

Bits and pieces . . .

Keep it fair: Don't allow extra meters for city's large water users

The following editorial was published in *The Scott County Record*.

If someone drives 4-5 times as many miles on our Kansas highways as the average person, and pays 4-5 times more in fuel taxes, or perhaps owns 2-3 vehicles, does that entitle them to special privileges?

Are they entitled to drive 10 mph faster than other people without getting a ticket? Do they get special parking spots in front of the grocery store or their favorite restaurant?

Of course, not. Yet, the Scott City Council is being asked to consider a similar proposal for high-end water users.

In an effort to get around sharply higher water rates that kick in at 60,000 gallons per month – and spike yet again at 80,000 gallons – it's been proposed that certain property owners be allowed to purchase a second water meter. In this way they can divide their usage between two meters and avoid the worst of the rate hike.

The argument made on behalf of these people is that they are entitled to this privilege because they are paying more in property taxes since they own larger homes and bigger lots.

You know...with wealth comes privilege.

As one council member noted, those households with 5-6 family members don't get a break in their water rates, even though they may be using less water per person than a household with just one or two people.

Councilman Jack Schmitt was more direct when he asked, "Just because you have the money, the huge house and you have the wherewith all, does that give you the right to use more water?"

Those who question the city's new water rate structure and conservation efforts by the city like to point out that all municipalities within the five-county Groundwater Management District No.1 use a total of just 7/10 of one percent of all groundwater in the district. Regardless of what conservation efforts these cities adopt, the impact on the

City of Ellis continues work to identify new water supply

The city of Ellis continues to evaluate finding another water source because the effects of the continuing drought. All but one of the city's wells have dramatically reduced capacity in 2013. The trend of declining water levels has continued over the past ten years.

Presently, Ellis gets some of its water supply from the Big Creek alluvium. But searching outside the alluvium is nearly taken for granted. The possibility of connecting into a pipeline owned by Trego County RWD 2 has also been considered. Locations for drilling and the cost of additional water well exploration have not been determined.

Ogallala Aquifer's lifespan will be minimal.

It's difficult to argue against that. And if municipalities were being asked to carry the entire burden for extending the life of the Ogallala, we would agree with their viewpoint. But we all benefit from the precious water resources below us and we all benefit by protecting the quality and the life of the aquifer.

While the success of a Local Enhanced Management Area (LEMA) within GWMD No. 1 will rest with farmers who rely on the Ogallala for irrigation, it's a responsibility that we all share – regardless of our economic status, the size of our home or the amount of land we own.

We already live in a society where wealth earns more than its share of privilege. The ability to use a precious resource such as water shouldn't fall into that same category.

City commission hikes water, sewer and trash rates all by 5 percent

The city of Independence recently approved a five percent across the board increase in water, sewer and trash rates. Total bills for all three utilities for an average family of four will increase from approximately \$43.54 per month to \$56.32 per month.

The sewer rate increase will help offset the \$200,000 to \$250,000 principal and interest payments required to pay off the \$4 million KDHE revolving loan the city was awarded. Many water lines in the city need to be replaced so the increased funds will be used to make those improvements, according to a report in the *Independence Daily Reporter*.

KDOT looks at closing rest areas near Russell

Water usage at the Interstate 70 rest area near Russell has nearly doubled in recent years and that has caused the Kansas Department of Transportation to develop plans to close both the east-bound and west-bound rest areas. According to a recent report in *The Hays Daily News*, the city of Russell has asked all water users to reduce water use by a fourth of its normal consumption.

The rest areas have shown a dramatic increase in water use. That increase in water use is largely the result of maintaining water levels in the waste lagoons, according to KDOT officials. Drought and lower usage in winter particularly increases the need to add water to the lagoons to maintain the water levels to make sure they function properly. The rest areas are near services in Russell and Bunker Hill. The public has been invited to comment, but barring a change of heart, the closings could take place as early as February 1.