LOCALNEWS

County board helps Big Falls slow down

BY SPENSER BICKETT
Staff Writer

The Koochiching County Board Tuesday approved a motion to send a letter to state Rep. David Dill in support of purchasing and placing a speed control sign on the highway near Big Falls.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation typically requires the municipality to pay for the speed control sign, Chairman Rob Ecklund said. However, after Ecklund and Commissioner Wayne Skoe, who represents Big Falls, spoke with Dill in St. Paul, Ecklund said Dill said he felt the sign could get paid for through the Legislature. Big Falls has agreed to pay for the power required to run the sign, Ecklund said.

The sign will have the phrase "Your speed is" above a board displaying a passing driver's speed, Ecklund said. To make it easier to get this project funded, Ecklund said Dill requested a letter from the Koochiching County Board expressing their support of the project.

Rob Ecklund

In other business, the board approved the purchase of a new camera system for the Sheriff's Office, which will work with the department's current Livescan fingerprint machine. The cost for the system including tax is $3,852, plus a $440 maintenance agreement.

According to the Sherif's Office, the department budgeted $3,500 for maintenance for the current system for 2014, which will go towards the cost of the new system. A partial refund from a maintenance agreement entered into in November will cover the rest of the cost of the new system.

The new camera system will save on maintenance costs in the long run, and will be integrated with the current jail management system, said information from the office. The maintenance costs on the current system are $3,306 per year, while the maintenance costs for the new system are $440 per year, resulting in a savings of about $2,900 per year.

KDA

Commissioners met as the Koochiching Development Authority Board earlier in the day when the status of the Renewable Energy Clean Air Project was discussed.

Board member Ecklund said Senate Majority Leader Tom Bakk and Dill said they would push to include the RECAP project in the 2014 state bonding bill. With the bill expected to be trimmed, Ecklund said the project isn't likely to receive funding in this bonding cycle, and is more a move to keep the project on the minds of legislators for the next bonding cycle.

The RECAP project would use a plasma gasification process to convert waste or garbage into usable fuel, like electricity, natural gas, or syngas. The KDA Board has partnered with Coronal LLC on developing the project, and are currently considering a project site on County Highway 155 south of Second Creek.

At a January meeting, board member Wayne Skoe presented a letter from Big Falls City Clerk Joan Nelson stating the Big Falls City Council would like to be considered as a potential site for the RECAP facility. At Tuesday's meeting, Skoe said John Howard of Coronal was working on sending a 20-page questionnaire to the city for them to fill out before they proceed.

Board members and commissioners Brian McBride and Wade Pavleck were absent from both board meetings.

TRUCK WINNER

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Richard Holmestad of International Falls received a new Chevy Silverado, valued at about $32,000, Feb. 28 during a prize ceremony at the International Falls Menards Store, 1985 Valley Pine Circle. Holmestad was selected as the grand prize winner after registering for the Menards Vehicle Sweepstakes at the Falls Menards and was awarded the vehicle on behalf of Menards and vendor, Richmond Water Heaters. "We are so thrilled to be presenting one of our loyal guests with this shiny new truck," said Jay Hamm, Falls Menards general manager.

Forum to draw leading scientists to RRCC

International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Forum to consider issues facing watershed

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

Leading scientists from the United States and Canada will present results of their research at the 11th International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Forum Wednesday and Thursday at the Rainy River Community College.

The international event is expected to draw more than 120 scientists and natural resource managers from the United States and Canada. The scientists and International Joint Commission will focus on water quality, fisheries, invasive species and emerging issues facing the Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed.

The Forum is the primary scientific conference for researchers and resource managers studying the water quality, fisheries, aquatic invasive species and hydrology of the bi-national Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed.

Todd Sellers, executive director, Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation, Kenora, Ontario, has been involved with the event since it started. He said the event this year has drawn more participants than before, in part because of the interest in Lake of the Woods and the broader watershed with the advent a the new International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Board established by the International Joint Commission.

In addition, he said the IJC's water quality plan of study for Lake of the Woods and the basin has spurred interest.

"That's all contributed to a heightened interest and attendance at the forum this year," Sellers said.

Sellers said the theme this year supports the water quality plan of study and the priority issues identified by an IJC task force. Those priorities include nutrient loads, algal blooms, aquatic invasive species, surface and ground water contamination in the watershed, and climate change and impacts and adaptation measures.

Momentum is building for coordinated and collaborated research and management action by the watershed board, Sellers said.

For more information about the IJC study team for the recently initiated Lake of the Woods Basin Water Quality Plan of Study see http://ijc.org/en_/LWBWQ-POS. Sellers also pointed to an interactive web story map tour overview of the geographic location and nature of the research to be presented at the forum this year, located at www.low-wsf.com/2014-forum-story-tour.html

The forum will feature 31 presentations over the two-day event, including:

Progress updates from the International Rainy-Lake of the Woods Watershed Board, the International Joint Commission team developing a comprehensive Water Quality Plan of Study for the basin, and the International Multi-Agency Arrangement collaborative research group.

Research presentations on:

- Nutrients, algae, aquatic invasive species and water quality modeling.
- Surface and ground water contamination.
- Effects of climate change and water levels on fish habitat, nutrients, algae, and flooding risk.
- Aquatic invasive species.

The Lake of the Woods Water Sustainability Foundation will present the "Larry Kallemeyn Award" and the "Gerry Wilson Stewardship Award" on Thursday. The Kallemeyn Award recognizes outstanding professional achievement of a scientist or resource manager in the Rainy-Lake of the Woods watershed. The Wilson Stewardship Award recognizes outstanding achievements of individuals, groups, or projects that have made a significant contribution to environmental stewardship in the watershed.

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