethanol plants are also working boost production with improved recipes and enzymes, Sneller said. And when methods are perfected to use cellulose fuels instead of grain, ethanol plants will probably look at adding that capability to their operations.

But expansion in the ethanol industry may slow in the near future until the country can come up with a way to use more of the fuel. The U.S. ethanol industry is already capable of producing 15 billion gallons every year.

Sneller said that's more than enough to account for 10 percent of the nation's fuel supply. In most cases, gasoline that is mixed with ethanol includes 10 percent ethanol.

"We've reached a saturation point," Sneller said.

The ethanol industry hopes the Environmental Protection Agency will approve the use of as much as

15 percent ethanol in a gallon of gas, so more of the fuel can be blended with gasoline. And the industry is lobbying to increase the number of flex fuel vehicles sold because those vehicles can handle fuel that's up to 85 percent ethanol.

The driver for continued expansion of the industry is the national renewable fuels standard, which will require 36 billion gallons of biofuels to be blended into gasoline by 2022, including 16 billion gallons of cellulosic ethanol.

Referral

From Page 1

cause they have reached term limits of eight years in a chamber.

"It would be nice to utilize that expertise and knowledge base for a bit longer with the idea of doing some long-range planning," Lust said.

The Legislature every year appoints committees to study particular issues for a single summer, but those committees don't have time to study long-term policy, Lust said. The new planning committee, with members serving for two years or more, would take an extended look at key issues so the Legislature could compete with the governor and state agencies in setting policy, he said.

"To me, this is the Legislature internally saying we're going to do things differently," Lust said.

House Democratic Leader

Bernie Hunhoff said having people stay on the planning committee a year after they leave the House or Senate would help provide continuity to the study of policy. He said lawmakers in each year's two-month legislative session have no time to deal with big issues because they're busy dealing with 500 or so specific bills.

Hunhoff, a co-sponsor of the planning committee bill, said it could have one of the biggest impacts of anything passed during

this year's legislative session. For example, the committee could look for better ways to fund education or promote economic development, he said.

"We need something that goes on year after year, tackling the tough issues that are really important to South Dakotans," Hunhoff said.

The law creating the planning committee says the panel will collect and analyze information dealing with demographics, education, labor, revenue, natural resources,

trends and the efficiency of government. Its members would include the speaker of the House, the Senate president pro tempore, a member of the Appropriations Committee, and the chair of the Executive Board, which is a panel that manages administrative issues for the Legislature.

The part Liss objects to provides that seven other members would be appointed to the planning committee for two-year periods, ending in January of even-numbered years. He said a

lawmaker appointed in January could lose a bid for re-election in November, and then serve on the panel for another year.

"My argument isn't with planning. Planning is all well and good. We should find ways to do that. But we should have elected representatives to do that, not former legislators who are sticking around," Liss said. "That sort of thing should go before a vote of the people."

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