

SNOWMOBILE

➤ continued from A1

He advised people not to ride alone, and noted that cell phone coverage can vary from place to place. “If you’re out there in the middle of the woods and something happens, it can be a long walk back in the dark,” he said. “And you can’t always rely on a cell phone to get you out of trouble.”

Groomers will be operating during the daylight hours until all the trails have been groomed and then will begin traveling the trails during the night. He urged riders to give the groomers plenty of room.

Bigler urged riders to join a local club if they do not already belong to one. Membership details and information on club meetings and upcoming activities are included on the IVSC website at <http://www.ridetheborder.com/>

“I believe if you ride, you should join a club — if you don’t we don’t have trails,” he said.

Grooming of trails is funded through a state grant-in-aid program which provides money for each mile groomed, he said. The funding, however, was cut by 6.5 percent this year because of a lack of registered snowmobiles, which Bigler said may reflect a number of past seasons without much snow. The IVSC is gearing up for activities in February when it will offer a Radar Run for Cancer in connection with a hot dog roast at the same time the Live on Skis vintage snowmobile run occurs.

VTSI

Julie Sawyer, trail administrator with the Voyageurs Trail Society Inc., said trails to the east — Kabetogama, Ash River and Crane Lake — have been packed and are open, but have not been groomed.

“We’ve got a great start,” she said. “It’s a great sport, but you do have to be careful. Our operators go through a lot to make it good for us riders.”

She said groomers have been packing the trails without pulling the drags that groom the trails. She said the packing, combined with frigid temperatures, should help eliminate some wet spots and firm up beaver ponds. Look for trail reports at the VTSI website at <http://www.snowmobilevacation.com/>

“There are certain places where you need to be careful,” she said.

Meanwhile, Sawyer said VTSI, which has three groomers in its fleet, will get a new groomer this week. The new groomer will be used on the Kab-Ash area trails.

“We’re very excited,” she said of the new machine. “We were very much in need of a new groomer and thanks to David Dill, our state representative, we were able to get some grants and matching grants that will help us get back on track.”

Snowmobiling and well-groomed trails play an important role in area’s winter economy, she said.

“Snowmobiling is our life support system in the winter — that’s the income we depend upon,” she said. “Grooming is the most important thing to get people to

come to the area. We have a great system, our groomers and operators do a great job and the new groomer will help us do our jobs better.”

The new groomer, delivered Tuesday, is a PistenBully, a German-made groomer that is smaller than the other VTSI groomers and will allow crews to more easily groom narrow trails and around tight corners, said Sawyer.

The Voyageur Trail Society, Inc. was established in 1986 to enhance winter trail opportunities in and around Voyageurs National Park. It began as a tourism marketing organization, but took over maintenance of the area’s trails in 1999. The Ash River-Kabetogama Snowdrifters club was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1999 with purposes of charity, recreation and education.

Sawyer also encouraged riders to join a local club. “If you ride, you should support it,” she said of the sport. “There is time when you’re on a sled to collect your thoughts and it’s just beautiful. We have a fantastic trail system. We’re very fortunate to have what we have out our own back door. I love it. I’ve been riding for years.”

VNP

Seth Nelson, Voyageurs National Park Namakan District maintenance supervisor, said Tuesday that the park’s lake trails will require thicker ice to allow for snowmobilers.

He said ice thicknesses on the park’s lake trails were checked Monday, where adequate ice was found in a few spots, but not in most areas.

“We need to let the cold weather hammer it down a little and we’ll go out and check Thursday,” he said. VNP crews walk along the ice checking its thickness every 50 feet.

“We just don’t have the ice yet,” he said, adding that the large dump of snow came just a little ahead of the good, clear weight-bearing ice.

Nelson recommended that people stay off the ice for now. “With all this snow, there’s some water and slush. It’s hazardous conditions.”

Signs proclaiming “Danger — thin ice” have been posted at the park’s boat ramps to alert people, he said.

VNP crews will work to get the snowmobile trails prepared for riding and then consider establishing ice roads.

But people looking to get outside and enjoy winter recreational opportunities are welcome to use some of the park’s ski trails. He said the Echo Bay Trail has been packed and should be tracked by the end of the week.

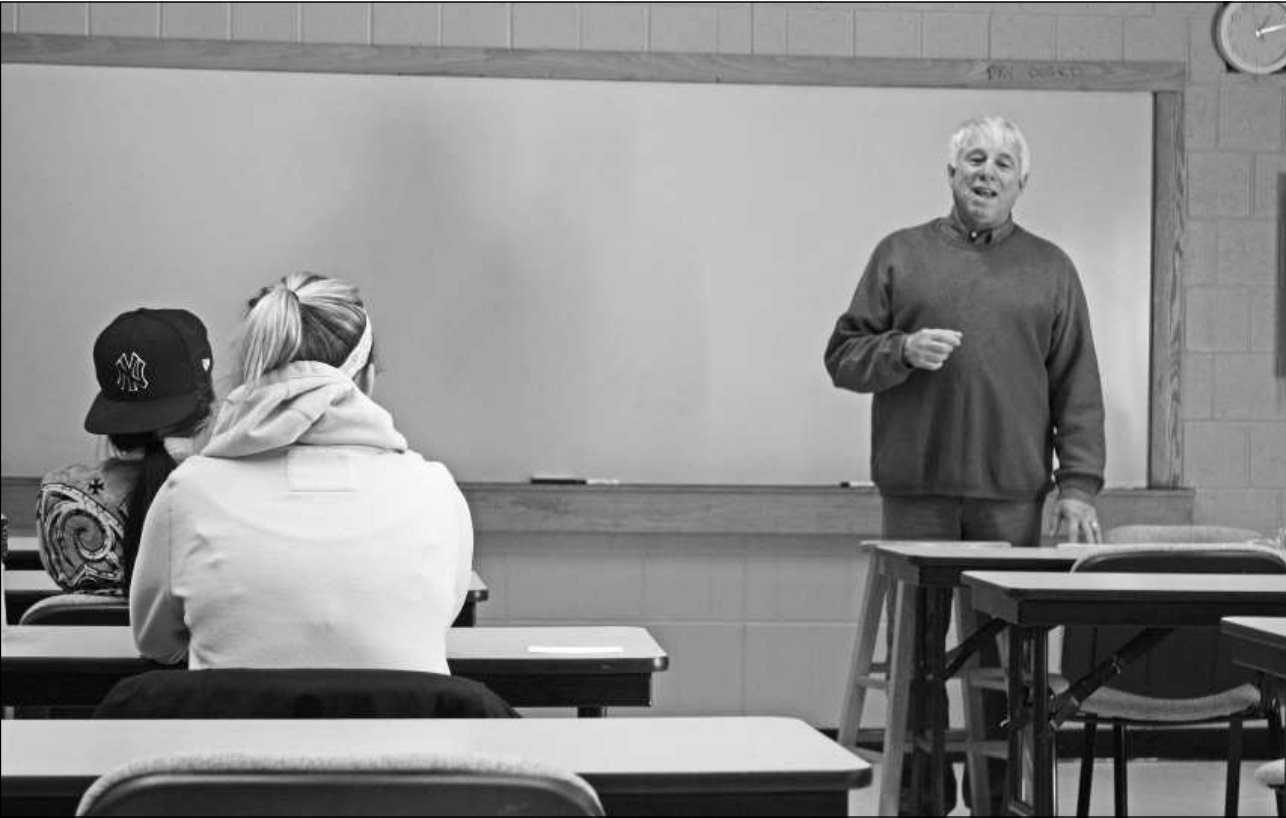
However, he urged people to pay attention to and prepare for the frigid temperatures forecast.

Winter trail reports will soon be provided to The Journal and posted on the park’s website, he said. Reports will be available at <http://www.nps.gov/voya/planyourvisit/winter-trail-updates.htm>

Next week, he said the park will invite area snowmobile clubs to an annual meeting when the park’s winter operations will be reviewed, Nelson said.

“We want to get everybody thinking about safety,” he said.

WAR STORIES FROM WADE



STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT

Wade Pavleck, Vietnam War veteran, speaks to Joe Chlebecek’s Vietnam War class at Rainy River Community College last week. Pavleck, also a Koochiching County Commissioner, discussed how his experiences in the Army and in Vietnam sparked his interest in government and politics. His decision to fly rather than walk in Vietnam led to him becoming a crew chief and door gunner on a helicopter, he said.

BUDGET

➤ continued from A1

Thursday’s announcement comes after Minnesota added 13,400 jobs since August and more than 122,000 jobs since January 2011 — regaining all of the jobs lost in the Great Recession, Dayton’s statement said. “Minnesota was recently ranked eighth in the ‘Forbes 2013 List of the Best States for Business,’ and had, according to the U.S. Department of Labor, the fifth-fastest growing state economy in the nation last year,” Dayton’s statement said.

Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk said the positive budget forecast is more good news for Minnesotans.

“Our state’s workers and businesses are the engine of our growing economy, and it’s thanks to them that Minnesota is well positioned coming out of the recent economic downturn,” he said in a statement. “This forecast also shows how the honest budget passed by the legislature and the governor, without accounting shifts or gimmicks, has created the confidence and stability necessary for Minnesota’s economy to grow. Claims that new revenue in the DFL budget would cripple the state’s economy are simply false, and we are optimistic that Minnesota will continue to add jobs in the coming year.”

Bakk said Thursday’s budget forecast not only showed revenue projections above what was expected, and the state’s spending came in \$247 million below what was appropriated, providing another strong indicator of a responsible budget. “At the same time, it would be irresponsible to portray a projected surplus as money in the bank,” said Bakk. “As the Legislature convenes next year, we will await the more up-to-date February forecast as we work together to expand economic opportunity for



Sen. Tom Bakk



Gov. Mark Dayton

and sustain Minnesota’s long-term prosperity.”

Commissioner of Education Brenda Cassellius said in a statement Thursday’s budget forecast represented an important day for Minnesota students, teachers and parents “because it’s the day we can mark the state’s debt to schools ‘paid in full.’ Instead of looking back, we can now turn our eyes to the future and our continued efforts to invest in the things that will help every student reach their highest potential, starting with high-quality early learning and all-day Kindergarten and continuing on through post-secondary opportunities.

Cassellius said Dayton and the Legislature made good on their promise of making schools whole again. “We can focus our full attention on giving every Minnesota student what our parents gave us — a well-rounded public school education that prepares every child for success in school, work and life,” she said.

Dayton said he expects to propose the elimination of all three business-to-business taxes, effective April 1 at a cost of \$231 million for the biennium if the forecast holds.

Following Thursday’s announcement the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce renewed its call for the 2014 Legislature to repeal all three sales taxes on business-to-business services.

“The surplus removes any obstacles for repeal of these B2B taxes. The governor and legislators on both sides of the aisle have stated these are bad taxes and have expressed their sup-

port for repeal,” Chamber President David Olson said. “We ask them live up to their word and act quickly to repeal the three new B2B taxes early in session before they do any more damage to jobs and businesses in key Minnesota industries.”

Eliminating the B2B taxes should be just a first step, given the size of the projected surplus, Olson said. “The governor and Legislature clearly over-corrected on revenues with the huge increases in taxes. This needs to be fixed immediately. Otherwise, the higher costs on businesses — which translate into higher costs for all Minnesotans — will be a drag on the growth and development of the economy,” he said.

Dayton also said he would propose a a tax cut for middle-income Minnesotans by, for example, conforming to all of the federal tax cuts, which would cost about \$205 million for this biennium. That would include eliminating the marriage penalty, which would reduce state taxes for 640,000 Minnesota taxpayers. It would also include increasing the working family credit, which would lower state taxes for 53,000 taxpayers.

“These two tax cut packages combined would total \$436.4 million, still leaving \$388.6 million for other purposes,” said Dayton. “I do not expect to make other specific proposals until after next February’s forecast.”

The 2013 Legislature extended the sales tax to three B2B services: repairs of business equipment and machines; purchases of telecommunications equipment by telecommunications providers; warehouse and storage services. The first two taxes went into effect July 1, 2013; the warehouse tax is scheduled to take effect April 1, 2014. Minnesota is in the distinct minority among states that tax these services.

“We continue to hear from businesses that are

thinking twice about whether it’s in their best interests to stay and/or expand in Minnesota,” Olson said. “We should repeal these taxes before they further harm Minnesota’s competitiveness and take additional toll on Minnesota jobs.”

Meanwhile, Dayton said credit for the surplus belongs, first and foremost, to the people of Minnesota — “to the businessmen and women, who reaffirmed their commitment to our state, by expanding their businesses and adding 123,000 jobs here during the past three years, and to their hard-working employees, who made those business expansions successful.

He said the Legislature and his administration is also due credit for setting a course of fiscal responsibility and sticking to it.

“In 2011, legislative leaders and I made permanent reductions in state spending of two billion dollars,” Dayton. “Last spring, the new legislative leaders and I continued those spending cuts, raised new revenues, primarily from our state’s wealthiest citizens and largest corporations, and invested most of it in education — from early childhood, to all-day kindergarten, to college tuition freezes.

Dayton acknowledged critics claimed the approach would have “a chilling effect on Minnesota’s economy.” Today’s forecast proves those critics wrong. In fact, it will be amusing to watch some of the people, who were criticizing Minnesota’s economy yesterday, claiming credit for it today.”

Dayton said the forecast will also permit the elimination of yet “another leftover gimmick, \$15 million owed the Airports Fund. Which will leave \$825 million remaining from the \$1.086 forecasted balance. This news will no doubt launch a blizzard of legislative proposals to reduce taxes and increase expenditures.”

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