

80 years of research

The year 2008 marked the 80th anniversary of the High Plains Grasslands Research Station, a U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) location. Established on March 19, 1928 by the 70th US Congress, research at the Cheyenne Horticultural Field Station began in 1930 with a focus on tree windbreaks and evaluation of shade, ornamental and shelterbelt trees, shrubs, vines and vegetables from around the world for hardiness in this harsh climate.

More than 1,300 varieties of fruit trees (apples, pears, plums, and cherries), 300 varieties of small fruits (raspberries, currants, gooseberries, and strawberries) and chrysanthemums and carnations have been tested at the research station. Improved strawberry varieties Radiance, Ogallala and Fort Laramie have been released, and the Cheyenne Hardy Mums were named the official Cheyenne flower in 1970.

The name of the research station changed in 1974 to the High Plains Grasslands Research Station, and research efforts were initiated in reclamation of mined-lands and livestock grazing management. Our current research mission is to develop new knowledge of ecological responses in semi-arid rangeland ecosystems (228 million acres in the western and northern Great Plains), and incorporate this knowledge into management practices which address both production and conservation goals relevant for public and private lands (see our web site at www.rrru.ars.usda.gov for more information).

For example, in collaboration with ranchers, the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, and scientists from both the University of Wyoming and Colorado State University, we are providing information and recommendations for managing rangelands on how livestock grazing, prescribed fire, prairie dogs and global change affect the health of these lands.

Justin Derner, Rangeland Scientist and Location Coordinator -- Jack Morgan, Research Leader

Our research in remote sensing is providing products, including aerial photography and computerized analyses of vegetation, that assist in the monitoring of rangelands for key ecological indicators regarding the function and sustainability of these lands.

The High Plains Grasslands Research Station is the headquarters for the Rangeland Resources Research Unit, which has an annual operating budget of \$2.3 million and employs 29 scientists, technicians and support staff. Additional facilities for the Research Unit include the Central Plains Experimental Range, 15,500 acres of shortgrass prairie northeast of Nunn, Colorado, and a state-of-the-art laboratory/greenhouse/office facility, the Crops Research Lab, in Fort Collins, Colorado.

The High Plains Grasslands Research Station occupies 2,736 acres of northern mixed-grass prairie just west of Cheyenne. This provides our Research Unit with the unique ability to conduct research in the two primary rangeland ecosystems in the North American Great Plains (northern mixed-grass prairie and the shortgrass steppe).

The High Plains Grasslands Research Station is working in partnership with the City of Cheyenne regarding plans for the future development of the High Plains Arboretum and Roundtop Park. These lands were returned back to the City of Cheyenne last year in an amendment to our 199 year lease with the goals of preserving open space for citizens of Laramie County and providing mutually beneficial opportunities to showcase local and federal government cooperation.

On behalf of the staff at the High Plains Grasslands Research Station, we encourage you to contact Ann Heckart at (307) 772-2433 ext 100 or by email at Ann.Heckart@ars.usda.gov for more information or to schedule a visit, or stop by our headquarters at 8408 Hildreth Road between 7:30 am and 4:00 pm during the week.

So far, so fair for Rick Kaysen

There was a change or two more that Rick could have made with "department heads," but he got off to a fair start.

The removal of Ken Lewis as City Engineer was preordained. Much of Rick's campaign financial support came from developers who despise Ken and Rick spent quite a bit of time with that crowd before the election. And after.

But, an incoming mayor does not need a reason, especially not a good reason, to decline to reappoint a sitting department head. That is his prerogative.

And, "department head" is an improper and exaggerated designation for some of the positions. The junior municipal judge is not a department head - he is an underling to the senior municipal judge. In the present case, the junior judge is wearing so many hats, it's hard to tell when he has time to act as a municipal judge.

When Rick is soon faced with employee cutbacks, he might want to look at that position - it is no more than a half-time job as it is being done now.

Besides alienating several developers who are "insiders" and who provided substantial financial support for the incoming mayor, Ken also led the futile battle to municipalize Cheyenne Light, Fuel and Power when Rick was its CEO. That battle got very personal and the only chance the City had to accomplish its hostile takeover was to convince the Legislature that Cheyenne Light was cheating its customers and that Rick was incompetent.

Payback can be a bitch.

Even though the City Engineer is one of the few city positions that require a level

of education not easily found - not to mention the extensive experience Ken had as a city engineer in Ohio and California cities - his departure was sealed when Rick won the election.

There is no comparable position in city government - when it comes to alienating the privileged and powerful. This is the second administration in a row to remove the city engineer. In Jack Spiker's case, there was a replacement waiting in the wings. Ken Lewis had been hired as the surface water drainage engineer by Leo Pando and there was no need for that position as the result of the election which rejected the creation of a storm water drainage district. So, Ken was not only already here on staff but readily available for the promotion he was offered by Jack.

The time for needing a replacement is not the best - an assistant city engineer recently left to accept another position.

Perhaps someone from WYDOT has the requisite education, training and experience and will apply. No mail order degrees accepted, please.

Who will become the next city attorney? Since Mary Guthrie was released by Jack Spiker in 2001, it's been slim pickin's over there. Most lawyers in private practice should be able to make much more money than the City can pay and also experience more challenging legal issues than trying to make sure resolutions and ordinances have the requisite number of "whereases" and "heretofores." Talk about wasting a law degree.

The best candidate would be a young one - male or female - who is bright, energetic and ambitious. Or one nearing retirement who wants an easy \$80,000 a year to take

into the assisted living home with them.

The reason Mary wasn't reappointed had little to do with her competence - it had much to do with Jack's belief that she had become the "mayor's attorney." So, what did he do once he was mayor? He made the city attorney *his* personal attorney.

If Rick doesn't appoint someone who is allowed to give credible legal advice and, instead, names someone who will tell him what he wants to hear, residents can look forward to four more years of losing litigation and potentially costly awards.

Releasing the new public works department head (Abel replaced Jackie Smith a short time back) at the same time as releasing the city engineer is a gamble. Those two positions dominate the decisions critical to growth. It also points out the risk of a city employee accepting one of the department head positions. As an employee, he has some rights. As a department head, he has squat. He serves at the pleasure of the mayor, with confirmation of the city council, which is and should be, automatic.

So, this employee accepted the department head job and then was axed. Merry Christmas! Unlike many corporate jobs eliminated at the Holidays, these just come up for reappointment at Christmas. Nothing personal or mean-spirited.

Some people were surprised that the Parks guy wasn't shown the road. There have been many more problems there - involving the public - than with Ken Lewis or Mike Abel. Wrongful termination that cost the City a lot of money when the employee was reinstated; two cemetery desecrations; and, fist fights at local restaurant and bowling alley parking lots.

Not to mention hiring and promotion practices. Department employees aren't likely to advance unless they are also archers.

The Parks Department is by far the most dysfunctional of all city departments. Supervision and management may be able to rein in that rogue group. Maybe.

Some believe it's not the mayor's job to "micromanage" the departments. It is. The mayor in Cheyenne's form of government is the CEO of the city. Unlike the county commissioners who have several other elected officials responsible for virtually all decisions, the mayor here is supposed to see that the operations of the city are run well. He is not mayor in Gillette. He is not any other Wyoming city's mayor. They all have city managers or city administrators to make the day-to-day decisions and the mayor there is a ceremonial position - often chosen from among members elected as a council member himself/herself.

Rick may have thought four positions to fill at one time were plenty.

The City has many very good employees. Most are conscientious and hard-working. They do not like nor support incompetence nor the waste of public money. But, like in private businesses, they will be as good as their management. Poor management filters down to the underlings.

Rick told the Herald that Bob Fecht did not resign his Senate seat under pressure. That's too bad - Rick's reputation would have been enhanced by issuing such an ultimatum. Cheyenne has too much crime to tolerate a part-time police chief. Now, if Fecht would pay back the taxpayers for his purchased mail order master's degree, we'd be all set.