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Fishing Report
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The Jackson County Star

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What's Going On Here?

Fishing Tournament At Delaney Butte Lakes

Those people who walk out on the ice to suffer gale force winds and sub-zero temperatures to catch fish even though they could buy frozen fish at the local market will be at it again on Feb. 7.

Yes, it's time again for Phase II of the North Park Chamber of Commerce ice fishing contest to be held Feb. 7 on the three Delaney Butte lakes.

Contestants will be angling for a variety of prizes, including $750 for first prize, and special prizes for those youths who have been dragged kicking and shrieking into this sport by their parents.

The prize pot includes $750 for the biggest fish, $400 for the next biggest fish, $300 for third place, and $200 for fourth place. Kids' prizes include $100 for first place, $75 for second, $50 for third and $25 for fourth.

Fish are measured by their length and girth for prize purposes, so there's no need to bring that lead shot to boost the weight of fish you've caught.

The official times for the contest are 6

Numbers To Back Crazy Tales

By Curran Trick

Locals talk often about the unique weather conditions we experience in North Park, but anecdotal evidence usually isn't enough to convince an outsider that:

- The wind blows all the time.
- It rained in Walden but not in Cowdrey.
- It snowed on June 11th.

But thanks to the North Platte Roundtable, a local water resources group, North Park is about to get a comprehensive automated weather monitoring system that will collect temperature, humidity, wind, solar radiation, precipitation, and soil temperature data in various locations around the county for a minimum of five years. Now we will have some numbers to back up our crazy stories.

In September 2008, the Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) gave approval for the Colorado Climate Center to receive $100,818 in Water Supply Reserve Account (WSRA) funds to place three automated weather monitoring stations and ten atmometers (a device that mimics plant membranes to measure evaporation) in different locations around North Park. Thanks to the Roundtable and Nolan Doesken of CSU, the data will be compiled, catalogued, and placed online for public and scientific use.

The Roundtable has an interest in how North Park weather affects North Park water. "We hope this helps answer some of the Roundtable's questions, and also ends up being a resource to the people of Jackson County for the future," said Doesken, who is the state climatologist and a senior research associate in the Department of Atmospheric Science at Colorado State University.

He worked with the North Platte Roundtable in the spring of 2008 to sponsor an application for the project, which needed state approval because of the funding source. WSRA money is doled out by the CWCB for water-related projects under Senate Bill 179 and is funded from oil and gas severance taxes.

The Jackson County project will be part of what is called CoAgMet, or the Colorado Agricultural Meteorological Network. CoAgMet began in the early 1990s with a network of eight weather stations on the eastern plains, and now has nearly 60 stations scattered throughout Colorado.

With 30 years of experience working with climate, Doesken is always eager for new data on Colorado's weather. "[North Park's] CoAgMet addition will help complete our monitoring efforts for Colorado irrigated agriculture, because until now we have had no irrigated hay meadow environments in the network," Doesken said. "This project is a big help to CoAgMet and our statewide monitoring efforts," he added.

As for the Roundtable, they sponsored the project because the data collected will help verify evapotranspiration (ET) values in North Park, which has to do with the amount of irrigation water consumed by hay meadow grasses. If you can figure out ET, you can calculate consumptive use, which is the amount of water those plants consume in their daily life processes. Consumptive use is a key factor in water law and water use debate.

ET values have been calculated for the

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Front Range and eastern plains for plants like corn and alfalfa, but due to the high elevation, strong winds, low humidity, and high solar energy in North Park, it is better to have local data from local conditions to get a local ET value.

"Do the accepted methodologies for hay meadow consumptive use developed for other regions really apply to North Park? That's an important question we want to answer for our own education, for the North Platte Roundtable and for research scientists," Doesken said.

Knowledge of ET is an essential ingredient for assessing current and future water needs in the North Platte Basin. "This project will be beneficial to helping us understand our climate to better calculate the consumptive use of our native crops. We don't currently have a lot of weather data that shows the differences in climate in different parts of the basin," said Kent Crowder, chair of the North Platte Roundtable.

Currently, weather data to track consumptive use in North Park consists of Eric Wagner's evaporation pan in Walden and a lysimeter (device that directly measures water consumed by grasses) at the Arapaho Wildlife Refuge. A dozen or so volunteers have also collected rain gauge data around the park through another program of Doesken's, CoCoRaHS (Community Collaborative Rain, Hail and Snow Network). Adding the automated stations and the atmometers will establish a network of complete year-round weather stations.

How You Can Help

The Colorado Climate Center will need local help to make this project work. "We will need seven volunteers to set up and read atmometers, and three volunteers to lend their land for sites where we can place the automated stations: preferably in hay meadow environments," Doesken said.

The project will need volunteers from as many different areas of the county as possible. "We hope all of the atmometers get read at least once a week, and some get read several days a week," Doesken added. Ideally, there will be a balance between location and easy access. "If it's an ideal site for data but you hardly ever go there, that doesn't help; if it's super easy to access but not representative of the data we need, that's not great either," Doesken said.

The three automated stations will operate either by cell-phone or radio frequency. Volunteers will have no obligation other than to provide visual checks of the station and simple maintenance. "Sometimes bugs get in the rain gauge and clog the opening, or dirt gets on the solar radiation sensor, so the landowner might have to check on those," Doesken added.

If you are interested in volunteering for this project, please contact Debbie Alpe, Jackson County Extension Office, by phone: 970-723-4298, or email: Debbie.Alpe@colostate.edu. The site selection will be completed by April 2009.

More information on CoAgMet and the Colorado Climate Center can be found at http://ccc.atmos.colostate.edu. More information on the North Platte Roundtable and this project can be found at http://ibcc.state.co.us. More information on the WSRA and the CWCB can be found at http://cwcb.state.co.us.