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An Ear to the Ground:

Appreciating our Wildland Fire Units

By Walt Bones
 SD Secretary of Agriculture

As I was growing up in southeastern South Dakota, prairie and forest fires were not a concern. Every once in a while, a trash fire might get away from us or maybe a bearing would go out on the baler and a red-hot ball bearing would start some grass on fire, but a couple of us with scoop shovels could take care of the situation.

But in the last year and a half, I have come to really appreciate the tireless dedication of the men and women that make up our Wildland Fire Division based in the Black Hills. As one of the

seven divisions of the South Dakota Department of Agriculture, they cooperate with local volunteer fire departments, independent contractors, and the U.S. Forest Service fire crews to protect the lives and property of our state's citizens.

When the situation gets real serious, they morph into one of the 33 National Type II Incident command teams with not only local, but also, regional responsibilities. In the past few months, they have answered calls to Wyoming (twice) and Colorado to help battle fires.

Their most recent assignment was on the Rosebud Indian Reservation where they coordinated 600 personnel with

ground and aerial resources to battle a fire that burned over 43,000 acres with no structures lost...an amazing accomplishment!

Last year's tragic loss of one of our own, and recently, the four airmen from a crash of the North Carolina Air National Guard C-130 helping us fight one of our fires, underscores the danger and risk inherent of firefighting, regardless of the location.

When our crews are not fighting fires, they are mitigating the dangers of wildland fire by thinning and removing fuels, going to training and conducting numerous training exercises for the volunteer fire departments all across

South Dakota.

As of Aug. 1, there have been 1,469 fires reported here in South Dakota, burning over 226,000 acres, making this one of the most active fire seasons on record. An average year burns about 52,000 acres.

I don't take fires for granted anymore and with our dry weather persisting, we are not out of the "fire season" yet. So, the next time you see your local public safety officials, thank them for putting their lives on the line for you, your family and your property.

Jackley questions Corps of Engineers' decision to charge South Dakota

Attorney General Marty Jackley reminds South Dakota citizens that on Aug. 27, from 4:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Ramkota Hotel, Pierre, the Corps of Engineers will conduct a public meeting to address the release and cost of surplus water on the Missouri River Reservoir System. The meeting will

address the Corps' plans to begin charging for stored water in the upper basin state reservoirs.

"Last summer, South Dakota experienced the flooding effect of a mismanaged Missouri River. To add insult to injury, the Corps is now proposing to exceed its congressional

authority and charge South Dakotans for what has long been recognized as our own water," Jackley said. "Should the Corps continue to disregard the state's legal water rights, as Attorney General I will be placed in the position of seeking court intervention to protect South Dakota's interests."

A draft environmental assessment has been completed identifying baseline environmental conditions and analyzes potential impacts from the proposed use of surplus water. The draft Surplus Water Reports recommended an administrative law rule making process be used to establish a

pricing methodology. The draft Surplus Water Reports and environmental assessments may be found at: http://www.nwo.usace.army.mil/html/pdf/Plan_Formulation/Review/review_plans.html

State Report Card now available; test scores remain steady

The 2012 Report Card, which details student progress on South Dakota's state assessment, is now available online.

There was a slight uptick in reading and math scores on this year's assessment, with 75.5 percent of students scoring either proficient or advanced in reading. That was up about one-tenth of a percentage point from last year. The percent of students scoring proficient or advanced in math went from 76.5 percent a year ago to 76.7 percent this year.

The Dakota STEP and Dakota STEP-A were administered to about 62,000 students in grades 3-8 and 11 last spring. The Dakota STEP-A is an alternate version of the assessment for students who have a significant cognitive disability.

South Dakota's statewide graduation rate was 83.16 percent, down only slightly from 83.39 percent last year. The graduation rate was calculated using the federally mandated four-year cohort

model. "This year marks a transition as we move forward with a new accountability system for South Dakota," said state Secretary of Education Dr. Melody Schopp. "Beginning with the 2012-13 school year, we will be looking at school performance in broader, more holistic terms, using multiple indicators to assess a school's performance."

The multiple indicators still include student achievement on state assessments, but that measure will be balanced with other factors, according to Schopp. In the long-term, schools will be evaluated using indicators such as academic growth of students, teacher and principal effectiveness, school climate, and college and career readiness at the high school level.

The 2012 Report Card, including district- and school-level results, is available on the Department of Education's web site at www.doe.sd.gov. Follow the "Report Card" link under "Quick Links" on the left-hand side of the page.

911 emergency surcharge collections and remittance reminder

The South Dakota Department of Revenue reminds all sellers of prepaid wireless services and telecommunication providers they should be complying with the new collection and remittance procedures for the 911 Emergency Surcharge and the new Prepaid Wireless 911 Emergency Surcharge.

As of July 1, 2012, any seller and wireless service provider that sells prepaid wireless service, which includes prepaid wireless airtime cards and prepaid wireless minutes and plans, is responsible for collecting and remitting the 2 percent Prepaid Wireless 911

Emergency Surcharge. The 911 Emergency Surcharge collected and remitted by all telecommunications service providers, wireless service providers, or Interconnected Voice over Internet Protocol Service providers increased to \$1.25 per service-user-line, per month, effective July 1.

All sellers of prepaid wireless services and all providers that collect and remit the 911 Emergency Surcharges are required to register with the South Dakota Department of Revenue, even if the seller already has a sales tax license. Sellers can register online in the Business Tax

section of the Department's website, <http://dor.sd.gov/> or call the Department at (800) 829-9188.

All surcharges will be remitted directly to the Department of Revenue on a monthly basis using SD EPath, an electronic filing system.

The first official filing date for the surcharges is August 23, 2012.

If you are a seller or wireless service provider and are not currently registered to collect and remit the 911 Emergency Surcharges, contact the South Dakota Department of Revenue at epath@state.sd.us or call (800) 829-9188.

Demolition derby added to S.D. State Fair

An invitation-only demolition derby has been added to the Monday, Sept. 3, racing action at the South Dakota State Fair Grandstand. Monster truck racing will begin at 11 a.m., with the demolition derby happening between the monster truck races. Stock car racing is scheduled for 5:30 p.m.

Monster trucks in attendance will be Nite Stalker, Evolution, Get'er Done, Clydesdale and Robo Machine.

Ticket prices for the monster truck racing and demolition derby are \$15 for adults and \$8 for youth. Ticket prices for the stock car racing are \$12 for adults and \$8 for youth. An adult ticket package is \$22, and a youth package is \$12. Tickets are on sale now.

Tickets purchased before Wednesday, Aug. 29, include gate admission to the State Fair on Monday, Sept. 3. Tickets can be purchased online at www.sdstatefair.com

<<http://www.sdstatefair.com>> or by calling (866) 605-3247 or at the ticket office.

The 2012 South Dakota State Fair will run from Thursday, Aug. 30, through Monday, Sept. 3. Channel Seeds Preview night will be Wednesday, Aug. 29. For more information on State Fair events, contact the Fair office at (800) 529-0900, visit www.sdstatefair.com <<http://www.sdstatefair.com/>> or find us on Facebook and Twitter.

SCHOLASTIC ACHIEVEMENTS

VALERIE ROBINSON RECEIVES NSU SCHOLARSHIP

Valerie Robinson, Vermillion, has been awarded a \$5,000 WolfPACT Scholarship from Northern State University in Aberdeen.



ROBINSON

Robinson is the daughter of Curt and Nancy Robinson. She is a graduate of Vermillion High School and will begin classes at NSU in fall 2012. She plans to major in elementary/special education.

WERGIN AWARDED SCHOLARSHIP AT SDSU

Nash Wergin of Vermillion

was awarded the Yellow and Blue Scholarship for the 2012-2013 academic year at South Dakota State University.



WERGIN

Wergin is an incoming freshman majoring in mechanical engineering at SDSU, the son of Rand and Vanessa Wergin and is a 2012 graduate of homeschooling, where he was an Eagle Scout and AWANA Leader.

USD GRADUATE SCHOOL AWARDS MUSKIE FELLOWSHIPS

Andrey Khomutovskiy of Petyrovlovsk, Kazakhstan and

Nadezhda Tsoy of Almaty, Kazakhstan have been awarded the prestigious Edmund S. Muskie Graduate fellowship through USD. This program brings emerging leaders in key professional fields from Eurasia to the United States for one to two years of graduate study at institutions in the United States. Khomutovskiy, who received his bachelor's degree in education at North Kazakhstan State, will be in the Master of Arts in Educational Administration program at USD while Tsoy, who graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Accounting from the Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research, will be in the Master of Business Administration program.

This is the first time the USD Graduate School has hosted Muskie Fellows.

and Polaris items. Western Trails has once again donated an eye-catching Montana Silver western buckle to be raffled off.

Bull-A-Rama pre-sale tickets are available in Vermillion at Hy-Vee, Pump-N-Pak and Freedom Value Store and in Yankton at Hy-Vee and Western Trails

This is just a warm up to the main event which begins Saturday, Aug. 25 at 7 p.m. at the rodeo grounds. The Bull-A-Rama will include sanctioned extreme bull riders, an open class event, steer riding for the youth, mutton bustin and the candy toss. There will be food stands operated by Hy-Vee, K & C Kettle Corn, Craig's Shave Ice and Hecks Dakota Style BBQ, as well as beer sales.

Clyde's Mechanical Bull and AlaBling will be available throughout the evening. In addition to selecting the winners of the numerous

raffles, there will be lots of items given away through the evening.

A fireworks display by Fireworks Unlimited will follow the conclusion of the bull riding, and everyone is encouraged to stay and dance to the music country band Riata, meet the members of the Clay County Rodeo Club and have a relaxing western style evening under the stars. Sunday morning will begin with an all-denominational outdoor Cowboy Church Service at 10 a.m., followed by a Trail Ride at noon which starts from the rodeo grounds and winds down along the beautiful Missouri River. The trail ride is free and all horse riders are encouraged to attend as the ride will be relaxing and very scenic. Following the trail ride there will be a pot luck meal back at the rodeo grounds.

An addition to the Sunday lineup this years is a ranch

rodeo, which will begin at 2 p.m. at the rodeo grounds and will showcase local riders in sorting, penning, and other ranch related cattle tasks. Spectators are encouraged to come and cheer on their friends and family as they try their best to be a "ranch cowboy". There is sure to be lots of laughter and fun in this free-to-watch event and it is intended to be a laid back family friendly afternoon.

This year's Bull-A-Rama would not be possible without the support of the community, the event's sponsors and generous donations. Organizers offer thanks to the following major sponsors: Double S Bulls, Jones' Ace Hardware, Hy-Vee, Budweiser, Premium Best Transport, Yankton Press & Dakotan, WNAX - the WOLF, Western Trails, Polaris, Fireworks Unlimited and Clay-Union Electric.

BULLS

From Page 1

Winterset, IA, will be there.

Bull-A-Rama organizers are pleased to include AlaBling fashions and accessories at Saturday's promotional event, along with Clyde's Mechanical Bull. The cost for mechanical bull rides is two tries for \$5 or a bracelet that is good for both the promo event and the evening event for \$20.

The Rodeo Club will also be selling the 19th Annual Bull-A-Rama T shirt and will have a huge assortment of raffle items. The raffle items include a men's package with a BBQ grill; and a ladies package with a purse, flip flops, a cowgirl tote, kitchen items and lots of gift certificates.

Other raffle items include several new Polaris helmets




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