

VIEWPOINT

Stop the burn

Range fires prove costly to rural communities

As Barton County — and the rest of the Great Plains — continue to face the threat of rangeland fires, local officials are serious about controlling all the ignition sources they can.

That means everyone needs to understand the importance of controlling fire.

Vehicles need to stay out of overgrown areas so hot exhaust won't set a fire.

Trash needs to be disposed of properly, not burned.

Limbs and brush shouldn't be burned. Field burning needs to be put off.

People need to be careful.

It's so easy for a fire to get started and, if the conditions are favorable, to spread quickly, as the officials near Burton found out last week.

We've already had our share of close calls and we are living on borrowed time, without some significant moisture.

It's much easier for everyone to be careful so the fires don't get started in the first place than it will be for county firefighters to expend the effort and wear out equipment tracking down and fighting range fires.

Rural residents can do their share, and more, by keeping a close watch on conditions and reporting any indications of fire while there's still a chance for it to be contained.

In the Burton area there were tens of thousands of acres burned. It's hard to say what that size of a fire costs the area communities, but it's not cheap. Prevention is well worth the effort.

— Chuck Smith

▼ EDITORIAL ROUNDUP

Talk the talk, now do something about it

President Bush's call to reduce the United States' addiction to oil is not something new, as presidents have spoken out for oil independence for decades.

Wind power could certainly be an effective alternative source. In Kansas, the controversy over wind power has brought out friends and foes. However, there has to be a compromise to preserve the uniqueness of the Flint Hills, as well as supplying power to our state and nation.

If the president's words are more than talk, our nation could look forward to greater energy independence because we will have a wider range of energy sources.

However, it is going to take more than words to push this effort forward. The rapid rise in oil prices in the past several years should have been enough impetus for Congress and the White House to work on energy legislation.

While the president pointed out the importance of reducing our oil use from the Middle East, it should be pointed out that we also depend on supplies from South America and Africa, where both regions experience political instability.

The importance for research funds for alternative energy sources can't be underestimated. As China, India and Russia expand their economies, the demand for oil will be an increasing problem for the United States.

Our move toward less dependence on foreign oil is essential if we are going to continue to be a world power. Let's hope the president's speech wasn't just rhetoric.

— The (Junction City) Daily Union



Being single on Valentine's Day isn't so bad

As I sit here, banging away on my computer, my e-mail pops up to notify me that I have mail. I click and open the umpteenth spam advertisement telling me for only \$64.95, their "sweetheart package" will help me win the undying love of my significant other.

I don't have a significant other. You might think being a single person I would view Valentine's Day with some disdain or even forlorn, but I don't.

Being single takes a lot of stress out of the holiday, even helps me appreciate my current lack of a sweetheart.

Don't get me wrong, I am all for romantic cards, boxes of candy, and those helium-filled balloons. It's just, with all the commercialism, and expectations associated with Feb. 14, it's a whole lot easier to buy my own chocolate.

Several years ago, after making my obligatory purchases, I saw a guy coming out of the store.

He had an over-sized card, and an elaborate looking box of candy in one hand. In the other he was leading one of those large heart-shaped balloons, the ones with the black accordion arms and legs that appeared to walk.

It was a little windy outside. As

he cleared the doors, a gust of wind ripped the balloon character out of his hand and the race was on.

With the first gust, Balloon Man gained 20-feet in altitude, and 10-yards on the ground.

As the gust died down, the balloon returned to a slow trot across the parking lot, and the hapless romantic tried to make up some ground.

Each time he would close the gap to four or five feet, the wind would pick up and the escaping balloon would leap another 10 yards.

About the third leap, he dropped the card, and the wind pushed it to its own flight for freedom. The pursuer hesitated for a second, and then clutched his last remaining purchase in both hands and took off after the fleeing balloon.

As the pair repeated their leapfrog chase across the lot, it almost looked like the balloon was glancing back to taunt its pursuer.

The last that I saw of them, Balloon Man was gaining altitude heading toward eight lanes of traffic.

Mr. Romantic was flailing along behind with his box of candy, heading for the ditch at the end of the parking lot.

Cars obscured my view so I couldn't see any more.

Terry Spradley



Since that day, when Feb. 14 rolls around and I find myself with no one to send a card to, I think about that hapless romantic.

I envision him laying on a gurney in an emergency room somewhere. He is offering up a flattened box of chocolates with a tire track down the middle from one hand, in the other, he is clutching one black accordion leg.

It is a whole lot easier being single for Valentine's Day.

Don't get me wrong, I like boxes of candy and helium-filled balloons, but I think I will wait until tomorrow to start looking for a new significant other.

The candy is all 50 percent off, and those helium-filled balloons have just a little less fight in them.

(Terry Spradley is a reporter for the Great Bend Tribune. His e-mail address is tspradley@gbtribune.com)



▼ PUBLIC FORUM

Hunting rules can save lives

Dear Editor,
The hunting accident in which Vice President Dick Cheney shot a fellow hunter while hunting quail on a Texas ranch illustrates the need for hunter safety and good old common sense.

A primary rule to be followed by a hunter is: Never point any gun at anything you don't intend to shoot.

And, a primary rule for companions in the nearby

area is: Announce yourself before coming near another hunter with a weapon.

Too often those rules aren't followed.

Whether it be in Texas or in Kansas — obeying a couple of simple rules can prevent needless accidents.

James A. Marples, Esbon

Kansas needs to revamp equipment tax

Dear Editor:
We need to find a way to leverage our state's great strengths into economic growth.

Kansas has excellent roads, a good educational system, bountiful natural resources, a positive regulatory environment and solid economic develop tools.

Unfortunately, our wonderful state has yet to take full advantage of these attributes and many areas of Kansas lag the national economic recovery that is occurring all around us.

Our citizens and businesses deserve better.

An excellent way to spur capital investment and economic growth would be to eliminate the investment tax on new machinery and business equipment.

To date this personal property tax on new capital investments puts Kansas at a disadvantage when com-

paring itself to other states, which do not have this impediment to financial growth.

Currently, the Kansas Legislature and the governor are considering this improvement to the Kansas tax climate for employers.

I encourage these leaders to make Kansas more attractive to capital investment in our economy by repealing this tax on growth.

Repealing this tax will primarily help small businesses, which account for the vast majority of newly created jobs. Spurring economic growth for Kansas employers will benefit all Kansans in the long-run.

S. Lewis Ebert, president & CEO, Kansas Chamber of Commerce, Topeka

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

Hair on display

(1) Pontypool, Wales, bus driver Mark Davis had his hair colored red, with an actual (small) fir Christmas tree woven in, along with a string of lights (according to a December BBC News report, with photo). "It gives everyone a laugh," he said, but "it's very difficult to sleep with it." (2) An October profile in the *Jamaica Star* reported on barber Darain Housen, 40, who is well-known in St. Thomas parish as the guy who has shaped his bristly hair in the form of a baseball cap, with the bill extending out a couple of inches over his forehead.

Cultural diversity

In South Korea, which has the highest rate of high-speed Internet use in the world, more than one-third of the population plays video games, with the result an alarming number of obsessive gamers requiring counseling (and, so far, two deaths after, respectively, 50 and 86 straight hours of playing). According to an October Associated Press dispatch from Seoul, at the many Internet cafes, gamers "typically live on instant (noodles) and cigarettes, barely sleeping and seldom washing." Video games are also a spectator sport: Three cable channels show matches, and the government is building an electronic-sports "stadium," where competitions will be shown on big screens.

(Send your *Weird News* to Chuck Shepherd, P.O. Box 18737, Tampa Fla., 33679 or go to www.newsoftheweird.com.)

Send letters via e-mail: email@gbtribune.com

Where to write the lawmakers

President George W. Bush, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW Washington, D.C. 20500. 202-456-1414 Fax: 202-456-2461. president@whitehouse.gov
U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20510. 202-224-4774. pat_roberts@roberts.senate.gov
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20510. 202-224-6521. sam_brownback@brownback.senate.gov
U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 1st District, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C., 20515. 202-225-2715. Hays office, 785-628-6401. jerry.moran@mail.house.gov
Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, 2nd Floor, State Capitol, Topeka, 66612. 785-296-3232. www.ksgovernor.org
Kansas senators or representatives: State Capitol, Topeka, 66612. 785-296-0111. Legislative hot line: 800-432-3924. For e-mail addresses, see www.kslegislature.org/senateroster/index.html or www.kslegislature.org/house-roster/index.html