

High Plains News

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IN DEPTH • IN TOUCH • INDEPENDENT • SINCE 1884

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A fast-moving grass fire burns across a Kansas field as heavy smoke fills the sky, highlighting the dangerous wildfire conditions across the state. Dry vegetation, low humidity and strong winds have contributed to several wildland fires, prompting Laura Kelly to issue a disaster proclamation allowing additional state fire suppression resources to assist local departments. *Courtesy photo*

Governor issues disaster declaration as wildfires spread

BY HIGH PLAINS NEWS STAFF

Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly issued a disaster proclamation Thursday, March 12, to help local communities access additional state resources as wildfires continue to spread across parts of the state.

The proclamation, issued at 12:26 p.m., allows state fire suppression resources to be deployed to assist local agencies that are battling multiple wildland fires fueled by dry conditions and strong winds.

“Recent weather patterns have created ideal conditions for the rapid spread of wildland fires,” Kelly said in a news release. “Local fire departments have been hard pressed to respond to multiple fires spawned by these

conditions. This proclamation will give those agencies access to additional state-owned fire suppression resources to assist them in their heroic efforts to keep safe Kansas citizens, their homes and other property threatened by these fires.”

According to the governor’s office, the greatest concern is currently in central and eastern Kansas, where wind gusts have remained strong for extended periods and relative humidity levels have dropped to particularly low levels — a combination that significantly increases wildfire risk.

Officials with the Kansas Forest Service say Kansas is entering its typical spring fire season, when dormant vegetation can easily ignite and spread flames quickly across

Fire Safety Tips for Residents

Emergency officials encourage residents to take precautions to reduce wildfire risks:

- Avoid outdoor burning until weather conditions improve.
- Check local burn bans or advisories before lighting fires.
- Dispose of cigarettes properly and avoid throwing them from vehicles.
- Use caution with grills and fire pits, keeping them well away from dry grass and buildings.
- Keep properties clear of dry vegetation,

especially around homes, barns and outbuildings.

- Report smoke or fire immediately to local emergency authorities.
- Fire officials say conditions can change quickly during Kansas’ spring fire season, and residents should stay alert to weather updates and emergency announcements.
- Local agencies continue to monitor fire conditions while coordinating with state resources to contain existing fires and prevent new outbreaks.

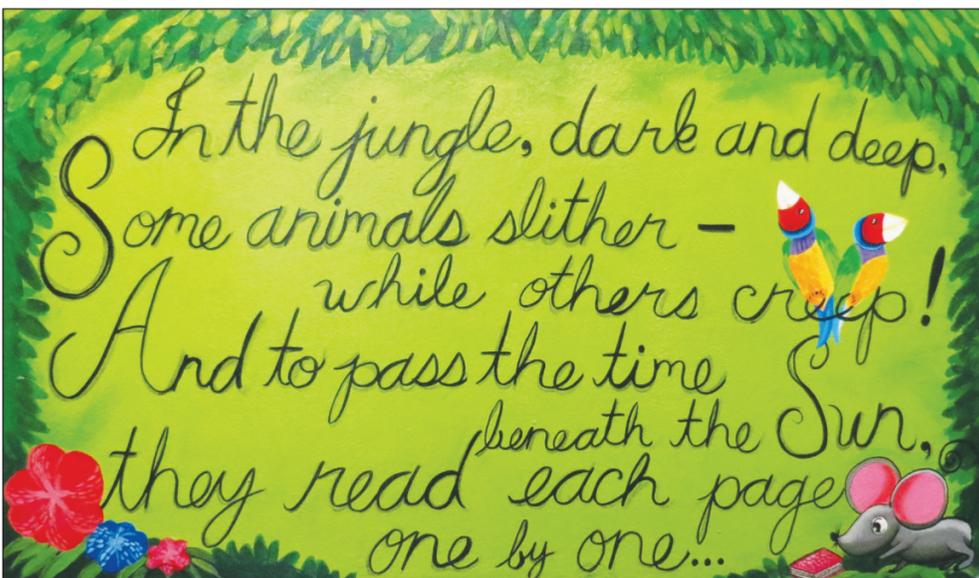
allow live embers to remain. On windy days like these, those embers can quickly reignite and turn into wildland fires.”

The Kansas Division of Emergency Management has activated the State Emergency Operations Center at an enhanced level. Personnel from the Kansas Forest Service and the Office of the State Fire Marshal are assisting with coordination and response efforts.

State officials are urging residents to avoid outdoor burning during this period of elevated fire danger. Activities that can generate sparks — including outdoor grilling, burning debris, or careless smoking — could ignite fires that spread rapidly in dry, windy conditions.

open grasslands. “We are in our typical spring fire season in Kansas,” said Bill Waln, fire management officer with the Kansas Forest

Service. “The heavy vegetation across the landscape this season is making prescribed burns more difficult to completely extinguish, which can



Ladd Wendelin’s artistic vision fills the stairwell with animals reading books. From the poem to the painted animals adorning the walls he entices kids of all ages to pick up a book and travel to a far away place.

Library unveils mural after a year of work

BY DESTRY JACKSON

The Oberlin City Library hosted the open house for “The Jungle Books” mural on Saturday, March 7. The event began promptly at 10 a.m. with Ladd Wendelin and Lonnie Hilker playing a trumpet

duet of “Bare Necessities,” from Disney’s *The Jungle Book*. Wendelin then gave a little speech of welcome and talked about how he had gotten permission from the Library Board to paint a mural in the stairwell and the process of painting the

see **JUNGLE BOOK**, page 3

Firefighters prepare as dangerous conditions spread

BY DESTRY JACKSON

Thursday, March 12 was a day of fire weather, according to the National Weather Service. The temperatures were expected to rise up to 80 degrees. The wind was expected to have gusts up to 40 to 50 mph, and combined with relative humidity readings as low as 11 or 12 percent, the conditions were ideal for rapid fire growth and spread if any sparks ignited.

Two of the top men in firefighting in Decatur County are Oberlin Assistant Fire Chief Aaron Ploussard and Emergency Management Director Jeff Burmaster. “We usually have 10 to 12 fire fighters who respond immediately to fire calls,” Ploussard said. “It’s usually only about three to four minutes until we’re headed to the fire as soon as the call comes in. All our crew



Volunteer firefighters aim a hose at the roof of a house, putting out the blaze.

are volunteers. No one stays at the fire station full-time. A good thing about living in a small town is that everyone lives close to the station and can be there very quickly to run the trucks to the fires. With 80 degree temperatures and up to 50 mph wind gusts, there could be some fires in the Northwest Kansas area. I don’t expect any fires in Decatur County, as all the farmers are very good about

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LIFELIFE SCREENING

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