Bits & Pieces

Girard residents see higher water rates

The city of Girard city council recently voted to increase water rates to customers both inside and outside the city limits. Customers inside the city limits had been paying $6 for the first thousand gallons and $3 per thousand gallons up to 75,000 gallons. All water use in excess of 75,000 was charged at $2.50 per thousand. Customers outside the city limits were charged $7 for the first two thousand gallons and $3.25 per thousand thereafter.

The new rates for customers inside the city limits will be $6 for the first thousand and $3.75 for each thousand gallons of water used up to 75,000 gallons. All water over 75,000 gallons will be charged $3.25 per thousand.

Customers outside the city limits will see a base increase to $7.50 for the first 2,000 gallons of water and $4.25 for every thousand thereafter.

The rate increase was prompted by an increase from Public Wholesale Water Supply District No. 11. The Public Wholesale increased rates to the city from $2.90 per thousand gallons to $3.50 per thousand gallons.

Leavenworth Waterworks Board increases rates

The Leavenworth Waterworks Board voted to increase water rates by about 1.5%. The increase will affect all but wholesale rates that exceed 1,000 units. A typical family's usage of eight units of water (about 6000 gallons) will see an increase of approximately 45 cents a month. The increase will take effect January 1.

The new rates result from a study evaluating costs of operation, future capital improvements and payments on a 20-year loan for capital improvements completed a the two water plants.

The Department continues to develop plans for a large water main from Leavenworth extending to the southern part of the county. The project has an estimated cost of $3 million. The board expects to recoup its costs over the next 20 years through increased water sales.

Columbus sets sewer & water rate increase

Sewer rates in the city of Columbus in extreme southeast Kansas will increase by 50 cents and water rates will increase by 25 cents per month. The sewer rate increase 25 cents in September and there will another 25 cents on January 1. The water rate increase will be implemented January 1.

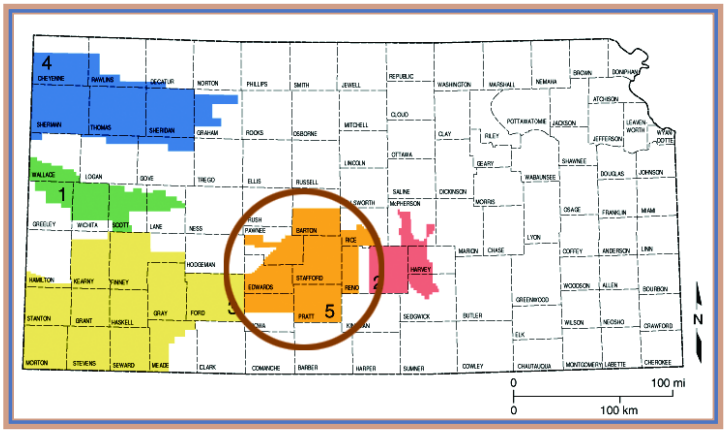
The new monthly minimum is $6.25 with the first 25-cent increase in sewer fees. The increase results in a charge of $1.45 per thousand for all water use in excess of 2,000 gallons.

Department of Agriculture creates State Water Bank Association Charter

David Pope, chief engineer of the Kansas Department of Agriculture's Division of Water Resources, has signed an order creating the state's first water bank charter for ground water users in south-central Kansas.

The new charter, the Central Kansas Water Bank Association, will be available only to ground water users in Barton, Edwards, Kiowa, Pawnee, Pratt, Reno, Rice and Stafford counties. The boundaries of the charter coincide with those of the Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5.

Through the water bank, water right holders will be able to deposit water they choose not to use in the coming year or years in exchange for monetary compensation. The depositor establishes a price for his or her water which is then made available for lease by another user.



Kansas Groundwater Management Districts with Big Bend Groundwater Management District No. 5 in the brown circle.

Depositing water for use by others will require a minimum of ten percent of the water be conserved. That means for a deposit of 100 acre-feet, 90 acre-feet will be available for lease. The remaining ten percent will not be used. When the term for the deposit expires, the full annual amount of water is again available to the original water right holder.

The bank also allows individuals to set up safe deposit accounts, where water not used the previous year can be deposited for use at a later date. The Central Kansas Water Bank Association charter will use a formula to determine how much water can be deposited into a safe deposit account. That amount will be 25 percent of the difference between 85 percent of the authorized water deposited into the safe deposit account and cannot exceed the total amount authorized by that water right.

The initial water bank charter is valid for seven years, at which time its operation will be reviewed to determine if conservation goals have been met. The review will also consider whether the bank's effect on the groundwater supply and other water right holders. The results of the review will determine whether the bank's charter is renewed for continued operation.

City's aging wastewater plant to be replaced

In 1978, EPA and KDHE informed the city of Pretty Prairie officials the city's wastewater plant no longer complied with federal and state standards.

Because the effluent flowed into what was determined to be a navigable stream the city would have to meet standards established by the Safe Drinking Water Act. Cost of replacing the trickling filter was estimated to be $300,000 with the city's share of the project at $75,000 to $100,000 in 1978.

Changes in the political environment resulted in EPA pressure on small towns to comply with the federal standards to be eased. As a result 27 years later, the city continues to treat the wastewater through the trickling filter system.

The problem now is the city is failing to meet the National Discharge Elimination System Permit (NDES) Permit issued in 2003. The aging Imhoff-trickling filter system does not meet the revised standards for ammonia, fecal coliform and total chlorine residual and more stringent limits on effluent biological oxygen demand (BOD).

The price for a lagoon system now is estimated to be in excess of $1.12 million. KDHE has recommended the city replace the present facility with a new wastewater treatment lagoon system. This appears to be the best long-term option for the city.

The city is in the process of applying for a $400,000 Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) and will seek a 20-year loan of $721,403 through the Kansas Water Pollution Control Revolving Loan Fund.

Rural decline threatens all Kansans

One hundred years ago, Kansas was largely rural in character, the countryside dotted with small family farms and ranches.

No longer. Today, rural Kansas is facing sweeping changes – including depopulation, a vanishing farm life and depleted water – that will profoundly affect Kansas' culture, politics and economy in coming decades.

Kansans must understand these shifting winds and adapt to them as best they can.

It's happened slowly, over decades, but the results are clear and painful to see: Today, a severe population decline is well under way across the northern Plains states, including much of rural Kansas: 30 Kansas counties, many of them in the western third of the state, experienced population declines of 5 percent or more between 2000 and 2004.

By far the greatest factor in this loss of people, experts agree, is the decline of the agricultural sector of our economy.

In 1970, Kansas had 87,000 farms. Today, there are 62,000 – and the numbers keep falling every year.

With increased mechanization and consolidation, there aren't enough jobs or income to keep youths on the farm. They're leaving in droves – and not returning. Family farms and ranches are being bought up by larger corporate agri-producers or by out-of-state investors.

Those folks who remain are rapidly aging, and the towns are aging with them.

Does all this matter? Yes, because the changes affect all Kansans, rural and urban.

After the 1990 census, Kansas lost one of its five congressional representatives, and it could lose another one in 2010 if present trends continue.

That means less political clout for Kansas nationally.

Rural schools, with fewer students and mounting costs, complicate the state school finance picture, and face pressures to consolidate.

The Ogallala Aquifer, which one seemed as limitless as the bison, is also reaching a crisis point because of shortsighted farming and irrigation practices. Water shortages could in the future threaten the very existence of some rural Kansas towns.

To many observers, the prospects look bleak. Will vast stretches of rural Kansas become the American Outback, largely written off to settlement? Or, as some have suggested, will it revert to a Buffalo Commons?

Some say the demographic and economic trends driving rural decline are unstoppable, inevitable. Get used to it.

Some of the bad news looks as if it's here to stay. But other evidence suggests that there are ways for rural Kansans to at least cope with these changes and gain more control of their destinies.

Instead of giving in to fatalism, Kansas needs to face its rural crisis with creativity and a sense of urgency. Reprinted from the *Herington Times*

Tapped out?

When Clinton Dam was completed about 25 years ago and a city water treatment plant was built to draw water from the new federal reservoir, it seemed that Lawrence's municipal water supply concerns were over. The combined water resources of the Kansas River and Clinton Lake seemed able to serve even a growing city for the foreseeable future.

Unfortunately, a future that includes water supply and quality issues now is in sight for many Kansas cities that draw water from reservoirs like Clinton. Experts always have known that even large reservoirs eventually would start filling with sediment that would affect the quality and amount of water available from those sources. Now, those experts are saying that sedimentation is occurring much quicker than expected.

Clinton Lake had a life expectancy of 100 years; now that lifetime looks more like 70 years. Older lakes across the state are even further along in the sedimentation process. Experts now estimate that, without remedial action, the state will face a huge water supply problem in 20 to 40 years.

Steps can be taken to reduce sedimentation and dredge away or otherwise remove silt that already has settled in the lakes, but it will be costly. For example, an official with the Kansas Biological Survey said enough dredging just to keep Perry Lake stable would cost an estimated $15 million a year. Multiply that amount across the state's 93 reservoirs of various sizes and you get an idea of the problem.

On the other hand, what choice does the state have? Those 93 reservoirs supply drinking water for about 60 percent of the state's population. Allowing them to fill in simply isn't an option.

State officials are right to attack this problem now. The Kansas Water office is seeking legislative permission for a $400,000 pilot project on lake rehabilitation. That amount is the proverbial drop in the bucket, but it's a start.

So often, we take our precious water supplies for granted. The recent news about the condition of Kansas reservoirs reminds us how vital and basic it is to make sure that water keeps flowing from the tap.

Reprinted from the *Lawrence Journal-World*

Lake development

What natural physical features Kansas could promote often go underdeveloped – namely, its lakes.

So, that two state agencies are studying the economic development potential of state-owned land surrounding the 24 federal reservoirs in Kansas is good news.

The Kansas Water Office has completed a preliminary study of the lakes and identified 13 lakes that have potential for economic development, either for residential, resorts or outdoor recreation. That last one seems a little off the point. Kansas' lakes generally are being used for recreation. But residential and resort uses are little to none at most lakes.

The reason is these are federally-owned reservoirs, created primarily for flood control, irrigation and public water supply. With lakeshore primarily in the hands of the government, private development has been mostly off-limits.

That does not mean no one has been interested. One look at Lake of the Ozarks in the Missouri and similar places, and a person quickly can see the potential of a lake becoming a resort and private getaway destination.

With this in mind, in 1989 the Legislature passed a law to allow resort development on state-owned property at the federal reservoirs. But no resorts have materialized.

It is not because Missouri has something Kansas lacks. Kansas has some great lakes, and many are close to metropolitan areas. Many have proven extremely popular with recreational users and some considered world class for fishing.

That 1989 law apparently did not trigger the development. First of all, the state would have to own the land. That seemingly does no open up a whole lot more lake frontage to development.

Secondly, just having a law is not enough. The state's Department of Commerce needs to go out and start contacting developers. The lakes need an open-for-business sign out on the lakefront.

We might be moving in that direction. Commerce is doing a study of its own on economic development potential on the lakes.

Residential development might actually be a more likely scenario before resort development. Already, on private land far back from the shoreline but with lake views, we have seen residential development. The east side of Wilson Lake is an example, although, oddly, the report rated Wilson high for resort development but not residential.

Resort development requires a strong interest from the occasional vacationer. Residential can appeal both to temporary and permanent residents. Get enough residential going, and resort operators might take more notice.

But while lake views are good, waterfront is better.

The state's water agencies, in concert with the federal agencies, will want to be sure to protect water quality and water for the core purposes of the reservoirs. But those goals should not exclude residential and resort development.

Federal and state agencies, in fact, have created tremendous economic assets for rural parts of the state with the reservoir system – if only they will remove the roadblocks so the open-for-business sign can be posted. That goes for state- and federal-owned waterfront land.

Reprinted from the *Hays Daily News*