

heat. A few brief intrusions of monsoonal moisture from the desert Southwest dropped some rain on the region on the 22nd and 23rd. Unfortunately, most of the heavy rain stayed in the high country, while areas around the Tri-Lakes received around 0.10 inch. Temperatures showed quite a variety over the last two weeks of the months, swinging from highs well in the 80s on the 21st, 22nd, 24th, and 26th to the upper 60s and low 70s on the 20th and 23rd.

Days have grown shorter and the nights longer. So if you enjoy the warm, sunny weather of the last few months, be sure to take advantage while you can because the cool weather of autumn will be here before you know it.

A look ahead

September is a transition month for the region, with the last tastes of summer mixed in with our first morning freezes. Leaves begin to change by the end of the month, and three out of the last five Septembers have seen at least

a trace of snow. The overall weather pattern is generally one of tranquility, with our chances for thunderstorms dwindling and blizzard conditions not quite ready for prime time. We are often greeted with sunny, pleasant afternoons, with highs from the mid-70s early in the month to the mid-60s later. Our first subfreezing temperatures usually occur during the second or third week, so prepare those tender plants.

August 2012 Weather Statistics	
Average High	82.8° (+5.2)
100-year return frequency value max	83.9° min 72.9°
Average Low	48.7° (-0.4)
100-year return frequency value max	55.2° min 46.8°
Monthly Precipitation	0.33"

100-year return frequency value max	(-2.80", 90% below normal)
Monthly Snowfall	0.0"
Highest Temperature	90° on the 6th and 29th
Lowest Temperature	41° on the 21st
Season to Date Snow	0.0"
(the snow season is from July 1 to June 30)	
Season to Date Precip.	3.77"
(the precip season is from July 1 to June 30)	
Heating Degree Days	34 (-34)
Cooling Degree Days	52 (+11)
Bill Kappel is a meteorologist and Tri-Lakes resident.	
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Letters to Our Community

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Overgrowth provides haven for bears
Our home is on Winding Meadow Way, and our backyard is connected to the Dirty Woman Creek drainage gulch called “The Meadows” in the Woodmoor Commons area. We have observed a bear and two cubs in our yard on four occasions—May 26, June 13, June 24, and Aug. 21. The adult bear on one of those sightings had a yellow tag attached, which means the Colorado Parks and Wildlife had already had a problem with it in the past.

The adult bear on Aug. 21 made a “bluff” short charge toward me once (just a few feet), then backed off. A state wildlife official said this behavior is normal. Then on Aug. 22, a huge bear with a yellow tag attached (about 100 pounds heavier than the bear on Aug. 21) emerged out of the gulch just as I was walking toward the gulch! This one was alone. He stayed near the edge of our yard, and laid down and scratched himself. After a few minutes, he got up and walked toward our next-door neighbor’s patio.

We called Woodmoor Security, and he came over with his paintball gun, but the bear was gone. He said they had been keeping track of the bear and two cubs plus this large bear all day.

Since our grandchildren frequently play in our backyard, we are naturally concerned about their safety.

Dirty Woman Creek gulch is like a thick jungle for about a 200-yard stretch from our house to St. Mathias Episcopal Church. It is so thick that deer (and cross-country skiers) take detours through our yard to avoid it. We frequently hear coyotes howling in the gulch, and the bears have entered our yard from the gulch and also returned to it.

Woodmoor does a nice job of keeping the other common areas mowed and trimmed, but they totally ignore this area. I believe they need to make it a priority to clear out most of the dense overgrowth, but still leave enough for wildlife.

Jerry Klazura Photo provided by Jerry Klazura

School District 38’s high staff turnover hurts
We’ve all read about companies that were in a downward spiral and were able to recover with new leadership who did not blame others but rolled up their sleeves and identified and then addressed the problems. This did not come without discomfort and increased transparency. Our District 38 school board and superintendent continue to blame the state for our financial predicament. Because we have a representative form of government, isn’t the district leadership, in essence, blaming the very citizens who vote and pay taxes to support our district?

In any organization, whether public or private, for profit or not for profit, a pattern of increasing staff turnover over a period of years is a primary indicator of an organization in trouble. As of May 2012, D-38 had 736 employees, of whom 327, or 44 percent, are teachers. From the school years 2009-12, a total of 332 employees have exited the district. Thirty-five new teachers have been hired for this school year.

Our turnover rate continues to be higher than those of D-20, D-12, and even D-11! I hope district leadership has not fooled itself into believing that the long-awaited raise for staff (that barely offsets increased insurance costs to employees) will solve the turnover crisis. These turnover statistics, which can be verified on the Colorado Department of Education website, should be alarming to anyone.

Any institution that relies so heavily on the abilities, personality, and professionalism of its staff such as schools do intuitively understands that building relationships with students, parents, coworkers, and community take time. Both parents and students fully acknowledge the importance of the student-teacher relationship to their educational success. High staff turnover interferes with student success.

Stephen Boyd

Younger D-38 students’ test results worth worrying about

What is all this education TCAP/CSAP testing news, and what does this mean to our kids’ quality of education? This information is from the Colorado Department of Education’s (CDE) website (<http://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/CoAssess-DataAndResults.asp>):

- Q:** What is TCAP’s purpose?
A: TCAP supports transition to Colorado Academic Standards (CAS) during development of the new assessment, scheduled for 2014.
Q: How is TCAP similar to CSAP?
A: TCAP will continue to assess those Model Content Standards aligned with Colorado Academic Standards. TCAP continues to assess some Model Content Standards that are not in the Colorado Academic Standards and preserves paper and pencil tests; multiple choice and constructed response questions; question formats; and test blueprint and reporting categories.

So, what does TCAP mean to our kids and their performance assessment? Dr. Lori Benton, Lewis-Palmer School District 38 director of assessment, gifted education and technology, told the Colorado Springs Gazette that determining how well kids are doing is “a complex issue.... What we have (on the TCAP results) is just performance compared to last year’s scores. But that is like comparing apples to oranges until we can dig into the cohort data because you aren’t comparing the same set of students.”

I was curious about the Colorado state data Dr. Benton referenced for 2011-12 as TCAP apples to oranges performance. We all like fruit, right? So I went to CDE data and looked. TCAP shows our 10th-graders doing well as they prepare to leave high school. Great job! Unfortunately, grades 3-9 show performance concerns.

At Dr. Benton’s District 38 level, for grades 3-9, her referenced 2011-12 Proficiency and Advanced TCAP test results for 2012 are:

- Reading averages dropped 1.2 percent
- Writing averages dropped 2.9 percent
- Science stable at 70 percent Proficient and Advanced
- Mathematics averages dropped 1.1 percent

And the District 38 performance year-to-year? You be the judge.

What are the district’s plans to improve? We had this conversation last year! It takes time, planning, more time, and more waiting for apples and oranges to ripen, while our kids struggle, and the educational clock ticks on. Folks, please check your school’s TCAP scores rather than one personal assessment. It is our kids’ future, and their education time is running out.

Gordon Reichal ■