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## Local reps discuss local and state issues

BY SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writer

A little bit of St. Paul made its way to International Falls Tuesday when Borderland lawmakers met with local officials.

State Rep. David Dill and State Sen. Tom Bakk met with area officials Tuesday at the Koochiching County Courthouse for a belated, pre-legislative session review of local issues. The Minnesota Legislature reconvened on Jan. 6.

Among the issues addressed by the officials were wetland mitigation, rural health care, restoration at the Capitol, transportation and aquatic invasive species education.

### Wetlands

County Board Chairman Wade Pavleck said Koochiching County has the largest repository of wetlands of any county in the lower 48 states, so wetland mitigation is a critical issue when it comes to development.

Currently, wetland mitigation has to occur in the same watershed, Dill said, which means if you disturb a wetland, you need to replace it in the same area. This is an issue for Koochiching County, because it makes it hard to replace a wetland, he said.

An upcoming bill Dill is involved with would allow wetland mitigation to occur outside of the watershed in which the wetland was disturbed, which affects everyone, he said.

“This affects someone who wants to build a garage,” Dill said. “This isn’t building a new mill, or building a new hospital or some small business. This is right down to your garage.”

This new process would set up areas in the state where wetlands could be created, Dill said. This would allow someone to simply pay a fee to mitigate wetlands for a project, he said, and the process would be complete.

### Health care

All rural communities are dealing with bed shortages when it comes to nursing homes or assisted living, Dill said.

“There’s just this real need, and to wonder what it’s going to look like,” Dill said. “How are we

going to deliver medical service to end-of-life in rural communities.”

Dill commended Koochiching County for its \$1 million loan to the Littlefork Medical Center to pay for capital improvements at the facility, which will allow it to remain open and serving the community.

“That’s really important and a strong message,” Dill said. “I don’t know what the answer is, but I hope at some point we can figure it out.”

The long-term care industry is struggling as a whole, Bakk said, and officials are trying to figure out how to keep it afloat.

“It’s one of the bigger challenges we face as a state: what are we going to do with this aging, baby

boom population, as they move into more need for health care,” Bakk said.

### Capitol

Bakk, who serves as Senate Majority Leader, said the Legislature is at an exciting time in St. Paul, in the middle of a \$240 million restoration of the Capitol building. The project has not been without its challenges, however.

“The biggest challenge in the Senate this year is probably not going to be the budget, it’s the logistics,” Bakk said.

Most of the Capitol is completely closed, Bakk said, and there are issues with public accessibility to officials.

Board to A7 ➤

Wyatt Vohler, front, and his brother, Mason, appear to enjoy themselves after winning a round of Saturday’s smooch races along Third Street during Icebox Days.

STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

## ICEBOX DAYS STILL ‘GOING STRONG’

BY EMILY GEDDE  
SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writers

When Minnesotans have something to prove — they prove it.

Saturday’s 35th annual Freeze Yer Gizzard Blizzard Run and Icebox Days event went off as it does every year, and this year, gizzards didn’t necessarily freeze.

At race time, an air temperature of 26 degrees above zero had some people celebrating, while a few were almost embarrassed it was so “warm.”

“Minnesotans are hardy and those who come from elsewhere have something to prove,” said International Falls Area Chamber President Faye Whitbeck on a Saturday morning interview with The Weather Channel. “Some (runners) even like to boast bare legs.”

Whitbeck explained the race has never been canceled, but only shortened in 1982 because of a -72 wind chill. The Weather Channel news anchor was noticeably shocked.

“We’re showing our Minnesota hardiness,” Whitbeck said. “We really don’t care about the weather...We have a lot of fun.”

And fun appeared to be

FOR MORE ICEBOX DAYS PHOTOS, TURN TO PAGES A10 AND B1.

Kristine Lessard of Ranier finishes Saturday’s 10-kilometer Freeze Yer Gizzard Blizzard Run. More than 90 runners competed in the 6.2-mile event.

STAFF PHOTO BY KEVIN BONESKE

### RANIER CITY COUNCIL

## Council discusses annexation

BY SPENSER BICKETT  
Staff Writer

**RANIER**—The Ranier City Council believes it should have a say in a potential annexation agreement.

The pending agreement between the city of International Falls and Koochiching County pertains to the multimodal district, which is owned by International Falls, but not located in the city limits.

The council discussed the issue of an annexation agreement between the the Falls and the county containing language preventing the siting of an industrial waste facility on the location, which is adjacent to Second Creek.

At a Dec. 23 Koochiching County Board meeting, during which the annexation issue was tabled, Commissioner Wade Pavleck expressed concern the county board was acting too quickly on the annexation process. He maintained the board should hold a public hearing to gather citizen input before formally acting on the issue.

Thursday, Ranier City Administrator Sherril Gautreaux said citizens David Stavseth and Jeff Oveson, who live near Second Creek, have been vocal about the issue, and desire a “buffer zone” be included in the agreement in order to protect the waterway.

Gautreaux said when the language regarding the industrial waste facility is added to the agreement, the city of Ranier should be able to review the agreement.

“We should have a say on that,” Councilor Ron Wilcox said.

“We don’t actually have a say,” Gautreaux responded. “But Wade is trying to give us a say.”

Ranier Mayor Dennis Wagner said the last meeting he attended on the issue included a large buffer zone for Second Creek.

Ranier to A7 ➤