

LOCALNEWS

Koochiching SWCD to host ‘community conversations’ on health of Littlefork River watershed

Study underway to identify pollutant sources, determine effort needed restore water quality

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Another series of community conversation events will present new information and invite public comment on efforts by the Koochiching Soil and Water Conservation District to assess and address the health of the Littlefork River Watershed.

Since 2013, the Koochiching Soil and Water Conservation District has partnered with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to work with local officials and citizens to ensure the health of the Littlefork River and Bigfork River watersheds, said a news release from the KSWCD.

The Littlefork River Watershed is one of 81 major watersheds in the state and encompasses a total area of 1,843 square miles. The 160

If you go

Jan. 14, 4:30 p.m., Littlefork Community Building.

Jan. 15, 4:30 p.m., LaCroix Ranger District, Cook.

For more information, please contact Jolén Simon, Koochiching SWCD program coordinator at 283-1180 or jolen.simon@koochichingswcd.org

mile river begins in Lost Lake, west of Lake Vermilion, runs through portions of north St. Louis, Itasca, and Koochiching counties, where it drains into Rainy River. As part of the larger Rainy River–Lake of the Woods Basin, the Littlefork River flows to Lake of the Woods and finally into Hudson Bay.

In fall of 2013, the Koochiching SWCD held two kick off events to which the public was invited to review and comment on the findings of the MPCA’s Monitoring and Assessment Report on the Littlefork River Watershed. This report showed five segments of the river to be impaired for turbidity, which is extra sedimentation causing cloudiness of the water, and one segment to be unsuitable for fish habitat. During these events, 34 local residents heard and commented on the presented information. SWCD staff said in the news release they hope to continue increasing and diversifying public attendance to such events.

Since last year’s events, the MPCA has hired a contractor, Emmons & Oliver Resources, Inc., known

as EOR, to assess the data the MPCA has gathered over the last five years and use it to create two guiding documents: The Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL, Study and Watershed Restoration and Protection Project, or WRAP, Report.

Now, another series of community conversation events will present new information and invite public comment. On Jan. 14, the TMDL study will be discussed at 4:30 p.m. at the Littlefork Community Building. The discussion will also take place at 4:30 p.m. Jan. 15 at the LaCroix Ranger District, Cook. For more information, please contact Jolén Simon, Koochiching SWCD program coordinator at 283-1180 or jolen.simon@koochichingswcd.org

The second set of community conversations will take place March 18 and 19 to discuss the WRAPS study.

What is the TMDL Study?

A Total Maximum Daily Load study must be conducted for each pollutant affecting an impaired water. The study identifies all pollutant sources and determines the amount of reduction needed by each source to restore water quality. State agencies, local organizations and other stakeholders work together using water sampling data, computer modeling and public input to develop TMDLs. EOR has completed this work and will present this information to the public this January for public comment.

What is a WRAP?

In 2012, the MPCA, Min-

nesota Department of Natural Resources, Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources initiated a 10-year Watershed Restoration and Protection Project, or WRAP, to determine the quality of the waters in the Littlefork River watershed and develop a long-range plan for keeping its waters healthy. Each of the other 80 watersheds in Minnesota is undergoing a similar project over the next 10 years to extensively monitor the chemical and biological health of the watershed’s lakes and streams.

The success of the Littlefork River WRAP will depend on the collaboration of other state agencies, local governments, the business community, lake associations, and citizens that live and play in the watershed, said the news release.

County ESD: Protect sewage treatment systems from frost

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

There’s no shortage of cold temperatures in Koochiching County, and every year homeowners face the possibility their septic or mound systems may freeze.

Koochiching County Environmental Services staff urge homeowners not to be fooled by recent warm spell: there’s plenty of winter weather left.

Koochiching County ESD staff offer the following tips to avoid frozen systems.

What can cause your system to freeze?

- Lack of snow cover combined with freezing temps during an extended period of time
- Compacted snow
- Compacted soils
- Lack of plant cover
- Irregular use of a system
- Leaking pipes
- Pipes not drained properly
- Cold air entering system
- Water logged system

To prevent existing systems from freezing

- Establish a good grass cover over the system. Before winter, let the grass grow to at least 6” long to help insulate from freezing.

- If a good grass cover has not been established and snow depth is minimal, cover the tanks, pipes and drainfield with straw (hay attracts deer and other animals).

- Keep kids, dogs, deer, snowmobiles and other traffic off the system. These types of activities drive the frost deeper during the winter, which can lead to freezing problems

- Direct furnace condensate somewhere besides the septic system. Small amounts of water have a tendency to freeze in the pipe before they reach the septic tank.

- Fix leaking faucets and toilets. As above, small amounts of water caused by a dripping faucet is likely to freeze in the pipe.

- Use water. Many people think water usage should be cut back in the winter to prevent freezing, however just the opposite is true. Septic systems need a regular dosing of warm water to function properly, especially in cold weather. Staggering water usage also helps. For example, washing clothes over several days is better than washing them all in one day.

- Consider installing a heat lamp in the tank(s).

If you have had problems with tanks freezing in the past or you plan to leave for an extended period of time, a heat lamp or heater can help you avoid a lot of issues.

If the system freezes

- Don’t continue running water into the system hoping it will thaw out. This will only result in making the problem worse.

- Don’t attempt to thaw it out by building a fire on the ground over the system.

- Do cover the system with straw as soon as possible. Sometimes there is enough heat in the ground underneath to thaw a system out if it’s caught early enough.

- Do contact a contractor who has the proper equipment to work on frozen septic systems.

- Do contact a licensed hauler to pump the tank.

If it hasn’t already been done, Environmental Services Department staff strongly recommend covering septic systems with straw. The lack of snow cover and upcoming cold weather puts septic systems at a high risk of freezing this winter

For more information contact Environmental Services at 283-1157.

VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK

VNP opens Rainy Lake Ice Road

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The Rainy Lake Ice Road is now open from the Voyageurs National Park Rainy Lake Visitor Center to the Black Bay ski trails and to Rainy Lake City.

Changing temperature conditions and lack of snow cover continue to slow winter trail progress. The green trail from Rainy Lake/Frank’s Bay to Kabetogama Lake/Crane Lake is open and staked. The yellow trail from Namakan Lake to Kettle Falls is also open and staked. Lake ice and overland portages have minimal snow cover. Conditions are poor on both the lake and portages. Use caution while traveling along the trail system. All other snowmobile trails are closed at this time, but ice checking and portage clearing continues.

The snowmobile speed limit within the park is 45 mph on frozen lake surfaces and 25 mph on all overland portages. Speed limit signs are posted at

trailheads and portages. The speed limit for the ice road is 30 mph.

When ice fishing, holes must be drilled at least 50 feet from ice roads and snowmobile trails.

Ski trails do not have significant snow accumulation to allow grooming at this time. Snowshoe trails are open, but not packed, and snow accumulation is poor.

The visitor center is open from 10 am. to 4:30 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. During business hours, the visitor center offers maps, information, and hot cocoa. Snowshoe and cross-country ski loans have not started for the season. The most up to date winter trail conditions are available at www.nps.gov/voya.

Snowmobile trails

- International Falls to Kettle Falls (Purple Trail) – Closed
- Rainy Lake/Black Bay to Kabetogama Lake to Ash River (Green Trail) – Open and staked
- Ash River to Crane Lake (Green Trail) – Open

and staked

- Chain of Lakes (Dashed Black Trail) – Closed

- Ash River to Kettle Falls (Yellow Trail) – Open and staked

- East Namakan Lake to Sand Point Lake (Blue Trail) – Closed

Ice roads

- Rainy Lake Ice Road – Open to the Black Bay ski trails and to Rainy Lake City

- Kabetogama Lake Ice Road – Closed

Ski trails

- Echo Bay Ski Trail – Not open
- Black Bay Ski Trail – Not open
- Tilson Connector Trail – Not open
- KabAsh Trail – Not open

Snowshoe trails

- Black Bay Beaver Pond Trail – Open, not packed
- Blind Ash Bay Trail – Open, not packed
- Oberholtzer Trail – Open, not packed
- Sullivan Bay Trail – Open, not packed
- Orange identifies hazards.

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