

Opinions

Sensationalism? Not here

SHEDDING SOME 'LIGHT...

"Shedding Some Light" is a regular feature on the Opinions Page that will consist of our spin on local, state and national issues.

So much more than just a movie

With all the action at Central Park on Saturday, one would've thought Box Car Days started early this year.

July 17 marked the second "Movie in the Park" at Central Park, and not only did the size of the crowd of movie-goers almost double from the last such event, dozens of children made use of everything from the playground equipment for sliding and frolicking, to the green space just to the north of the bandshell for a pick-up baseball game, to the old tennis courts.

Even the ice skating rink was occupied with a volleyball game that evening.

Yes, the park came alive Saturday, just like it had for decades before the advent of cell phones and iPads. Kids were everywhere. Screams of joy, and plenty of laughter echoed throughout the park, as people awaited the showing of Disney's "Raya and the Last Dragon" on the big screen.

How nice it was to see the Tracy's largest park used by so many. This must've been exactly what our city's leaders envisioned when they came up with the idea of hosting a movie night at Central Park.

Filling the park every now and then might seem a bit insignificant, but it really isn't. What people saw Saturday was not just a great place for people to gather, but a true community event that small towns everywhere are, for the most part, missing out on.

While Tracy might be one of them, it seems the tide is turning. Back on July 8, Swift Lake was swarming with kids armed with fishing poles for the first-ever Returning Our Youth Outdoors public event. Swift Lake never swarms with kids, but on that day, it was. Same with Central Park this past weekend.

That should mean a lot to every Tracy resident. It surely was a refreshing sight to see the park taken over by so many people of all ages this past weekend. Let's hope it's a trend.



DOZENS OF YOUTH gathered at Central Park on Saturday, not just for a movie on a big screen, but to have some fun with their friends — something that hasn't happened that often recently in Tracy's most expansive park. Photo / Per Peterson

To the Editor

What happened to working together?

When I read the front-page article from last week's *Headlight Herald*, "Council quarrels over committee choice," my first reaction was, "Here we go again, another embarrassing episode for the council."

Three members of the City Council voted to challenge the results of the election of members to the Community Center Working Group. The challenge to the outcome was made not because of some flaw in voting or misinterpreted rules. Remember, the council set the rules for the vote. They just did not like the outcome of the vote.

So much for working together, having a positive, can-do attitude and moving things forward. It appears that all of the positive statements that candidates made during last October's council candidates' debate are null and void when you don't like the outcome of a vote.

Now, I'm not promoting any one candidate. Both Tony Peterson and Don Gregoire would make excellent members of the working group. But in the end, a vote was taken, and all nominees must be treated fairly and with respect.

There was nothing fair or respectful about the challenge to the vote or the comments made by some members of the council. I thank the four members of the council that stood up for principle.

TOM MORIN
TRACY

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The *Tracy Area Headlight Herald* welcomes its readers to submit letters to the editor, as we believe they serve a civic purpose and are a forum of democracy in your newspaper. We encourage readers to use letters to the editor as a way to express feelings, thoughts, opinions and gratitude. Letters can be about any topic, but can be refused if judged to be libelous. If you wish to submit a letter to the editor, email it to per@headlightherald.com You must include your phone number and address for verification. Letters that are not able to be verified will not be published.

There were a couple different routes I could've taken with last week's Page 1 city council story. I chose the professional one, the high road you might say.

I'm sure I'm not the only print journalist who has fought off the urge to sensationalize a story. Why not, after all? That's what sells papers, right?

Maybe, maybe not. But there's more to my job than selling papers. Of course, I want to sell out at every newsstand we deliver to each Wednesday, but I won't sell myself out to do it.

The "journalist" tag is being abused now more than ever, and a lot of so-called journalists are giving the good ones a bad name because they want ratings and they want clicks.

Consider one Stephen A. Smith, an ESPN loudmouth who must be addicted to the taste of his feet.

To be clear, I don't disagree with everything Smith angrily spouts on his show on ESPN (I believe he has a radio show as well). However, what bothers me is his drive for ratings — a drive that pushes him to say things he shouldn't — and sometimes has to apologize for.

It's been a rough stretch for Mr. Smith. First, he told the nation (or those who will listen to him) that Anaheim Angels' star Shohei Ohtani, an Asian-American, could never be the face of baseball because he speaks through an interpreter.

"I understand that baseball is an international sport itself in terms of participation, but when you talk about an audience

gravitating to the tube or to the ballpark, to actually watch you, I don't think it helps that the number one face is a dude that needs an interpreter, so you can understand what the hell he's saying in this country," he said on his show.

Tell me this isn't racism? If anyone knows anything about the damage stereotyping can inflict, it's Smith, an African-American. I guess the racist highway only goes one way. But in this day and age, in a time of heightened anti-Asian sentiment in this country, perhaps that wasn't the best route to take.

Smith later apologized — of course, he did, every celebrity apologizes after saying something dumb and insensitive. Hope that helped him sleep that night.

"As an African-American, keenly aware of the damage stereotyping has done to many in this country, it should've elevated my sensitivities even more," Smith said in his pre-written apology that probably saved his job. "I screwed up. In this day and age, with all the violence being perpetrated against the Asian Community, my comments — albeit unintentional — were clearly insensitive and regrettable. I'm sincerely sorry for any angst I've caused with my comments."

Whether or not we accept this xenophobe's post-blathe contrition and apology isn't the issue, because his disrespect for others doesn't end there. He also, seemingly on purpose, mispronounced



There
Ya Go
Per Peterson
Editor

names of members of the Nigerian basketball team after it beat the U.S. team. It was another embarrassing and shameful act — again, on national TV.

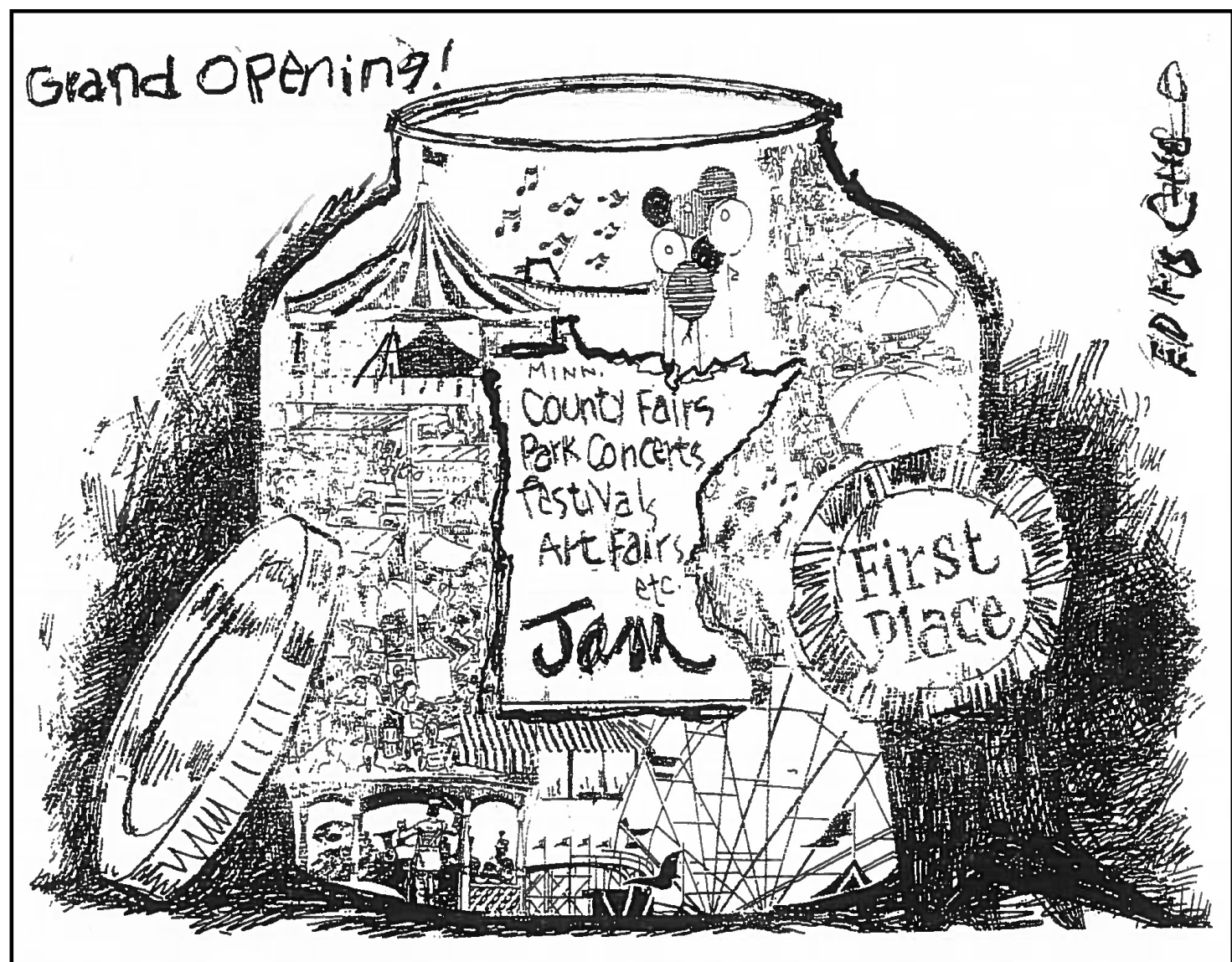
And then he apologized. Again.

"When I spoke about the Nigerian basketball team, on the very same show, I hurt people as well," Smith said at the opening of "First Take" show. "So it doesn't matter what my opinion was, or what my intentions were. What matters, is that I messed up. I intend to learn and listen to people in those communities."

Smith has proven to have two faces. He is loud and bombastic when blasting others in the name of ratings, and quiet and solemn when apologizing for his big mouth.

Smith sensationalizes things, it's his job. The problem is, he does it in a hurtful manner. That's why I don't. Believe me, there have been times when I could've taken the low road and written something for no other reason than to raise eyebrows. However, I don't write to hurt people. Yes, I write to make you think, perhaps to stir some debate, but I'll never publish something in this paper that disparages someone to the point where I feel an apology is necessary.

To me, that's not journalism. That's hype. That's sensationalizing. And honestly, there's no room for that in a small-town weekly newspaper.



Watchdogs and cheerleaders

Last week I made my first ever trip to the Iron Range of Minnesota. I've been to Duluth before but my final destination last week was Giant's Ridge in Biwabik. If you have no idea where that is, don't worry, I didn't until I found out I'd be going there. It's about an hour-and-a-half north of Duluth.

The reason for this trip? The Minnesota Newspaper Association Board of Directors' summer meeting. This was an exciting meeting as it would be our first in-person meeting since January 2020. In addition, the summer board meeting includes all past presidents of MNA who can make it. This group of people includes many who helped shape my career in the industry, cheered me on when I first got started and have given moral support as we jumped into the world of newspaper ownership. It's a special group of people and I'm honored to be on the board.

Discussions flowed freely at our meetings and many topics were covered. One thing that came up time and time again was the fact that Minnesota now has three news deserts.

What is a news desert? It's a county that doesn't have a single newspaper in it. Yes, I'm biased because I'm in the industry, but you should be worried. A local newspaper is important and not just to those who are relying on it for their paycheck.

The biggest concern facing newspapers today is giving their product away. Now honestly, we don't give our product away. But it is taken from us often. If you look on social media, you can find many local news stories being shared by people, but

Tara's Takes

Tara Brandl
Publisher



if the content is behind a paywall (meaning you need to have a digital subscription to read it), people are upset and voice their concerns that news should be free.

However, news is not free. News costs money, every day. There is the cost of sending reporters to events and meetings. There is the gas mileage. There is the cost of the staff to design ads and proof the stories. There are the equipment costs and the basic costs of running a business such as electricity, rent and taxes. News costs money.

But more important than the cost of news, is the cost to a community and county if there isn't a newspaper.

Yes, we hear it all the time: "I saw it on Facebook." However, when you get your "news" from Facebook, do you trust it? A survey from 2017 showed that only 18% of people who read news from Facebook daily trust it most or all of the time. Yes, that study is a few years old, but I don't think Facebook's credibility has increased. Just because you see it on Facebook doesn't mean it's true.

Here's a bigger question: When was the last time Facebook was at Tracy Area High School to cover a game? I'm trying to place the date as to when Facebook was at a Tracy city council meeting to report on the happenings. Or perhaps the last time you saw Google at a school board meeting. We stopped by the "Movie in the Park" on Saturday night to take a photo for the paper. I looked to see if I could find anyone from Google there, but I must

have missed them in the crowd of almost 150 people.

The truth is, they aren't there. They never will be there. Now there are three counties in Minnesota that are without newspapers because of online giants that took support for local papers away.

In addition to the lack of coverage, cities, school boards and townships are facing another problem: where to publish their legal notices. Legal notices are required to be printed in a legal newspaper, set forth by the state of Minnesota. Each year, we have to renew our status as a legal newspaper. We have to prove to the state that we meet the standards set forth. I am positive neither Google or Facebook are meeting any standards.

So how do we keep more counties in Minnesota from becoming news deserts? By supporting local newspapers! One of my fellow board members said a publisher once told him local newspapers are "the biggest watchdogs of the community and the biggest cheerleaders." That is absolutely correct.

Per doesn't live, eat and breath his job as editor for a big paycheck, he does it because he cares about Tracy and the surrounding area. Every church dinner, school play and city council meeting is important to him.

Yes, you are not going to agree with, or even like, everything Per writes in the paper. Some days I don't even like Per. But I love his dedication. There are days you aren't going to agree with my columns. That's OK. We write them because we are here for the community.

TARA'S TAKES
CONTINUED ON PAGE II

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Tara's Takes

Continued from page 4

On a Monday night, it's very rare that you will find a packed house at the Tracy City Council meeting or a Tracy or Milroy School Board meeting. I understand that. People are busy. Do you know who will be there? Your local newspaper. And we're going to report on it — the good, the bad, the ugly. Why? Because it's our job. We want you to know what is happening in your community, so if you don't agree with something, you can speak up. We want to report the good news in town such as local businesses staying local. We're not just cheering because it's a good story, we're cheering because we are proud of our community and those in it. We followed Tony Nelson on his journey to a state title, not because it will sell papers, but because he's a local champion, and we as a community should be celebrating him.

If we want local newspapers to stay in our area and continue to support our communities, we need to support them. We need to buy a subscription (buy it at any paper you want, it doesn't even have to be ours). Read what is going on in your community. Support businesses that support the local newspapers.

It's easy to put things on Facebook and free unless you pay for a boost. But guess what, as much as some don't want to believe it, not everyone is on Facebook. In our office of four people, two of us are

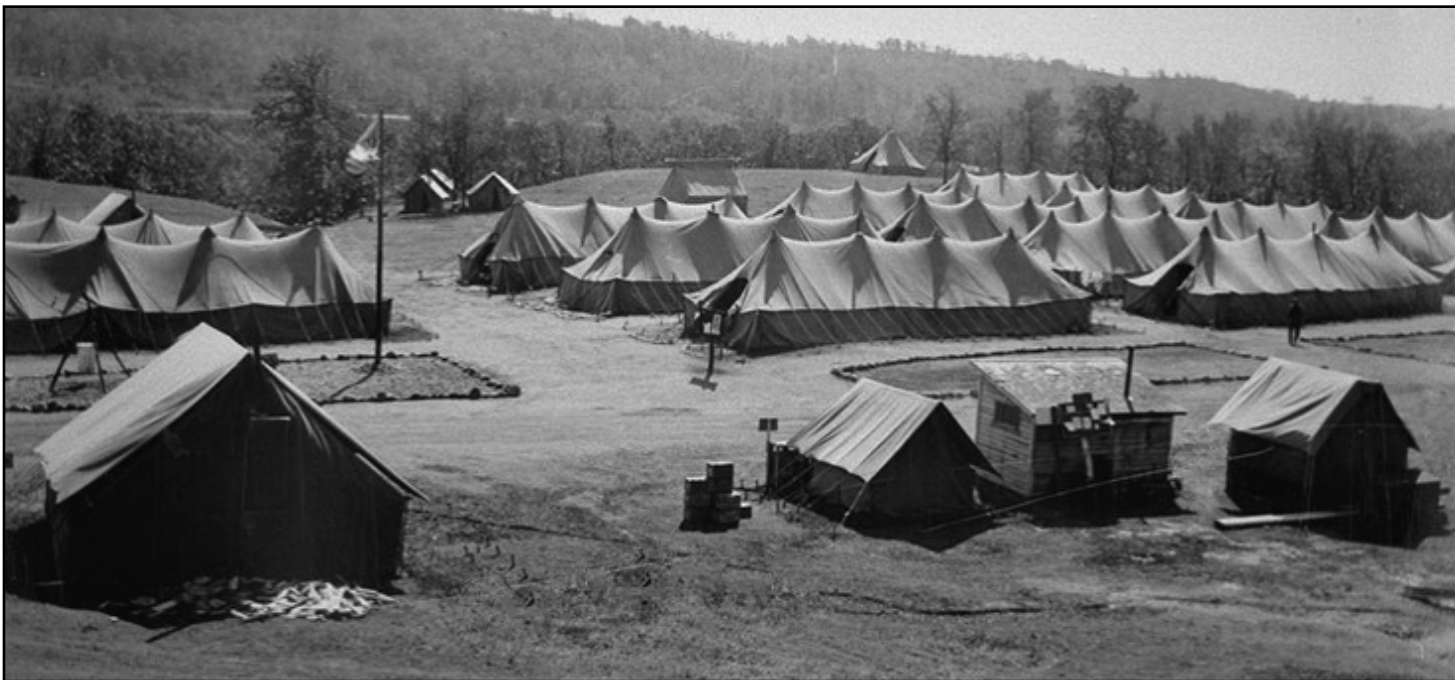
active on Facebook, mainly due to work. One doesn't even have a Facebook account and one despises Facebook but has it only because of work. Not everyone is on social media all day. Some people have jobs and lives outside of their phone screen.

In addition, everything you post online isn't seen by everyone who likes your page. Facebook has this fun thing called algorithms. Have you ever looked at a pair of shoes at a certain store's website? You will now see ads for those shoes in your Facebook feed more than anything posted by family and friends.

Social media has its place in our society. It's a great way to share photos of kids growing up when not everyone lives down the road from grandma and grandpa. It's a fantastic way to keep in contact with high school and college friends with whom you would have lost touch in the past.

It is not, however, going to run a page of photos from Box Car Days or senior awards night. It is not something you are going to display at graduation to highlight your graduate's accomplishments.

Yes, I understand I'm biased on the importance of local newspapers and the support needed for them, but you should be, too. We want every community to have a local watchdog and cheerleader. They are so much better than a desert.



CAMDEN'S VCC COMPANY'S temporary tent camp from August 1934. Photo courtesy National Archives and the Minnesota DNR.

Camden Love Letters: VCC Company 2713 reports for duty

BY BILL PALMER
PRAIRIE LIVES

We have been exploring the history of Camden State Park, our southwest Minnesota wilderness. We learned that the wooded Redwood River Valley upriver from Lynd has attracted human habitation and trade, since long before Euro-American settlement.

We learned about Andrew Dale's dream of raising a family on the valley farm he bought there in 1911 that reminded him of his native Norway. We learned of the Dale children's determination to keep the family together and farming after their parents were killed in an auto/train collision in 1921. And we learned of their decision to sell the valley farm to the State of Minnesota in June 1934 during the farm crisis brought on by the Great Depression and persistent drought conditions.

Responding to that depression, Congress passed the Emergency Conservation Work Act (ECWA) in 1933, authorizing President Roosevelt to create the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Veterans Conservation Corps (VCC). In July 1934 the Director of the ECW authorized increased enrollments in these programs in response to Midwest drought conditions.

Once Minnesota had a purchase agreement with the Dale's, it petitioned the Federal government to establish a drought camp at Camden. The ECW Director approved Minnesota's request.

These ECW projects were popular Depression Era programs. Over 500,000 men were enrolled in CCC or VCC camps at their height in 1935. Army personnel organized, equipped, and maintained the camps, while National Park Service personnel planned and supervised the conservation work projects. From 1933 to 1942 over three million men served across the US. Minnesota hosted 165 ECW camps, only eight of which were VCC camps. The CCC enrolled unmarried, unemployed men ages 18-25, while the VCC enrolled veterans of any age, married or unmarried, who needed work.

Camden's first Superintendent, John A. Woodhall, and his successors submitted

monthly progress reports. These reports narrate the development of Camden State Park.

Mr. Woodhall's report for August 1934 explains that he arrived in Marshall on Aug. 6, 1934 and, guided by a County Engineer, spent several days exploring the park land and considering park development. The men encountered brush heaps; dead and fallen trees; herds of cattle and a few horses grazing the land; and lots of tree stumps. They met with the local park committee and arranged to discontinue grazing before the conservation company arrived.

Mr. Woodhall described the arrival of the camp's company of 205 men a few days later.

"The Conservation Company arrived on the morning of the 10th and proved to be a company of veterans transferred from Rochester."

Their first task was to establish a tent camp in a clearing north of the bluff above what is now the lower campground and uphill to the west of the present location of the swimming pond. Camp leadership also selected a site for a permanent camp in a clearing below the tent camp where the lower campground is located today. The Army contracted with local firms to build the camp's barracks, hospital, mess and recreation halls, and supervisors' cabins before winter.

Mr. Woodhall quickly realized, as the Army staff began moving Army tents and equipment on-site with heavy trucks, improving roads had to be a priority. So he assigned a road work crew on Monday, August 13th.

He described other circumstances that dictated another early work priority.

"It became immediately apparent from the unusual amount of local interest and the large number of visitors that it would be necessary to provide an accessible picnic grounds in order to keep them from roaming all over the park. I selected a spot about midway of the area, which was nicely wooded, near the river, and had a fine spring adjacent to it."

A work crew spent a week clearing

the temporary picnic ground and an adjoining parking area; developing the on-site spring as a water source; and building four temporary stone fireplaces. Their work was rewarded with a crowd of over 300 persons using the area that Sunday.

Later in the report Mr. Woodhall shared his observations about the veterans in Company 2713.

"I have found the veterans to be an agreeable, interested crew and an especially pleased at the interest they show in the work. I have found a large number of them to be excellent workmen and instead of being hard to handle, which I at first feared would be the case, I find they are, on the contrary, well-disciplined and efficient workers in that they are experienced and understand the best methods of accomplishing an objective."

He also reflected on what he had learned of the camp's military commander.

"I have found the C.O. (Commanding Officer) Capt. A.E. Clark to have a fine spirit of cooperation and he has worked very harmoniously with us in every respect. He is very much interested in the work we are doing and its ultimate objective and I feel he inspires the men to a large extent by this attitude."

The veterans of Company 2713 spent most of August improving roads; clearing stumps and debris; cleaning up several acres of accessible and scenic parts of the park; and building the temporary picnic grounds. The Company was quickly making its mark.

Mr. Woodhall closed his August summary by reporting on the popularity of the barely-there park.

"The last Sunday of the month there was an estimated crowd of over two thousand people in the park area. . . . I feel that its development will be closely watched and appreciated by the local populace."

I welcome your participation in and ideas about our exploration of prairie lives. You may reach me at prairieviewpressllc@gmail.com.

Political Corner

Fischbach urges emergency waiver for haying, grazing of CRP lands

U.S. Congresswoman Michelle Fischbach (R-MN) and U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) last Thursday sent a letter to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Tom Vilsack urging the department to grant an emergency waiver for haying and grazing on Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) lands in Minnesota.

"Most of western and southern Minnesota is experiencing a severe drought, and there are no signs of improvement," said Fischbach. "There are reports that herd culling is already being done around the region due to a lack of quality feed, and we need to take action to ensure the circumstances do not worsen. I join my colleagues in urging USDA to take immediate action to allow for haying and grazing on CRP lands."

"We are very appreciative of

Congresswoman Fischbach's support for opening emergency haying and grazing on CRP land. Forage quality and drought concerns are worsening daily, and immediate action is needed for our producers across the state," said Grant Bretkreutz, president of the Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association.

"Minnesota Farm Bureau appreciates the leadership of Congresswoman Fischbach and the Minnesota delegation strongly encouraging USDA to authorize emergency haying and grazing on CRP lands before August 1," said Kevin Paap, president of the Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation. "The series of compounding weather events in 2021, from the late May freeze to the current drought conditions, has escalated the need for quality forage to properly care for livestock."

"Many of the western states

are experiencing extremely dry conditions and the upper Midwest has not been spared from this widespread drought. These drought conditions will soon cause challenges for Minnesota livestock producers as quality of the second cutting hay harvests and grazing lands deteriorates," the letter reads. "To date, USDA has already authorized 29 counties for emergency hazing and grazing. However, unless access to additional pasturelands are made available, the scarcity and high cost of hay could force farmers and ranchers to liquidate their herds."

Under current law, CRP lands cannot be used for

haying and grazing in Minnesota before August 1. However, emergency waivers have historically been granted due to natural disasters such as a drought. Authorization to hay and graze on CRP lands is automatically triggered if the U.S. Drought Monitor classifies an area as being in a "severe drought" or worse for more than eight weeks.

The letter echoes a similar call from Minnesota's largest agricultural advocacy groups, including the Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association, the Minnesota Farm Bureau Federation, the Minnesota Soybean Growers Association and the Minnesota Corn Growers Association.

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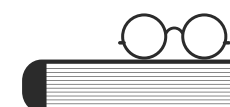
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