

Local News

Lewis County to join Mesonet
By MICHAEL ARTHUR, Staff Writer

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VANCEBURG -- Lewis County will be receiving its own weather station linked directly to the Kentucky Mesonet, a state-wide network of weather and climate monitoring systems administered in coordination with Western Kentucky University and the National Weather Service.

In addition to providing detailed, localized information on temperature, precipitation, winds and various other climate-related data, the new Lewis County system will assist forecasters at the closest National Weather Service office in Wilmington, Ohio, to make crucial decisions on severe weather advisories and warnings concerning Lewis County and surrounding areas. It will also help local residents track and prepare for major weather events like snowstorms or flash flooding, according to individuals associated with the program.

"It will be a great benefit for the county as far as weather preparedness," said Judge-Executive Steve Applegate following a Lewis County Fiscal Court meeting Monday where the weather station was discussed.

Applegate said the station will be located on Twin Valley Farms, near Kentucky 9. He said fiscal court was asked to put a fence up around the station and clear away any growth and vegetation that would interfere with its operation, but the county will not be responsible for any other contribution to the station's set-up or operations.

Earmark funding for the Kentucky Mesonet was secured by Sen. Mitch McConnell, according to the program's Web site, www.kymesonet.org.

According to Dr. Stuart Foster, state climatologists with the Kentucky Climate Center, administrators of the Mesonet are excited about the new location in Lewis County.

"At this point, we don't have any stations along the Ohio River counties in the northern part of the state," Foster said. "We have spent some time there in the last few months working very hard to identify some good locations."

Administrators are hoping to set up a Mason County station as well, he said.

While kymesonet.org currently shows 21 sites in Kentucky, Foster said the goal of the program is to develop and install about 100 stations across the state. The closest current site is in Rowan County, near Morehead.

The Lewis County station will consist of a meteorological tower that is about 10 meters (33 feet) tall, as well as a covered precipitation gauge and a power source.

"Most of sites, including the one in Lewis County I believe, are solar powered," Foster said.

The stations' day-to-day operations are automated, although maintenance checks will be routinely performed to make sure the equipment is taken care of, Foster said. A small computer called a "data logger" runs the station, but administrators at the Kentucky Climate Center will be able to send instructions or "talk to the station" from the center's Bowling Green facilities as well, Foster said.

The Mesonet stations collect a variety of weather and climate related measurements every five minutes. Every 15 minutes, the information is transmitted to the program's Web site, which is accessible for free by the public. Foster said the data is also transmitted directly to the NWS and to researchers and forecasters at several public universities in the state who belong to the Kentucky Mesonet Consortium.

At kymesonet.org, the public can view live weather data, including graphs of specific readings over 24 hour periods, as well as historical data that is archived from the time each individual station goes into operation.

Once the station is installed, local resident will be able to see weather readings and track changes for the area almost in real time, or check out reports from other stations to the south or west to keep an eye on developing storm systems moving toward their area and prepare accordingly.

"You can basically get an idea of what's headed your way before it gets there," Foster said.

If the Mason County site can be finalized, Foster said it will "pair well" with the Lewis County station.

For more information on the Kentucky Mesonet, visit www.kymesonet.org.

Contact Michael Arthur at michael.arthur@lee.net or call 606-564-9091, ext. 271.

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