

LOCALNEWS

Cold temps help winter recreation warm up

Ice road not yet ready for use, but snowmobile trails open

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

November’s colder-than-normal temperatures have helped jump start plans for winter recreation in Borderland.

Areas on local snowmobile trails often too wet at this time of the year for grooming have frozen over, and ice depths are thickening at a rate allowing for the preparation of a Rainy Lake ice road.

Jim Bigler, president of the International Voyageurs Snowmobile club, said area trails can now be used, but urged people to use caution because of the light snow cover.

“We want people to be careful, but our end is covered,” he said Monday. “They can start using trails today.”

Travis Thompson, plow driver for the ice road that starts at Rainy Lake Marine Service, said the ice road is not yet ready for use as he waits for at least 15 inches of ice to plow and open the road.

And clearly not faint of heart, Thompson said he beat his own personal record with the early ice this year.

“I drove my truck out last night,” he said Monday. “I had to beat my old record of 1996, Dec. 1. I had one hour left and figured I better go out to beat my record, but I probably shouldn’t have.”

In 1996, he used a Toyota pickup. This year, he said he felt more comfortable because of the ice thickness to take out his heavier truck.

“Last year at this time we

had 10 inches of snow and 2 inches of ice,” Thompson said. “This year we have 10 inches of ice and 2 inches of snow.”

Snowmobile trails

Meanwhile, Bigler said the IVSC’s trail clearing day is Saturday. People interested in assisting to get the trails ready for use are urged to meet at 9 a.m. at Rainy Lake One Stop, Highway 11 east.

Bigler said he’ll take is snowmobile out that day, but said people may also bring their ATVs if they prefer. Both of the club’s groomers will be out that day.

“We hope we get it all done real quick this year,” he said of the trail preparations.

He recalled the 18 inches of snow that fell last year just before the club’s trail clearing day. “We do need a few inches more of snow, and I hope that comes and we’ll all be fishing and snowmobiling,” said Bigler.

A change in the trail route going east will bring sleds into Ranier in a different path than used in previous years, he said. The old trail will be gated on both ends and signs will be up identifying the new route.

Bigler encouraged people to join IVSC or another local club to help fund trail maintenance.

“It’s really important to join a club,” he said. “It keeps the trails open. We get money for grooming trials.



CO Darrin Kittelson

It’s very important.”

The club meets the third Tuesday of every month at 7 p.m. at Almost Lindy’s banquet room, County Road 20. Everyone is welcome, he said. “The more the better,” Bigler added.

The club is gearing up for a number of activities, he said. The fundraiser radar run is scheduled for Jan. 31, the club will play host to Minnesota United Snowmobile Association’s 2015 Winter Rendezvous Feb. 12-15 and the weekend after that, the club offers its annual hot dog roast on the Hagerman Trail.

Ice road

Thompson said ice conditions for creating the Rainy Lake ice road off the Rainy Lake Marine Service ramp are better than he’s seen in many years.

“It hasn’t been this good in years,” he said Monday. “We’ve got no snow and it’s been so cold — there was one foot of ice there this morning.”

The ice road is not yet open for use, but will likely be opened in the next few weeks when Thompson feels it’s safe.

“I wait until we have 15 inches of ice,” he said. “It might be one of the best years in a long time.”

On Monday, he said he found 10 inches of ice as he checked thicknesses. He estimated another couple inches of ice were made with the below-zero temperatures Monday night.

The ice road will be accessible with the purchase of a permit from local bait shops once the road is ready for use, he said. The purchase

of a permit helps Thompson cover the cost of creating and maintaining the road, he said.

With warmer temperatures forecast for the weekend, he urged people to check ice thicknesses for themselves if they venture out on snowmobile or ATV. People may use the Rainy Lake Marine Service lot to park trucks and trailers, he added.

CO: Plan for the worst

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Conservation Officer Darrin Kittelson said Nov. 26 he checked spearfishing action on Kabetogama Lake Nov. 22 and his kids had already fished Red Lake.

“There’s just no such thing as safe ice, but thinking ahead can help people be prepared for the worst,” he said. And the worst involves falling through the ice into the cold water.

Kittelson recommends carrying ice picks when walking or traveling by sled or all-terrain vehicle on ice.

But even more important is to think there is the possibility of falling through the ice and consider what you will do, he said.

“What’s the plan if it happens?” he asked. “A lot of training is in regard to falling through the ice. They’ve found it’s not so much that people drown, it is a factor, but it’s the shock of cold water initially. You need to be able to calm down and not gasp for air when you hit the cold water. That’s when you suck water and go down. You need to think about this in advance — what to do if it does happen.”



STAFF PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

The ice road at Rainy Lake Marine Service is not yet ready for use, but plower Travis Thompson is clearing an area in front of the barricade for trucks and trailers to park to access Rainy Lake by ATV or snowmobile. Thompson said cold weather is making for good ice that will help him establish the ice road.

When someone falls through the ice on foot, he said they will expend a lot of energy pulling themselves back onto the ice where they went through, typically the thickest part of the ice.

He urged people to roll away from the open water and not to stand up until they are at a place they feel it’s safe to walk.

Then what? Hypothermia begins to set in quickly, which is why people should always consider where they would go if they fell through. Is there house or vehicle nearby to get inside and warm up, he asked.

Once people begin driving vehicles on the ice, Kittelson said they should consider keeping their seatbelt on and opening their windows. The front end of a vehicle often drops through the ice first, and may throw it’s occupants forward. “If you’re

knocked out, it doesn’t matter what you do next because you will be out,” he said.

Again, he said, it’s important to stay calm should a vehicle go through the ice. “You have seconds to minutes, but you need to be prepared and the best opportunity make the situation better for yourself is before going down, get your windows and doors open,” he said.

He urged people to avoid wearing life jackets in a vehicle on the ice because they will make it more difficult to get out of the care.

But first and foremost is to think about what you will do if you go through the ice, said Kittelson.

“Be prepared and think about what you will do,” he said. “If you have your mind set ahead of time, it will help you and you will do what you plan if you can calm down.”

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