

OUTDOORS

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DNR postpones AIS training and trailer decal program

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will postpone the new aquatic invasive species training and trailer decal

program that was due to launch at the end of the month while legislators consider changes to the program. Under a law passed by the state Legislature in 2012,


anyone trailering a boat or water-related equipment such as docks and lifts in Minnesota is required to take aquatic invasive species training and display a decal on their trailer. The

effective date is July 1. “With the legislative interest in this educational program and ongoing discussions about possible changes, we are postponing the launch until we see if the Legislature acts this session to modify the program,” said Bob Meier, DNR assistant commissioner.

The DNR supports the

education that would be provided under this law, but recognizes there are some concerns with the way the law is currently written. For example, people transporting boats on trailers through Minnesota to another destination are required to take the course and display a decal even if they don’t put their boat in Minnesota waters.

Since the training and decal are currently not required until July 1, the DNR wants to remind people that there will be time to see what happens legislatively and still take the course and receive decals. The agency will post any updates on trailers at www.trailers.mndnr.gov and alert the media if there are any program changes.




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Midcontinent

COMMUNICATIONS

STARWATCH

February offers plenty of plant action

BY DEANE MORRISON
University of Minnesota

For a short month, February packs a lot of action, starting with the planets. While Jupiter climbs in the east, Venus vaults up from the western horizon and waxes brilliant against the fading sunset. By mid-month, nightfall leaves the sky bookended by these two brightest of planets.

On the 21st Venus makes a close pass by Mars below a young crescent moon. Look an hour after sundown to find Mars, by far the dimmer body, just to Venus’s upper right. As Venus keeps climbing, the two planets separate. Jupiter reaches opposition on the 6th, when Earth laps it in the orbital race and the planet appears opposite the sun in the sky. This year will be its closest opposition till 2019. Jupiter will be 404 million miles from Earth, which is 4.3 times the Earth-sun distance. The bright star following on the heels of Jupiter is Regulus, the heart of Leo, the lion.

Jupiter comes to opposition every 13 months because it takes about 12 years to orbit the sun. Here’s why: If we start the clock running with Jupiter at opposition, during the first year Jupiter moves one-twelfth of the way around the sun while Earth orbits once and ends up at the starting point. So then we have to go an extra one-twelfth of our orbit in order to line up with Jupiter again,



Venus and Mars are alright on this night.

and that takes one month. Therefore, it adds up to about one year plus one month between laps of Jupiter. Accordingly, next year’s Jupiter opposition falls on March 8. On the 3rd a full moon rises right after sunset, only a few minutes after the moment of perfect fullness. This means a gorgeously round moon against a pale sky. This moon has been called the full hunger moon and the full snow moon. These names are related in that the deep snows of February made hunting difficult, and so this was a particularly harsh month for northern Indian tribes. Groundhog Day began as an ancient Celtic holiday called Imbolc, or lamb’s milk; it was one of four “cross-quarter” days falling midway between a solstice and an equinox. It was thought that sun and shadows on that day foretold more cold, while clouds and no shadows meant rains to

soften the earth for planting. Hence our ritual in which the groundhog seeing its shadow means six more weeks of winter, but no shadow means spring is right around the corner. The University of Minnesota offers public viewings of the night sky at its Duluth and Twin Cities campuses. For more information and viewing schedules, see: ■Duluth, Marshall W. Alworth Planetarium: www.dumn.edu/planet ■Twin Cities, Minnesota Institute for Astrophysics (during fall and spring semesters): www.astro.umn.edu/outreach/pubnight ■Check out the astronomy programs at the University of Minnesota’s Bell Museum ExploraDome: www.bellmuseum.umn.edu/ForGroups/ExploraDome/index.htm ■Find U of M astronomers and links to the world of astronomy at <http://www.astro.umn.edu>.

TRAIL REPORTS

VNP
Enjoy the ease of snowmobiling on groomed surfaces at Voyageurs National Park thanks in part to the park’s gateway community snowmobile clubs: International Voyageurs, Ash River – Kabetogama Snowdrifters, and Voyageur Trail Society. Today’s snowmobile trail spotlight is the southern portion of Voyageurs’ Green Trail, which extends from Ash River to Crane Lake. Ash River is a hub of trail connections. The yellow trail leads north to Kettle Falls. The Ash River to Arrowhead Link Trail enters the Superior National Forest and heads southeast to Orr or Crane Lake. The Bill Morgan Trail follows Ash River Trail to connect with the Arrowhead Trail to the west. If you don’t have a snowmobile trail map, stop in at the Rainy Lake Visitor Center, pick one up from the information boxes at park boat launches, or contact

one of the local snowmobile clubs. Along the southern portion of Green Trail, as you depart Ash River, you’ll ride along the old Virginia and Rainy Lake Railroad Grade. The trail turns onto Moose Bay before an old railroad bridge. A short distance further, you’ll pass Hoist Bay, the historic Virginia and Rainy Lake Logging Camp, which was later used as a resort by Ted and Fern Monson. The bay got its name from the large hoist machine which hauled logs out of the water and placed them onto waiting railroad cars. On the eastern end of Namakan Lake, The Blue Trail spurs off and makes a north-eastern loop on Namakan and Sand Point Lakes. Riding across the Grassy Bay Portage on the Green Trail, the sheer granite Grassy Bay Cliffs rise from the ice, displaying the geological processes that helped shaped the park’s landscape.

The Green Trail turns south, traveling over Mukooda Lake, a popular ice fishing destination. Remember that lake trout fishing on Mukooda Lake is catch and release only due to 2014 MN DNR regulations. Finally, the Green Trail terminates in Crane Lake. Every area snowmobile trail offers a different experience. That experience could be as simple as a new route, but it also might reveal some of the history and natural wonder Voyageurs National Park and the surrounding communities preserve. The most up to date winter trail conditions are available at www.nps.gov/voya. All snowmobile trails are groomed. Ski trails are packed and tracked. Trails are generally in good condition. Some slush pockets are starting to develop on the lake surface. Pressure ridge activity has decreased, but monitoring continues.



Starting Monday, February 9

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but the option number has changed

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option 5



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