

AMARILLO, TEXAS -- Potter County is currently under a burn ban which took effect on January 27 for the next 90 days. Tuesday's dry forecast with winds upward of 30 miles per hour will test this ban, but firefighters are prepared for any scenario.

"During this time of year, generally when we hit the end of February through March and generally in the first part of April, it's pretty much the more severe time of the year for wild land fires in this area," Potter County Fire Chief Richard Lake said. "So throughout the year we make sure our training is up to date, our equipment is up to date and we're ready to respond throughout these periods."

The burn ban does not prohibit the burning of domestic waste at a private residence or fire to keep warm in cold weather. The ban does require these fires to be in a container with a metal screen capable of keeping flames from escaping the container.

Fire Chief Lake has some advice for the windy, dry weather to come.

"The best thing to do is not do any outside activities that involve fire such as burning trash," Lake said. "We have a lot of instances where they're cutting or welding, working with machinery, things of that type of outdoor work generally lends itself to wild land fires starting."

For more information about the burn ban or to report a violation please call the Potter County Volunteer Fire Department at (806) 383-3373.

FRITCH, TEXAS -- The National Park Service reports Lake Meredith visitors spent \$20 million in surrounding communities in 2012.

Chief Ranger Paul Jones said this number seems unrealistic. He said the park saw more than 1.1 million visitors in 2005; that number was nearly halved by last year.

One Fritch business owner, Joan Knoll, said she hasn't seen much of that \$20 million either. A few years ago, CJ's Bait Shop employed four people 12 hours a day to keep up with demands.

Present day, she works mostly by herself. She credits the lack of traffic to a drop in the lake's water level.

Chief Jones said the decline in Lake Meredith visitors is due to several factors including the 2002 ban of personal water crafts. That law was overturned in the summer of 2004, but the number of visitors has since steadily declined each year.

He said the ban and low lake levels caused most local businesses to stop selling personal water crafts.

Chief Jones said they are trying to make the park more accessible for cyclists. Park volunteers are currently building a 10-mile multi-use trail.

There's a cycling ban on undesignated national park trails, but Chief Jones hopes that will change by June 7 for National Trails Day

AMARILLO, TEXAS -- With Saint Patrick's Day upon us and spring breakers letting loose, the Department of Public Safety has increased the DWI patrol units on the streets.

Through the Federal Highway, TxDOT gave Texas DPS a grant to boost patrol units from March 7 through March 23.

Trooper Chris Ray said most of the traffic violations this time of year have come from travelers driving through Amarillo, but there have been some DWI arrests.

"A lot of our spring break traffic comes from Dallas going to Colorado and New Mexico to travel into the mountains for skiing," Ray said. "So most of ours is travel related, but we did get some DWIs so far."

Ray said last year there were more than 1,000 DWI arrests across Texas. About 226 of those were a direct result of the federal grant.

A DWI can cost more than \$10,000, so Ray said to call a cab or designated driver if you've had too much to drink.

He also said sober drivers should take precautions because intoxicated drivers usually find a way to get behind the wheel. He says to know your route, get plenty of rest, make sure your car is in top shape, stay off your cell phone and inform someone of where you're going.

AMARILLO, TEXAS -- Apartment rent in Amarillo is up 2.5 percent from last year, according to the National Association of Realtors.

The NAR also reports apartment occupancy in Amarillo is at 91 percent, so rent prices are rising due to supply and demand.

Greg Glenn of Prudential Ada Realtors said because there aren't many new apartments being built and people aren't purchasing homes, apartment rent will continue to rise.

According to the NAR, the average price of an apartment in Amarillo last year was \$650 a month and the average size was 811 square feet.

Glenn said mortgaging a two bedroom home would cost about \$700 a month, but a down payment of almost \$8,500 would be required. He said he understands it's quite a commitment to purchase a home, and apartments offer a lot of amenities that people like.

AMARILLO, TEXAS -- Political tensions in Ukraine affect one West Texas A&M University student studying abroad.

Daniela Fierro was supposed to study in Ukraine for a year starting in August 2013, but she evacuated in late January.

Dr. Elizabeth Morrow Clark, associate professor of history at WT, said Ukraine's political uncertainty is dividing the country in half.

"The big question for Ukraine is whether Ukraine will be part of Western Europe or part of the East, part of the Russian's sphere," Dr. Clark said. "And that's a classic question for Ukraine. Ukraine is a border state between Western Europe, and with Poland being a member of the European Union already that makes Ukraine the next natural candidate for expansion."

Fierro said Russians had already entered Crimea when she arrived at Karazin Kharkiv National University in August. Five months later, she felt it was the appropriate time to leave Eastern Ukraine due to rising political tensions.

"I'm upset that I had to come back early," Fierro said, "because it's an opportunity for me to continue learning a new language and meeting new people from all over the world."

When asked whether she wants to return to Ukraine, Fierro hesitated.

"I love the Russian culture and I love the Russians, but I'm not too fond of Russian politics at this moment," Fierro said. "So if that were to happen, I don't know if I'd be going back any time soon."

LANGSTON, OKLA. (AP) -- LANGSTON, Okla. (AP) - The U.S. Geological Survey has recorded 9 earthquakes in Oklahoma since about 9:30 p.m. Friday, the largest being a magnitude 4.0 temblor.

The U.S.G.S. says the 4.0 magnitude quake was recorded at 10:05 p.m. Friday about seven miles south of Langston.

The other quakes all ranged from magnitude 2.4 to 2.9 and all but four were recorded in the Langston area. The others were recorded near Stillwater, Choctaw, Cherokee and Crescent.

No injuries or damage have been reported.

Geologists say earthquakes of magnitude 2.5 to 3.0 are generally the smallest that are felt by humans.

AMARILLO, TEXAS -- Celebration Talent hosts professional, family-friendly dance events for young children and students.

The event has two levels of competition-- girls age 3-12 and 13 and older.

Participants can perform in a solo event, as well as group performances.

Andrea Cantu traveled all the way from Lamesa, Texas to compete in the younger division.

"We did ballet," Cantu said. "And for me ballet is beautiful and graceful. And we also danced tap. The song was dancing in the streets. It means like you can go to New York , it doesn't matter what city, or whatever song it is, or even in a grocery store. You hear your favorite song and you're like, just go for it."

Amarillo was one of two stops for Celebration Talent in Texas.

AMARILLO, TEXAS -- Texas is one of a few states without an Equal Pay Act.

A civil rights attorney in Amarillo, Jeff Blackburn, explained the current law in Texas for workplace fairness.

"It's against the law to be discriminated against," Blackburn said. "It doesn't mean you have an absolute right to equal pay. You'll have to prove that you're being discriminated against. You have to prove that. You can't just say 'well I'm being paid less than that guy.' It takes a lot more proof than that, the burden's on you."

But do any employers in Amarillo pay men more than women for the same job, same duties and same work experience? Vicki Wilmarth is an employment attorney who represents employers and she said yes.

"There have definitely been some cases where employers were not paying equal pay between men and women," Wilmarth said. "But as a rule as what I have found in 25 years of practicing in the area of employment is that the employers are trying to do the right thing, but they either don't know the law or things slip by them."

Texas requires disparate pay claims to be made within 180 days of when the discrimination began through the Texas Workforce Commission.

Under federal law, such claims can be filed within 180 days of when discrimination was discovered.

If someone in Texas discovers disparate pay after 180 days of when it began, Blackburn said he/she would have to file with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission or through a federal court.

"You're going to have to go to a federal agency that is understaffed, overworked and underfunded that may take upward of a year or two to even get around to looking at your case," Blackburn said.

Gov. Rick Perry vetoed House Bill 950, a Texas version of the Lilly Ledbetter Act, in June 2013 because he said it duplicates federal law

The High Plains Food Bank is a nonprofit organization the city of Amarillo is lucky to have living within its borders. Not only do Potter and Randall benefit greatly from their charitable work, communities all over the Texas Panhandle depend on their kindness and hard work to feed their citizens in need.

According to Zack Wilson, High Plains Food Bank Executive Director, last year about 9,000 lbs of food were distributed every month, with 60% of the inventory venturing outside the city limits of Amarillo. Why? The HPFB folks refer to certain areas of the Panhandle as "food deserts," in other words, small communities where a grocery store is hard to get to, or is simply too far for the elderly or those in need to attempt to visit. To respond to this need volunteers work around the clock to pack 35lb box family packs. Inside these brown boxes are blessings for those who would otherwise go without. These family packs contain cereal, dry goods, and canned foods. Canned products are ironically what the HPFB is in most need of. According to the staff canned food donations are running very low recently, along with meats, and paper products.

The food bank's focus is to not only feed the Panhandle, but to nourish those in need with healthy, organic produce through their community garden project. The year round garden grows fresh vegetables, herbs, even pumpkins. It's the perfect place for volunteers to learn about the organic garden process, and also educates the locals on the health benefits of a nutrient rich diet.

With the holiday season upon us we tend to think of those without, but please remember the High Plains Food Bank needs our help all year long to make sure the Panhandle a place for all to thrive.



Growing around the original Tascosa is Cal Farley's Boys' Ranch.

The original Oldham County Courthouse remains, as does the original County Schoolhouse, which has been restored.

The town began in the 1870s and was dubbed the Cowboy Capital of the Texas Panhandle.

It had a rowdy reputation.

Mike Pacino represents Boys' Ranch and knows a lot about the history of the site. "Tascosa supported the ranches," he says, "what killed it was barbed wire," and an effort by a local rancher to move the railroad to a town he created, Cheyenne, which ultimately never came about because he lost interest after the railroad was moved. He had some animosity against Tascosa.

But as old as Tascosa is, the story didn't begin there.

Before Tascosa there was Casimero Romero.

After the Comanches were subdued, the New Mexican sheepherder, or Pastore, brought his flocks to the great grazing land.

Of course, cattlemen loved the area too and eventually sheep weren't grazed, but the Romeros made a big impact on Tascosa.

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AMARILLO, TEXAS -- Rick Standiford has lived the past five months at Another Chance House as a temporary guest, there to meet a forever life goal.

"I've made a personal commitment to be here for a year, and what I hope to do is become self-sufficient and get a program of recovery under my belt," Standiford said.

Standiford said he needed a fresh start before things got out of control, and the program was a perfect fit.

"I had a career, lost a career and found myself in the depths of alcoholism and drug addiction," he said.

The program currently houses 69 men, half of whom are veterans. Another Chance House takes formally homeless men and gives them just that, another chance.

Assistant Director Bobby Nixon said, "They have to do their part and whatever the reason is that they become homeless whether it be drug addiction, alcoholism, mental illness, loss of family, loss of job. You do your foot work and we'll give you a clean and safe place to stay."

According to Nixon men who are admitted to the program stay anywhere from 12-18 months and each day with a new goal, but for Christmas with all goals set aside, it was time to celebrate as a family.

"Well you see it, we just come here to have lunch together and just be around the people that are in the same shoe, identify with each other and support each other," Standiford said.

AMARILLO -- The Wildcat Bluff Nature Center and the Mariposa Community, both located off Loop 335, are efforts to protect and preserve the land.

Vivien Young is the Executive Director of the Center and Mariposa is an effort spearheaded by local philanthropist Mary Emeny.

Emeny was also instrumental in developing the Center.

They believe not just in sustainability, but they strive for regeneration.

They like to say "blonde is beautiful", referring to the natural state of traditional grasses.