

Going out
on top

Local musher finishes
season with a win

A3



Blast from
the past

Renaissance feast
comes to Backus

A9



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\$1

The Journal

Board, teachers union settle contract

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

After about a year of negotiations and some compromise from both sides, the Falls School Board and the teachers union Local

331 have agreed on a two-year contract.

The board Monday ratified the contract that will include a seven-period school day and slight salary increases for staff.

"I'm glad it's over," said John

Sandberg, teachers Local 331 president and FHS social studies teacher. "I'm always pleased when both sides can come to an agreement."

The district's about 70 teachers were working under a 2011-2013

contract that expired June 30. The board and Falls Superintendent Nordy Nelson advocated for a seven-period of day from the beginning to allow students more electives when selecting their courses.

"The district needs to stay competitive and offer electives that are really needed for students

entering the work force," Nelson said.

"We need to expand beyond the core subject areas."

Teachers, however, were hesitant to change from a six- to a seven-period day at first because of uncertainties.

Contract to A7 ➤



STAFF PHOTOS BY SPENSER BICKETT

Tom Burri watches as Dave Harder of Up North Builders dumps rocks into the Rat Root River as part of the spawning enhancement project. For more photos of the project, turn to pages A12 and B8.

Returning to the Rat Root River

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

A project to improve preservation of the Rat Root River which began two years ago recently completed its third and final phase.

The joint venture between the Koochiching County Soil and Water Conservation District, Rainy Lake Sportfishing Club, and the local Minnesota Department of Natural Resources office was designed to maintain and improve walleye fishing on Rainy Lake by improving the spawning habitat on the Rat Root River.

The final phase of the project involves arranging rocks at a spawning site on the river to enhance it and make it more successful as a spawning site, said Tom Burri, of the DNR fisheries office in International Falls. The site is self-cleaning, he said, meaning debris and sediment won't settle in the site and thus allows the eggs to aerate.



River to A7 ➤

Tom Burri, DNR Fisheries in International Falls, moves rock by hand into the proper arrangement on the Rat Root River.

Ranier council changes water rates

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

RANIER- The Ranier City Council Monday approved a motion to change the water rates to counteract a recent increase by the city of International Falls.

The council's motion increased the water rate by 5 percent while reducing the escrow charge attached to each bill from \$7 to \$3.50.

Half of the escrow charge goes to an account designated for water line repairs, while the other half goes to an account designated for water line replacement. The total yearly contributions to the escrow accounts is slightly more than \$36,000.

The city of Ranier has to pay the city of International Falls for water, Mayor Dennis Wagner said, and the International Falls is raising its water rates by 5 percent for 2014. This increase, he said, combined with debt service and escrow fund contributions, means Ranier would operate at a deficit of \$21,150 if it didn't change its water rates.

With a balance of a little more than \$355,000 in its water accounts, Wagner said Ranier could reduce the amount it contributes to the escrow accounts and raise the water rates to make up the operating deficit.

"I don't know if we have to continue to keep putting that much into the repair fund because we already have the certain amount you need to maintain," Wagner said.

Wagner said the amount in the repair and replacement accounts should give Ranier residents peace of mind and give the city enough to cover any major repairs. However, to keep up with the rate of inflation, Ranier needs to keep adding to the accounts, he said, just not at the rate it has been.

"We do have to keep increasing the fund," he said. "I don't think we have to increase at the rate of \$36,000 a year."

Water to A7 ➤

Recommendation to come back before City Council in April

Mayor rules motion on Donahue property out of order

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Discussion about a recommendation to take the minimum actions needed to honor a contract with the Donahue Trust took place Monday at the

International Falls City Council meeting.

But a motion to accept the recommendation was ruled out of order by Falls Mayor Bob Anderson, who said the agenda did not specify action could be taken.

"The citizens have a right to know if we're taking action," Anderson said.

The recommendation is expected to be placed on an April agenda of the city council.

The discussion Monday came from a referral in February of a

recommendation from the International Falls Economic Development Authority Commission, made up of the council.

The recommendation, which originated with the Falls EDA Advisory Board, calls for the city to take the minimum actions at a minimal cost to maintain a contract for ownership of the 122 acres of land west of International

Falls known as the Donahue property.

In February, Anderson voted against the motion to refer the recommendation to the council. The matter was sent to the council because the city, not the EDA, owns the property under an agreement with the Donahue Trust.

Council to A7 ➤

INSIDE
TO REACH US

OBITUARIES/A6
PHONE: (218) 285-7411

OPINION/A8
FAX: (218) 285-7206

BUSINESS/A11

SPORTS/B1
ONLINE: IFALLSJOURNAL.COM OR FOLLOW US ON FACEBOOK

CLASSIFIEDS/B3

COMICS/B7

VOLUME 5
NUMBER 23