

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Plan to be safe in cold

In the Icebox of the Nation we’ve come to have an intimate affair with Mother Nature. For many the cold temperatures signal an opportunity to experience nature’s wonder from a different perspective as they sit on area lakes atop ice that often measures 3-feet thick. And for others, the cold means a time to appreciate the indoors and all it offers, such as near hibernation with amenities.

But even for the many among us who brag about living in the Icebox of the Nation and being bold enough to run in the cold, the severe temperatures being thrown at us so early in the season should have grabbed our attention and reminded us of the fragility of humans and our companion species.

Recently, two young Minnesotans suffered severe hypothermia after they were exposed to below-zero temperatures for lengthy periods of time. The young woman in Duluth continues to struggle and may lose limbs from the exposure.

When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up the body’s stored energy. The result is hypothermia, or abnormally low body temperature. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the victim unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia

particularly dangerous because a person may not know it is happening and won’t be able to do anything about it.

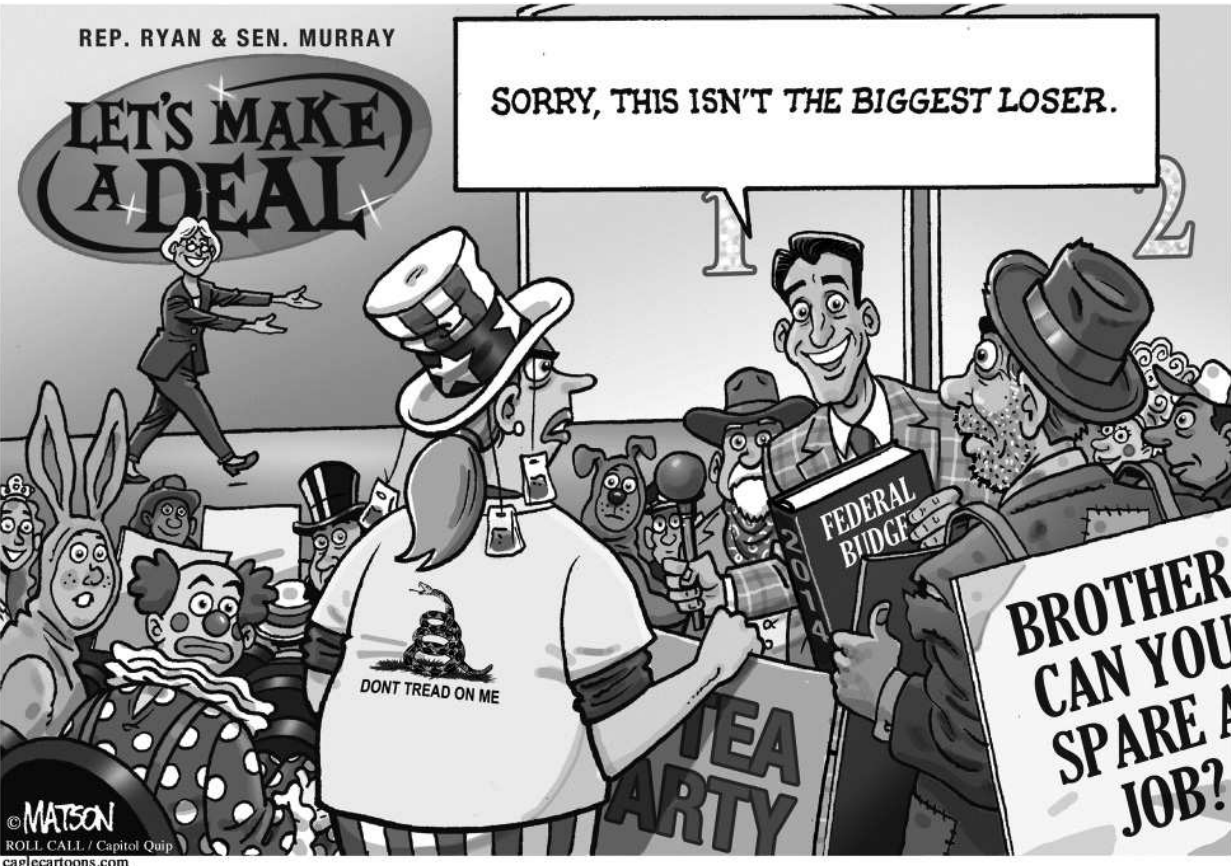
Add alcohol and the situation becomes even more dangerous.

The Center for Disease Control offers the following warning signs of hypothermia: adults — shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, drowsiness; infants — bright red, cold skin and very low energy.

If you notice any of these signs, take the person’s temperature. If it is below 95 degrees, the situation is an emergency — get medical attention immediately, the CDC website advises. If medical care is not available, begin warming the person, by getting the victim into a warm room or shelter; warm the center of the body first — chest, neck, head, and groin — using an electric blanket, if available. Or use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.

Warm beverages can help increase the body temperature, but do not give alcoholic beverages and get medical attention as soon as possible.

We must, even as hardy northern Minnesotans, pay Mother Nature the respect she deserves by dressing appropriately, planning to stay safe during these dangerous temperatures, and knowing what to do if an emergency occurs.



GUEST COLUMN

More common sense needed for wetland mitigation rules

BY LEON OLSON

Wetlands have been a part of Minnesota History since statehood in 1858. According to the 1997 Minnesota Wetland Conservation Act Manual, some of the highlights include: Chapter (statute) 73 in 1858 allowed for the formation of private corporations for the purpose of draining land and creating water privileges; Chapter 108 in 1883 allowing counties to authorize construction of ditches or water courses to drain shallow, grassy & meandering lakes less than four feet deep; Chapter 257 in 1897 which created the State Drainage Commission which supervised and controlled the construction and maintenance of State Ditches. Back then the purpose of drainage was to promote settlement of lands granted to the State by the Federal government which would in turn provide a tax base for the State & Counties to fund their services.

By 1931 things began to turn in a different direction. The dry years and the depression halted wide scale drainage efforts. Chapter 65 had abolished the State Drainage Commission and created the Department of Drainage and Waters which evolved into the Dept. of Conservation & eventually the DNR. In 1947, under Chapter 142, navigable waters which provided substantial public use were defined to be public waters and could not be drained without a permit from the Commissioner of Conservation. The first “Save the Wetlands Program” was enacted in 1951 and was funded partially with Federal dollars.

Finally in 1991, Minnesota passed the Wetland Conservation Act, Chapter 354. This act created a no net loss policy which requires the mitigation (replacement) of drained or filled wetlands and allowed for local governments to have administrative authority. In conjunction with these state laws, there were significant Federal laws that addressed wetlands including the 1985 Food Security Act which

created the “swamp buster” provision that denies farmers USDA payments if they convert wetlands for agricultural production.

OK, well wetlands are good. I agree that we need them to provide for water filtration which cleans up water before it reaches a lake, stream or ground water, storage for flood waters, habitat for plants, fish, birds, amphibians, reptiles & wildlife. I agree that they contribute to our environment in a good way. But I disagree with today’s rules for the mitigation of wetland impacts caused by a road reconstruction project and here is why.

Current state rules require that projects impacting wetlands located in counties which have lost more than 50% of their pre settlement wetlands due to drainage projects during the 19th and 20th centuries must replace new wetland impacts at a 2:1 ratio. Counties that have 80% of their wetlands remaining are required to replace wetlands at a 1:1 ratio. Kittson Co. is in the 2:1 category according to the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources (BWSR) which administers WCA. Kittson County attempted to appeal this ratio through what was an available process however BWSR denied the application and actually never really looked at it. Although wetlands were lost during the years of major legal drainage ditch construction, it is hard for me to visualize that the impacts from over 100 years ago were serious enough to require us to replace new impacts at a 2:1 ratio which will mitigate current & past losses.

Our road projects are actually reconstruction projects that occur in the same corridor as the original road construction project. To meet new safety guidelines, deficient roads with higher traffic levels are widened and slopes are flattened during a project and this requires a small amount of additional right of way for the road authority to work in and build the new typical road cross section. In some instances the old road ditch is filled in and a new ditch is built directly adjacent to the

original ditch. If the old ditch was classified as a wetland, this is counted as an impact and the area must be mitigated 2:1. It would make more sense if the new ditch passing through the wetland area could mitigate the filling of the old ditch. This would be an on-site mitigation and would not require the withdrawal of wetland banking credits from a private owner which is funded by the State for road projects but has a cost of nearly \$10,000 per acre. Unfortunately, the state’s WCA rules and the Federal 404 public waters rules in Title IV of the Clean Waters Act administered by the US Army Corp. do not recognize this as an acceptable means of wetland mitigation. If it did, Kittson Co. could easily save the tax payers over \$100,000 in wetland banking credit withdrawals for every six mile long road reconstruction project. This savings could be passed on to the road construction fund and more miles of roads could be improved or maintained. But in this day and age, things that make sense never get approved within higher levels of government.

Many counties in the north half of Minnesota have been trying to work out an understanding with the responsible authorities but to no avail. We have attended meetings in an effort to improve the process and we get head nods but never any improvements to the process, in fact it seems like it just continues to become more bureaucratic. Some counties have even sent representatives to Washington, DC. And like any other issue the more you dig into it the more it becomes a turf war and we are out voted. This is only one issue dealing with wetlands, another one is ‘how is a wetland determined?’ and this may be the topic of a future letter. If any of you have a suggestion concerning wetland mitigation, please relay it to me or any other elected officials.

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