

# LOCALNEWS

## RRCC grant will study local waters

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Thanks to a two-year grant, one Rainy River Community College biology professor will be able to give some students a hands-on learning experience on area rivers.

The two-year, \$149,000 Watershed Pollutant Load Monitoring Network sampling grant, in partner with Vermilion Community College, will allow the schools to monitor local waters, track pollutants, and study water chemistry.

Kelly Sjerven of RRCC is one of the project's managers, along with O'Niell Tedrow of VCC. Sjerven said RRCC will be responsible for monitoring two sites, one on the Littlefork River near Linden Grove on state Highway 73, and one on the Sturgeon River at county Highway 107. Samples will start being collected after the ice goes out on the streams, and up to October for both years of the grant. The project will also collect samples during snowmelt and rain events to capture run-off pollutant loads.

The project's goal, Sjerven said, is to determine the pollutant amounts entering streams at various points, to track long-term trends, and allow agencies to create management plans and better target sites where actions can be taken.

Sjerven said she'll announce this opportunity to her students soon, and hopes to employ two students each year for the two years of the project. She and her students will collect data about stream stage, which indicates the amount of water flowing in the stream; turbidity, or cloudiness, which indicates the amount of sediment in the water; and water chemistry, including dissolved oxygen, conductivity, pH, and temperature.

Water samples will be sent to Pace Analytical lab in Virginia to be tested for total suspended solids, suspended volatile solids, turbidity, dissolved orthophosphate, total phosphorus, nitrate-nitrite nitrogen, and total Kjeldahl nitrogen, Sjerven said. The data will then be submitted to the Minnesota Pollution Control

Agency and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, with annual data being compiled for each site using the Flux32 pollutant load model.

Each college is responsible for its own sampling sites, Sjerven said, but they will work together to ensure proper data collection and analysis. Staff and students taking part in the project will attend training sessions together, as well as provide regular updates and have an ongoing discussion about sampling strategies and data, she said.

"I have been looking for ways to collaborate with science departments at the other colleges of the Northeast Higher Education District, and I think this collaboration is a great opportunity for both colleges," Sjerven said.

Sjerven worked on a similar project in 2009, also on the Littlefork River. She helped Minnesota Waters coordinate a citizen monitoring program for the river by assisting volunteers in obtaining water samples and data from different locations along the river and its

tributaries. The samples were analyzed for E. coli bacteria as well as contaminants like nitrogen and phosphorus.

Sjerven's interest in water quality issues dates back to her time as a student at Gustavus Adolphus College, she said. She took classes related to water resources and ecology, and completed a small-scale research project analyzing water quality of agricultural streams using benthic macroinvertebrates, which are insects that live in the rocks and sediment on the bottom of streams.

Her interest didn't stop there, as she was hired as a summer intern for the Chippewa River Watershed Project in west central Minnesota in 2000, when she collected water samples, analyzed data, and did public outreach about water quality issues. She studied environmental science as a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, where the thesis project expanded her research on the use of benthic macroinvertebrates as indicators of water quality.

## The pranks of Mother Nature

BY EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writer

It appears Mother Nature's idea of an April fools joke is a winter storm warning two weeks into spring.

Borderland prepared for a forecasted 12-18 inches of fresh snowfall Monday evening into Tuesday, but luckily, warmer temperatures came to the rescue.

According to Kevin Huyck, meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Duluth, temperatures were warm enough to melt most of the snow as soon as it hit the ground.

"If the snow had not melted as it landed, International Falls would have ended up with 6 to 7 inches of snow instead of the 3.7 that was reported," he said.

To the west of the Falls, Baudette recorded 18 inches of snow and was unable to stay on the warmer side of the front like Borderland was, Huyck said.

"It was only a few degrees cooler (in Baudette)," he said. "But with these spring storm systems, a few degrees can make a huge difference."

Still, 3.7 inches was enough to break out the shovels and snow plows and Falls public schools opted for a two-hour delay Tuesday morning in anticipation of the snowfall.

Even with just under 4 inches of the white stuff, the battle against blowing snow made travel and snow removal more challenging.

The meteorologist said Monday's highest recorded wind gust was 37 miles per hour, accompanied by wind

speeds of 15-24 miles per hour.

"That's a pretty good wind speed," he said. "It's usually down in the single digits."

Blowing snow created hazardous travel conditions late Monday night and into Tuesday morning.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation's website reported difficult driving conditions for Highways 53, 11 and 71. The site warned against blowing snow and freezing rain in areas to the west and south.

But maybe it wasn't the pranks of Mother Nature to blame for the April 1 snowstorm. It could be possible Saturday's sighting of gulls returning to Borderland is the culprit. Lee Grim, Carl Brown and Patty Ross reported at 2:36 p.m. Saturday they had spotted a gull in Ranier. Local folklore calls for three snowstorms after the first gulls return to Borderland.

And if the folklore holds true, Friday's round of snow could count as snowstorm No. 2.

"There is another system moving through the plains and Midwest," Huyck said.

While he said it was too early to tell how much snow the system would carry, he noted International Falls "is definitely in the area we'll see a chance of snow."

And it looks like there won't be too much instant melting this time around.

"It'll probably be all snow," he said. "People should keep up with the forecast as we refine the track of the storm."

For a complete forecast, visit [www.crh.noaa.gov/dlh](http://www.crh.noaa.gov/dlh).

## Risk for high gas prices is still likely

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Average retail gasoline prices in Minnesota have fallen 3.9 cents in the past week, averaging \$3.47 per gallon Sunday, according to GasBuddy's daily survey of 2,856 gas outlets in Minnesota. This compares with the national average that has increased 1.8 cents in

the last week to \$3.53 per gallon, according to gasoline price website MinnesotaGasPrices.com.

Regular gasoline prices in International Falls, according to the site, ranged from \$3.44 to \$3.54. Local prices midgrade, premium and diesel fuel were not listed on the site.

Including the change in

gas prices in Minnesota during the past week, price Sunday were 7.8 cents per gallon lower compared to the same day one year ago and are 0.4 cents per gallon higher than a month ago. The national average has increased 9.2 cents during the last month and stands 8.3 cents per gallon lower than this day one year ago.

"Another week, another rise in the national average," said GasBuddy.com Senior Petroleum Analyst Patrick DeHaan. "While gasoline prices have seen slight increases in the last week, it still may get worse."

### Boise Paper employees award safety funds

Boise Paper maintenance employees recently presented \$2,700 in safety funds to children and hunger service organizations in Koochiching County.

Boise Paper, A Division of Packaging Corporation of America, donated the funds in recognition of 90 percent employee safety participation in February. Employees then voted to distribute monies evenly to the Rotary Club's STRIVE and Learning Tree programs, United Way's Buddy Backpacks and Imagination Library, Project Read, Backus Community Café, Falls Hunger Coalition, and Salvation Army food pantry.

"I congratulate the organizations receiving funds and commend the maintenance employees for their commitment to the behavioral-based safety process," says Bert Brown, mill manager. "In addition to achieving 100 percent safety participation, they improved the identification and elimination of hazards and worked over two years without a recordable incident in 2013."


For the past several years, monies have been set aside to assist organizations in Koochiching County based on employee safety participation. Those interested in learning more information about the program are encouraged to call 218.285.5312.




L-R: Maintenance employee Lauren Ysen, maintenance employee Bill Thomas, Falls Hunger Coalition director Nancy Anderson, maintenance employee James Beck, Salvation Army director Bev Mayfield, maintenance employee Glenn Davis, Rotary Club president Mike Ward, maintenance employee Van Pavleck, and maintenance employee Kurt Schuschke.

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