

# DNR: Littlefork area road and trail closures

DNR STAFF REPORT

As warm weather approaches, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has temporarily closed many of its roads and motorized trails on state forest land.

Road and trail conditions

are expected to deteriorate rapidly this spring and many will not remain firm enough to support vehicle traffic without being damaged. This includes state forests, recreation area and wildlife management area roads and trails. The temporary closures could remain

in effect until sometime in May, depending on weather conditions.

State forests in the Littlefork area include Pine Island, Koochiching and Smokey Bear, along with the wildlife management areas located in the forest boundaries. A list of roads to remain open

will be posted on the DNR website.

“Many forest roads are given weight restrictions, and others are closed due to their susceptibility to damage during spring break-up,” said Joe Brown, Littlefork area forestry supervisor. “We ask that people use good

judgment, obey the closures and check the DNR website for updates.”

Road conditions can change quickly and the DNR advises people to first check the individual state park, state trail or state forest Web pages before planning trips. Online road and trail con-

dition information is updated by 2 p.m. every Thursday.

For closures and updates, go to “current conditions” on the DNR website at [www.dnr.state.mn.us/trailconditions](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/trailconditions) or call the DNR Information Center at 651-296-6157 or 888-646-6367 between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays.

## THE SWEET ESCAPE



STAFF PHOTO BY EMILY GEDDE

Paige Christianson is escorted by her date, Tyler Richards, during Saturday’s grand march.

## SCHOOL BOARD

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“I wanted to Skype into a lot of the meetings, but there is no wireless Internet in the (Falls High School) cafeteria,” Wagner said.

And, there has been speculation from the public that Wagner is no longer a resident of Koochiching County.

“I live in the Falls,” he confirmed. “But I won’t be running again (in November).”

### Superintendent search

Nelson, who has been with the district since 2012, previously told The Journal he will leave International Falls to pursue his St. Cloud-based consulting business part time after his contract

expires June 30. Before he leaves, however, he said he will help his successor transition into the role.

That is, if there is enough time.

The board so far in its search for Nelson’s successor has narrowed a list of potential candidates down to three – Gwen Carman, Kevin Grover and Beth Shermoen.

■ Gwen Carman — according to the Minnesota Department of Education, Carman is licensed for the following positions: pre-kindergarten, elementary education, district superintendent, K-12 principal, community education director and early childhood special education. She is now an elementary principal

for Cook County Schools district No. 166 in Grand Marais, Minn.

■ Kevin Grover – according to the Minnesota Department of Education, Grover is licensed for the following positions: mathematics teacher, district superintendent and K-12 principal. He now serves as dean of students and athletic director at Falls High School.

■ Beth Shermoen – according to the Minnesota Department of Education, Shermoen is licensed to teach elementary education and communication arts/literature. She is working to secure her principal and superintendent license. Shermoen is a sixth-grade teacher at West End Elementary School.

## STUDENTS

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program was to provide attention and focus to students who may be struggling or even are in need of a bit of extra attention and support to grow as learners and make positive progress academically,” she said. “Extra time, attention and focus can make a big difference.”

Students who fit the criteria for the program are analyzed based on math and reading test scores to determine in what specific areas they may need support.

West added program educators also visit with other teachers to gather more information about the student and get a well-rounded idea of the needs of each child.

“The teachers know each child so well and we work together to determine needs,” she said. “Students who demonstrate need based on this assessment are invited to participate. However,

they also must be students who demonstrate respect and responsibility on a daily basis, as good behavior is essential to creating a positive climate for learning.”

### Successful program

West said working in small groups is key to the program’s success.

“Teachers pull small groups of students to work on math and reading skills while other students work on educational software specifically chosen for students to enrich skills in math and reading,” she said.

In addition, paraprofessionals meet with students individually to review sight words and/or math facts while keeping records to indicate progress. The variety of learning activities, West noted, keeps kids interested and engaged, yet focused on academic goals.

### Support and goals

West said the program may feel like a club for some students who reach out to each other for friendship,

encouragement and support. “They feel welcome, valued and cared about, which in turn increases the desire to grow as a learner,” she said.

She said the importance of the program stems from its support for individual progress towards goals of moving forward.

“I believe that society’s belief that all children should be in the same place at the same time academically, is flawed,” West said. “While it is important to have goals, benchmarks and expectations, it is just as important to have an understanding that we may learn and process information in different ways and at different rates... Rather than always focusing on tests and achievement as a measure of a child, I believe we should focus on growing and moving forward toward certain goals, without labeling children as failures if they are not all the same.”

## COUNCIL

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help attract a client. “That should be our goal, to get the property ready,” she said.

A \$657,000 grant from the state could be jeopardized should the site not be made ready for development, she said. That money could be withdrawn and provided to another community. “I am not ready to give up that money,” she said.

Anderson said the state had given an extension to the grant previously and the city could seek another extension and delay installation of the utilities until a client is secured. He added that despite his concerns, he was pleased a local contractor was the low bidder.

Councilor Paul Eklund said he’s viewed on recent travels signs in small communities advertising site-ready properties. He said the city’s investment of utilities to the site could make a client feel more welcome. “We’re not looking to be site ready, just to get the utilities to the site,” he said. “There’s a lot of competition all over the country. Our location hampers us in drawing business. The more we can make this attractive to business, the better chances we have.”

He also said he’s concerned about the success of seeking another grant extension. Asked by Phil Paulbeck about money spent so far, Mason provided an outline, and said Public Works Director Gary Skallman has said it is under budget, which may allow the utilities to be placed further into the district. The city has spent \$194,000 of its required \$300,000 match for the grant, she said. The city’s money must be used before the grant, she said.

David Farmer asked the council what jobs had been created with the money spent already. “This has been a waste of money with no guarantee what comes there,” he said. Rognerud said the grant allows for five years to create 50 jobs and said the grant is not taxpayer money. “Who pays the state?” he asked. “The taxpayers.”

Mike Rud asked for details about the length of the infrastructure that would be installed, but Mason said Skallman had those details and was not present at the meeting.

Donahue property A motion by Councilor Cynthia Jaksa to accept a report on the 122 acres of land west of the city known as the Donahue property and a recommendation from the EDA Advisory Board to meet the minimum criteria in a contract needed to keep the property prompted several residents to voice concern.

A motion in March to accept the recommenda-

tion was ruled out of order by Anderson, who said the agenda did not specify action could be taken and he said citizens have a right to know if the council was expected to act on an agenda item.

The council approved Monday in the consent agenda a revised agenda format and meeting rules of conduct pamphlet which specifies if action is expected.

Meanwhile, the contract for the property calls for a total of about \$90,000 in brokerage fees paid annually over six years to Matt Donahue’s brokerage firm. In February, the city had \$30,000 left to pay on the property.

Monday, the council approved four recommendations developed by the EDA Advisory Board brought to the Falls EDA, which recommended them to the council:

Minimal initial investment in construction of a trail, which is required in the acquisition agreement;

Construction of a monument, also required in the agreement, that can be easily moved should the site be developed;

Work with user groups and neighbors to determine uses and ensure the site does not become degraded; Explore annexing the property.

The council also agreed to post a prohibition of hunting on the property.

Rognerud said she had recently been asked by a potential developer of homes when the property would be annexed and utilities installed.

Anderson asked several questions to clarify the recommendations, including whether horse riding and all-terrain vehicles would be allowed on the trail and what kind of trail is required. He said he assumed the city would face a lawsuit by Matt Donahue if the requirements were not met. He noted the Journal earlier reported Donahue said he would take the property back.

Rognerud said the city has been advised that it cannot simply give the property back, but could sell it by public bids and “eat” the \$60,000 already paid.

Farmer asked for more details, prompting city Attorney Steve Shermoen to explain the council could live up to the contract or default on it. Donahue would have to agree to take the property back through negotiations, he said. Shermoen later added that the city could sell the property, but the buyer would be bound by the same requirements as the city is now.

Jaksa urged a vote saying the issue had been given ample discussion at four meetings held last year on the property.

Farmer said he was told at the meeting he attended he would not be allowed to

say anything but positive ideas about the property.

Rick Anderson said he did not want taxpayer money to go toward a trail for ATVs next to the golf course or next to a walking trail.

“Just give it back,” he urged.

Shermoen, also a member of the advisory board, said the recommendations were not intended to be definitive, but to prompt discussion among users.

“This is a first step, not the last step on what would be allowed,” he said.

Eklund agreed taxpayer money should not fund an ATV trail, but said the Donahue family could have sold the property for a lot more money than it will receive from the city. “This is another tool for the future,” he said of potential development.

Mayor Anderson said the Donahue family tried to sell the property, but was unable to.

Rud asked whether the city would monitor the use of the property and wondered how long the city would maintain trails there.

Paulbeck said developments on the property should be handled by a developer, which would pay taxes on the property. He said existing houses that may be vacated would compete with new ones built there. Costs for any kind of development there could be high because of wetland issues.

“It seems like it will be a burden to the taxpayer,” he said, citing improvements, maintenance, and law enforcement issues. He added that Clark’s Park, about six miles east of the city, was given up by the city because of the burden of upkeep.

“If there were significant job development in the community, I’d be a bit more optimistic,” Paulbeck said. Several other residents voiced concerns about the city’s costs to obtain the property and requirements to keep it.

Don Hughes urged the city to talk to Donahue to see if he’d buy the property back.

Richard Thompson wondered if he had property to donate to the city if he could then charge a commission.

He also raised questions, and was supported by the mayor, about the \$1.8 million value set by a Hibbing appraiser. Anderson said the county had assessed the value at the same time at \$384,000. The brokerage fees were based on the appraisal.

Jaksa said if Thompson has property along the river he would sell at 25-percent the assessed value, she’ be very interested.

Local appraiser Poncho Krantz said a “big red flag” should have went up on the appraised versus assessed value.

“It’s water over the dam, now,” he said.

### MESOTHELIOMA LUNG CANCER

If you or a loved one have been diagnosed with Mesothelioma, Lung Cancer or any other asbestos related disease contact us for a confidential review of your rights. There are strict time limits in which to bring these claims. Shermoen & Jaksa, PLLP has been representing Minnesota asbestos victims for over 20 years. We are one of only two Minnesota law firms that regularly litigate asbestos cases.

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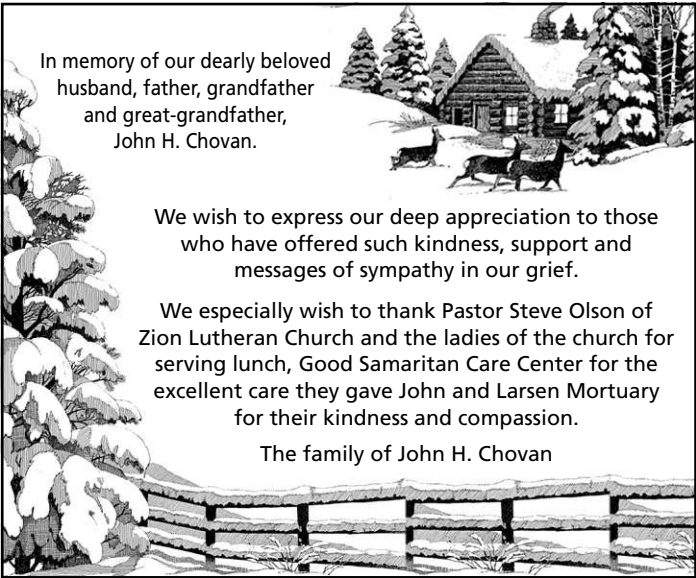


In memory of our dearly beloved husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, John H. Chovan.

We wish to express our deep appreciation to those who have offered such kindness, support and messages of sympathy in our grief.

We especially wish to thank Pastor Steve Olson of Zion Lutheran Church and the ladies of the church for serving lunch, Good Samaritan Care Center for the excellent care they gave John and Larsen Mortuary for their kindness and compassion.

The family of John H. Chovan



Please Call And Wish Our Papa Curt  
**Happy 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday Tomorrow!**



**All Our Love**  
Ava, Liv, Coli & Em