

Ray gets recommendations for reducing wildfire risks

State foresters advise city on tree spacing

By Brad Nygaard
The October 2024 wildfires that burned nearly 90,000 acres in Williams County and killed two people are still embedded in the consciousness of Ray city officials.

City Auditor Ronda Rustad briefed city commissioners April 14 about potential mitigation efforts after an inspection by members of the North Dakota Forest Service.

“It was really interesting,” Rustad said.

Apparently educational, too, especially as it pertains to tree rows on the north side of town along Seventh Street.

“They’re roughly 98% dead,” Rustad said of the assessment. “Their recommendation was remove that. Completely get those out.”

The city “could look completely different” right now, Rustad said, “if those tree rows had caught fire.”

Potential concerns raised about ponderosa pines being in close proximity to houses in the area are mitigated, according to Rustad, by the thickness of the trees’ bark.

“As long as branches and shrubbery are removed and not allowed to sit up against them, they have a tendency to not start a fire,” Rustad said she was advised.

Those pines would remain after any cleanup effort.

Rustad said the forestry personnel also advised adding boulevard trees rather than windbreaks. That effort, according to Rustad, may require consulting with Williams County as well as expanding the city’s tree ordinance that she described as “little.”

A third member of the visiting team, a former wildfire technician, is now reportedly

involved in municipal prevention efforts like tree removal, and Rustad said that person is researching potential grant funding on the city’s behalf.

“It’s something that needs to be done whether we get grant funding or not,” Rustad said. “It would be a bonus if we got grant funding.”

The bottom line, according to Rustad, is to remove the dead trees and clean up the remaining tree rows.

“That would involve keeping it mowed,” Rustad said.

Bids to do the recommended work are currently being sought.

Another item of concern, according to Rustad, is the “roughly 50” hay bales just north of the tree rows. Those bales are outside city limits but lie within the city’s extraterritorial area and, according to Rustad, were mentioned as a potential hazard by Mike Smith, Williams County emergency management director.

Rustad suggested contacting the property owner with a written request to remove the bales.

Commissioner Richard Liesener asked about the possibility of also addressing crop stubble, especially that left by stripper headers within the extraterritorial area.

“We had a lot of flax stubble that would have burned hot, would have burned this town down if it had caught fire,” Liesener said.

Commission President Troy Kupper appointed Liesener and fellow Commissioner Eric Barman to a subcommittee that will work with Rustad to communicate with the city’s attorney regarding potential fire hazards within the area immediately outside city limits.

State law allows cities with populations under 5,000 like Ray to exercise its zoning authority to any property lying within 1 mile of the corporate city limits.

Street work update

Having received word that work on Ray’s chip seal project is scheduled to begin in late May or early June, city commissioners approved a preliminary step.

Crack sealing on a number of streets must be done prior to chip sealing, according to Commissioner Andrew Nelson.

Commissioners approved a quote from B’s Crack Sealing of Williston in the amount of \$85,615.

That firm is the same company that will do work at the Ray Mall parking lot in a separate project that was previously approved.

Ad change

An advertisement placed by the city in hopes of business redevelopment of a city-owned property is undergoing a minor but significant change.

Commissioners voted to change a public notice regarding the property located at 10 N. Main St. to an ad offering the property under contract for deed.

The initial ad asked for proposals to lease the property under a contract for deed.

The change will eliminate the word “lease.”

Commission president Troy Kupper said the purpose of the change is to “separate ourselves as much as possible.”

Commissioners have long discussed the possibility of having a private entity eventually own the 2,500-square-foot building, which the city purchased late last year for \$195,000.

That property was purchased by the city with consideration for development as a day care center.

A potential sale under a contract for deed will be at the same price paid by the city, according to commissioners.

All other elements of the advertisement remain the same.

No injuries reported from Crosby, rural Wildrose fires

By Jordan Rusche Report for America

Firefighters from Crosby and Wildrose were kept busy on April 12 with two different fires occurring in the area that day.

One fire involving a FedEx delivery truck took place near Wildrose around 6:02 p.m.

“He ended up on a prairie trail,” Logan Sevre, assistant fire chief for the Wildrose Fire Department, said. “I don’t know if he was just following GPS, maybe blindly.”

Fire Chief Kevin Caraballo said the driver attempted to free the truck from the trail, which was surrounded by sloughs on both sides, and in

the process, either the engine or muffler ignited the dry grass and caused the truck to catch on fire.

Sevre added the fire crew was able to extinguish the fire in about a half-hour.

“We usually know our roles, and been doing it for a while, so we know where to go and what to do,” he said.

There were no injuries to the driver, but the delivery truck was extensively damaged. Sevre said there were also packages that were damaged with the fire.

“We saw a couple items there that were kind of charred,” he said.

Another fire started around midnight at Travis and Chrissy Running’s house in Crosby, according to Crosby Fire Chief Darwin Anderson.

“As far as we know right now, it started at the back of the house,” he said.

The Office of the North Dakota Fire Marshal is currently investigating the incident.

No one was injured during the fire, and Anderson said the home is still habitable as most of the damage was contained to the kitchen and garage.

“My understanding is that they’ll be rebuilding the damaged areas,” he said.

New dugouts on deck



Jody Michael -- The Journal
Contractors install the exterior panels for one of the new dugouts under construction at Vournas Field in Crosby on Saturday, part of a larger renovation project for the baseball diamond. The Divide County High School baseball team is currently playing all of its games on the road while the renovations are finished.

DCHS seniors profile fellow students, music teacher

(Editor’s note: This is the latest in a series of articles written by Divide County High School students in the English 4 class, taught by Pam Buth Nelson.)

Lone Star Showcase By Chayton Davis

Peyton Kostad and Gust Svangstu recently attended the Lone Star Showcase April 10-14 near Dallas.

Before the event, they were asked about their expectations and what they think about the trip and the idea of it.

Kostad and Svangstu shared what they hoped to get out of the tournament.

“To get some good experience and to get noticed by college scouts,” Kostad said.

“To play some good hockey and experience Texas, enjoy the nice weather and do some swimming,” Svangstu said.

They also talked about how they thought their team would do during the event.

“I think we will be alright in the tournament,” Kostad said.

“I think that the team will do very well and if we just play our game then we will win,” Svangstu added.

Svangstu and Kostad shared how it felt to be on a team with people they had never played with before.

“It feels different, but the boys have good off-ice chemistry going, so that’s good to see, and I think that if we all play our best game then we will definitely come out of the tournament with some wins,” Kostad said.

“It’s cool meeting new people and playing with different play styles, but I have high hopes for the tournament and I think that we will win some games,” Svangstu said.

Amber Grabowski By Rose Neal

Amber Grabowski is a senior at Divide County High School. She is going into nursing school after graduation. She plans to attend Bismarck State College in Bismarck.

Grabowski talked about how the school year is going so far. “It’s going good, especially compared to other years,” she said.

She has had good grades all throughout high school, and is a dedicated student.

She works at the Crosby Clinic as a certified nursing assistant and has been working there for over a year.

Grabowski also mentioned what she thinks is the most important thing about being a CNA.

“Helping the residents, and making an impact on their lives is the most important thing about my job,” she said.

She talked about how her job is “a learning experience” and “something that will make a big impact on my future.”

Being a CNA is about making the residents feel comfortable and happy. She said that her job teaches her skills that she can use in her future and how to treat residents.

Grabowski is going into the neonatal intensive care unit in her nursing career. The NICU helps provide special care for sick or premature babies.

Besides her nursing career, Grabowski said she is focusing on her family, friends and work.

“I am taking my generals for senior year, but the classes I am in currently do not align with my career,” she said.

Grabowski’s plans for the summer following graduation include going to Boston for a couple days to learn more about nursing. Going to Boston is what Grabowski said would be “the highlight of my summer.”

Region music contest By Cooper Svangstu

Kayla Pulvermacher is the band and choir teacher at Divide County High School.

Pulvermacher and her students just recently competed at the regional small-group music competition in Stanley.

Pulvermacher explained how the band is doing in terms of numbers and skill development.

“Our band is very spread across the board because we have lots of seventh-graders and upperclassmen,” she said. “The seventh-graders have had to step up their game, which is good for their development as young musicians.”

Pulvermacher explained that they just got done with regionals a few weeks ago.

“We were the leading school at regionals with the most stars,” she said. “One judge complimented Divide County and said that we had the best ensembles today. He wanted to see our larger ensembles.”

She explained that Divide County did the best out of the schools at the contest.

“We received 14 out of the 35 stars that they gave out,” she said. “There were 11 schools there, so we did awesome.”

Pulvermacher is happy with the overall result and has a positive outlook going into state competitions.

“Eighteen kids are going to state and 14 ensembles,” she said. “State has some pretty steep competition. You might be as prepared as you can and come back with a 1 rating.”

She is optimistic and hopes that Divide County will bring back at least a couple of stars.

“I think that we would have a better chance if we really practiced on the feedback we got from our regional judges and improved those areas,” she said.



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