

OPINION

OUR VIEW

Plan fits all needs

The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.

That comment has been attributed to Ghandi, and many other people have voiced similar philosophies referring to the elderly, the poor, children and animals.

In this case, we believe this community's measure will be ranked high though a partnership that has brought government and a non-profit organization together for the benefit of the community and the pets this community loses, abandons or allows to proliferate without control.

We applaud Koochiching County commissioners, International Falls city councilors, and volunteers with the Borderland Humane Society for braving criticism to work toward establishing a pet shelter to take care of this community's pets.

And while some people may think that the pet shelter being planned for construction next year is too costly or beyond what it needed, we disagree. The day of putting pets in crates in an old shed is over. This plan will meet the needs and the state requirements for a pet shelter.

For some, pets are nothing more than a bother or something to be used for their

own pleasure until it becomes inconvenient. For others, pets provide a crucial role in our lives by giving humans the companionship they need, and a physical contact that some may not get from anyone else. Either way, a civilized society must provide for the care of pets that are no longer of use to some, or simply cannot be cared for by others.

That's why we give kudos to Steve Shermoen, city attorney and pet lover, who suggested a forgivable loan to BHS for a portion of the costs. Shermoen said that pet lovers could donate generously toward the effort, while other taxpayers could take comfort in knowing that a portion of the costs would be returned to the governments.

Clearly, a community that does not need a pet shelter is ideal. But that can only happen with responsible humans making sure that all pets are: neutered and spayed; taken care of humanely and appropriately; and identified through pet tags and city licenses.

But, not all humans are responsible, which has led to other needs and rules in other aspects of life.

The new shelter will serve this community well and we encourage all that believe in the value of pets to consider a contribution toward it.



LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Voters should decide property future

**To the editor,**

An open letter to Shawn Mason and the Economic Development Advisory Commission:

After listening to your radio program, I find your ideas for the Donahue property troubling. Put the Donahue project to a vote and let the voters decide what to do with it in the next election, not the old council and former mayor.

If you are spending taxpayer money, the taxpayers should have a voice in the decision. What's the hurry? There is no reason it can't wait until next year's elections. The timber will still be there, the rock will

be there and the plaque will still be waiting to be made.

If this property is so valuable, why didn't the Donahue family bring in a developer to create a development — condos, homes, etc. — on the property that abuts the golf course? That would have produced revenue for the taxpayers, instead of being a drain our our tax dollar, as has been proposed.

The portion of the river this property is located on is downstream from two paper mills and a sewage treatment plant, making it questionable for swimming and other recreation. And the regular

water level fluctuations and currents make its safety for that purpose questionable.

It would be honorable for Mr. (Matt) Donahue to take his brokerage back and sell his property to someone.

Don't forget that the old council and former mayor brought lawsuits that gained absolutely nothing. That indicates unwise choices were made by the same people pushing the Donahue property project.

There is an election coming in a year.

**Dick Koeneman**  
**International Falls, MN**

GUEST COLUMN

Building a culture of conservationism; we all have environmental responsibility

Hunting and fishing are such a valued part of our Minnesota heritage that they are forever preserved privileges under the state constitution alongside protections for freedom of expression and religious liberty.

Our outdoor traditions are a part of our culture. Preserving that culture is critical. Hunters and anglers are the fiercest advocates for fish and wildlife conservation. By way of hunting and license fees, and because of excise taxes on fishing rods and firearms, they also provide the economic base to manage and protect the natural habitat and wildlife we all value.

Unfortunately, this important group of environmental advocates is a shrinking group. A smaller and smaller portion of our state's population is participating in hunting and fishing. The declining trend may be rooted in an aging population, increased disconnection from the out-of-doors and lower participation rates among minorities — portions of the Minnesota population that are growing the fastest.

This should concern not only the hunter and the angler; it should concern everyone because ultimately fewer people interested in and participating in our outdoor tradition translates into waning support for our natural environment. It's not a pattern unique to Minnesota, which is of even greater concern. We need to broaden support for outdoor pursuits so we can also maintain a funding base for fish, wildlife and natural resources management.

As an agency, the Department of Natural Resources offers programs and initiatives and activities to try to sustain and build up our population of sports people. Becoming an Outdoors Woman



Tom  
**LANDWEHR**  
 DNR COMMISSIONER

introduces hundreds of women each year to fishing, hunting and other outdoor sports. More than 10,000 kids and adults annually participate in Fishing in the Neighborhood events aimed at introducing metro area kids to fishing at 67 DNR-managed fishing ponds right in their own neighborhoods.

Mentored turkey and deer hunts provide kids the opportunity to hunt with an experienced adult and a special youth waterfowl day allows kids a day to hunt before the regular duck opener. We certified more than 21,000 firearms safety students last year. We've recruited women to teach some of these firearm safety courses so girls and women can see someone like them as a leader and role model in a male-dominated sport. Since its inception in 2004, Archery in the Schools has taught basic archery skills to hundreds of thousands of students.

We are fortunate in this state to have an abundance of public lands and waters. In the past year 4,405 acres have been added to the DNR's 1.4 million-acre wildlife management area system where hunters have access to once private lands; these are lands especially critical for future generations of hunters.

We as an agency have pushed for legislative changes aimed at eliminating obstacles

and constraints for young sportspeople and made it easier for adults to take youth out fishing and hunting. This past session, the Legislature reduced the nonresident youth license fees so they're in line with youth resident license fees. And an earlier change created an apprentice hunter validation so young hunters can sample hunting for two seasons before they're required to complete a hunter education firearms safety course.

In the end, however, DNR can only do so much to reverse course on the trajectory that started its downward and broad-based tilt in the 1990s. Increasing hunter and angler participation is really about the relationship between two people: an experienced hunter interested in sharing his or her knowledge, ethics and skills and an beginner interested in gaining knowledge, ethics and skills. This is what we call the "natural path" to recruitment, and is where every experienced hunter/angler can help.

Hunting and fishing have been lifelong passions of mine – passions I am passing along to my kids. As a conservationist and outdoorsman, I believe we have an obligation to ensure our rich outdoor traditions are passed onto another generation, to preserve our Minnesota culture and ultimately our environment.

As you go afield for another fall hunting season, I ask you to share the passion with someone new. Invite a neighbor kid or co-worker to get on board. Take your spouse, son, or daughter. Encourage kids to enroll in organized programs that offer mentored hunting and fishing experiences. Open others to new experiences and foster a renewed culture of outdoor sports in the state — for their future and the future of wildlife conservation and management in Minnesota.

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