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# PRESSE DAKOTAN



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# Neb. Wildfires Burning Holes In Budgets

Extreme Heat And Drought Being Blamed For Higher Numbers Of Fires

#### BY GRANT SCHULTE Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Wildfires blamed on extreme heat and drought this summer have strained the budgets of rural Nebraska fire departments, forcing many to dip into cash reserves as they race from one monstrous wildfire to another.

Departments have seen their truck maintenance and fuel costs soar as they respond to fires burning in western and central Nebraska. Local flare-ups extinguished with help from nearby towns have given way to massive blazes that have drawn federal, state and local crews from as far as 350 miles away.

Some of the smallest departments have logged thousands of miles more than normal as they crisscrossed the state.

In August, six fires burned an estimated 94 square miles around Lake Mc-Conaughy in western Nebraska, the state's largest reservoir. In July, three wildfires in north-central Nebraska blackened nearly 120 square miles and destroyed more than a dozen homes. And last week, crews rushed to northwest NeMinden, in south-central Nebraska, drove five-and-a-half hours to assist with a fire near the northwest town of Rushville. Firefighters in Thedford have spent an estimated \$10,000 on fuel alone, compared to \$1,500 in a typical summer, and responded to about 40 fire calls when they normally receive eight or 10.

Local crews in Brown County have already blown through their \$155,000 annual firefighting budget, said Ainsworth Fire Chief Brad Fiala. The department has responded to nearly 75 blazes so far this year, compared to roughly 55 in a normal year.

Beside the number of fires, some have been far more severe, with flames up to 130 feet high and blazes that roared through at 50 to 60 mph.

"This has to be the worst season I've ever seen," said Fiala, a 28-year veteran firefighter who has spent the last four years as chief. "The changing winds. The heat. You see the craziest fire behavior."

Problems started early this year, with fires breaking out in June rather than the normal July or August because of dry grasslands and forests. Fire officials said

## WHEN CHARLIE BECAME BRAVO



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D

Spc. Robert Buechler holds the Charlie Battery guidon at the start of Sunday's re-flagging ceremony at the Yankton Armory. The Charlie Battery guidon was encased and the Bravo Battery was uncased as the South Dakota National Guard unit took on the new name under SDNG reorganization.

## Local Unit Officially Becomes Bravo Battery Of The S.D.N.G

braska for three other fires near the Panhandle city of Chadron.

To aid in fighting the fires, a crew from

WILDFIRES | PAGE 2

### Agency Looks At Boost In Hunting, Fishing Fees

SIOUX FALLS (AP) — South Dakota wildlife officials are considering seeking an increase in hunting and fishing license fees because the agency's costs have increased 18 percent since the fees were last raised in 2005, State Wildlife Director Tony Leif said.

Game, Fish and Parks Department officials are now preparing a budget request for next year. If they decide to seek a license fee increase, they will do so at the Oct. 45 meeting of the Game, Fish and Parks Commission, which oversees the department.

Strong license sales since the last fee

increase have allowed the department to offset rising costs to this point, Leif said. But revenue has declined slightly each of the past two years, and a third dip is expected this year, he said.

Leif said the department took in \$27.4 million from hunting and fishing license sales in 2009, but revenue is projected to fall to \$26.3 million this year.

Adult residents now pay \$51 for a combination fishing and small-game hunting license that includes pheasants. Nonresident hunters pay \$114 for a smallgame license that lets them shoot pheasants.

#### BY RANDY DOCKENDORF randy.dockendorf@yankton.net

What's in a name?

For the Yankton-based Charlie Battery, its name carries with it a great deal of history.

The unit has worn the Charlie Battery designation with pride for the past 44 years, both in wartime and during crises on the homefront.

On Sunday, that era ended for the South Dakota National Guard (SDNG) unit. In a re-flagging ceremony at the Yankton armory, the unit encased its Charlie Battery guidon and uncased its new Bravo Battery guidon. The change was created under SDNG reorganization.

Cpt. Josh Smith, the Charlie Battery commander, said the simple act carried a huge significance.

"During the ceremony, it really hit me — Charlie Battery is going away," he told the Press & Dakotan. "It's the same people, same unit, same mission. But it's a different name, and there is symbolism to that."

Smith said he appreciated his role in Charlie Battery's history.

"The past two years have been the most gratifying years of my military career," he said. "It has been a special opportunity and privilege being the last Charlie Battery commander in the unit's 44-year history."

Smith said he was struck by the unit's talent, work ethic and cohesiveness during his command.

"In July 2010, when I first walked into this armory and met the soldiers, I was enthusiastic about the unlimited

GUARDS | PAGE 14

# This Was Only A Drill ... In Order To Save Lives



RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D

Rescuers analyze the accident scene during Saturday's disaster drill at Chan Gurney airport. About 70 emergency responders took part in the drill, which simulated a two-plane crash and chemical contamination with six victims.

## LEPC Annual Disaster Drill Held At Chan Gurney Simulated An Airplane Crash

#### BY RANDY DOCKENDORF

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Bill Lucht and his sons, Ryan and Jordan, screamed in pain at the airport accident site. Another boy, Dylan Kortan, lay unconscious and covered in blood.

Nearby, Kathy Brown sustained a chest wound and lacerations to her face and hands. A boy, Micah Davenport, suffered as the sixth victim.

Emergency crews arrived in response to the gory scene. The chore was made more difficult by chemical contamination and the pre-dawn darkness.

"Units, we have a report of an airplane crash," the dispatcher reported in response to the call. Fortunately, the dispatcher was able to add the words, "This is a drill."

The annual disaster drill was held Saturday morning at Chan Gurney Airport in Yankton. The simulated airplane crash used two vehicles as the "aircraft," but the "victims" were instructed to create a real-life scenario. They were extracted from the vehicles, then taken through a hazardous materials tent for decontamination.

Utica mayor Cherie Hoffman, a member of the Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC), organized the drill. While some parts of the scenario may have been known to participants, many of the top officials didn't even know the location, adding to the realism.

"I would guess that we had about 70 people

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RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D Ryan Lucht shows off his "wounds" following Saturday's disaster drill. Lucht and other members of Boy Scout Troop 102 portrayed "victims" in the drill, using the make-up and biting on blood pellets for a more realistic look.



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YANKTON RECYCLING THIS WEEK: SOUTH OF 15TH STREET

**OMORROW:** Community Shares Memories Of Late Nuns Contributions To Area