

LOCALNEWS

Celebration of success

Rat Root River riffle dedicated Thursday

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

The culmination of three years of effort by volunteers and resource managers and grants nearing \$300,000 were celebrated Thursday with the commemoration of walleye spawning riffle placed in three sites in the Rat Root River this spring.

The project, a partnership between local and state groups and agencies and funded by state grants designated for natural resources, was designed to improve the degraded habitat of the river blamed for the decline of a traditionally productive walleye spawning run that benefits Rainy Lake and Rainy River. Those efforts included clearing log jams to increase water flow, planting shoreline trees to reduce erosion and silt movement, and adding riffle, or rock, to the river bottom for walleye spawning.

A group gathered Thursday on the Galvin Line Bridge near where a new sign has been erected crediting the projects collaborators: the Clean Water Land and Legacy Amendment, Rainy Lake Sportfishing Club, Koochiching County Soil and Water Conservation District, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Lessard-Sams Heritage Council.

Tom Worth, long-time RLSC board member, said the addition of the riffle was the crowning jewel of the project.

“The log jams and the erosion control were necessary, but the riffle has the potential of helping the Rat Root be a more successful spawning river for fish,” he said.

The three-year project, organizers have said, wouldn’t have been accomplished without the unique and successful partnership between the local club, county SWCD and the DNR, Worth said. “All three are very important in bringing out project to fruition,” he said.

Worth recalled the hay day of the Rat Root River

spawning run which was so productive the DNR from 1933 to 1943 trapped walleye to gather eggs to benefit other Minnesota waters. During that time, the eggs from an average of 3,887 walleye were used each year, he reported. By the 1970s, the count dropped to 243 walleye and the DNR stopped using the river as a source for eggs.

The local project really began in 2008 when club members Dave Peterson and Rob Ecklund, who now serves as a county commissioner, took action during a meeting to seek a grant from the Lessard-Sams Heritage Council, recalled Worth. That initial money was used to begin the massive effort of clearing log jams that had trapped sediment, degrading spawning habitat and reducing river flow.

In 2010, the Rainy Lake Sportfishing Club teamed with Koochiching SWCD, which have common resource management goals. The club’s ability to provide matching funds and SWCD’s expertise in grant administration and technical service was combined with the knowledge of walleye by the DNR Fisheries staff creating a successful partnership.

The collaborative efforts of the three partners resulted in a small Conservation Partners Legacy grant in 2011, totaling \$22,500 with \$2,500 in matching funds provided by the RLSC. This initial phase served as a pilot project for how to address the log jam removal needs identified in a report as the first key step in improving spawning habitat. The effort resulted in 15 miles of log jams opened or removed to restore water flow. Building on that success, a second CPL grant was awarded in 2012 for \$215,000 with \$21,500 in matching funds provided by the RLSC and more than \$11,000 provided by Koochiching County. Phase 2 expanded the efforts to address sediment issues and ongoing log jam removal.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Several people gathered Thursday for a photo to celebrate the commemoration of the Rat Root River riffle. Representatives, among others in the photograph, included SWCD’s Pam Tomevi, Eric Olson, Conservation Corps apprentice Sam Soderman; RLSC’s Tom Worth, Eric Norstad, Jack Lang, Ron Jean, Gary Coran, DNR Area Fisheries Supervisor Kevin Peterson, county commissioners Rob Ecklund, Kevin Adee, Brian McBride; Bob Anderson, International Falls mayor and member of the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, and former Sen. Bob Lessard. The Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council was established by the legislature with the responsibility of providing annual funding recommendations to the legislature from the Outdoor Heritage Fund. The Outdoor Heritage Fund, one of four funds created by the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment by voters in 2008, receives one-third of the money raised by the tax increase.



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Tom Worth

DNR walleye tagging began in 2010 to determine spawning site fidelity and dispersal in Rainy Lake. Angler tag returns show walleye are traveling about 60 miles from the Rat Root River to the upper end of the North Arm of Rainy Lake.

Additional partners included Nature Valley, which provided funding



Former Sen. Bob Lessard discusses the Rat Root River project with RLSC President Eric Norstad during the dedication of spawning riffle placed in the river this spring. Lessard, a veteran fishing guide, has said the project serves as an example of the good an amendment approved by voters in 2008 can do locally.

in 2013 to plant conifers in the area around the river to stabilize shorelines and reduce timber from other tree species from falling into the river creating more log jams. This project brought

together dozens of volunteers from across the nation along with members of the Minnesota Conservation Corps youth crew, National Park Conservation Association, and Voyageurs Nation-

al Park Association. Last year, Koochiching County led efforts to stabilize severely eroding shorelines at two public sites on the Rat Root River just north of Rat Root Lake.

LOOKINGBACK

25 YEARS AGO

Tent caterpillars invade Borderland! Horticulture adviser Don Petman said there really isn’t much Borderland residents can do except let the caterpillars run their course.

Donna Schuster, Rainy River Community College’s library secretary, retired at the end of the school year.

40 YEARS AGO

Bonnie Jean Bruggeman, daughter of Mrs. Lucille Bruggeman and the late Burton Bruggeman Jr., graduated May 31 from the University of Minnesota with a degree of bachelor of science in pharmacy.

The Edward R. Backus and Seymour W. Backus Memorial scholarship winners this year are Tara Dahl, daughter

of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Dahl and Dean Lindstrom, son of Mr. and Mrs. Gunnar Lindstrom.

Buzzy LaFond, ex-Bronco great and Fargo-Moorhead Sugar King, has signed a letter of intent to go to St. Scholastica for the upcoming year.

50 YEARS AGO

Cheryl Madison and Jo Pavleck, students at the

Swedish Hospital School of Nursing, Minneapolis, took part in the capping ceremonies recently.

A son was born today at Falls Memorial Hospital to Mr. and Mrs. Matti J. Hyvarinen, 319 Seventh St.; 7 pounds, 15 ounces.

The Koochiching County Board of Commissioners approved, by unanimous vote,

the appointment of James (Bud) Prettyman as county veterans service officer to succeed the present officer, Fred Ludwig, who will retire on Nov. 1.

Charles Ketola, owner-manager of Ketola’s department store and volunteer fireman for 21 years, announced his retirement May 21 at the most recent official meeting

of the fire department. Mary Thiele arrived home Wednesday evening from Bemidji to attend graduation exercises of her sister, Marcia.

Mr. and Mrs. Halbert Johnson and sons, Curtis and Tommy, residents of the Falls for three years, moved to Montevideo. Mr. Johnson was supervisor of the Farm and Home Administration here.

Mr. and Mrs. J. Ralph Dahl, 6241/2 Eighth St., were honored at a surprise housewarming Thursday evening given by a group of friends.

Mrs. Rudy Hanson was honored at a baby shower at the Happy Hollow Community Hall. Mrs. John Cullen assisted in the opening of gifts.

70 YEARS AGO

Airline hostess Blanch Chezick, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E.F. Chezick, 906 Ninth St., will be stationed in Seattle, Wash.

Mr. and Mrs. Fred Williams, Ranier, are parents of a daughter born today at Littlefork Hospital.

J.C. Kohlase, county superintendent of schools since 1938, will leave Tuesday for service with the Navy.

ALL WILD EDGE MEMBERS

Earn 10 points and spin the wheel on one of our promotional kiosks for a chance to win up to \$25 in Fortune Play.

Earn 20 points and spin the wheel on one of our promotional kiosks for a chance to **win from 3x to 25x bonus entry tickets** for our primary monthly promotion.

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37th Annual
WILDER PAGEANT
Walnut Grove, MN

Little House Reunion
10 Stars from the "Little House" TV Series, appearing in Walnut Grove
July 25-27, 2014.
See website for details.

Outdoor drama based on the life of Laura Ingalls Wilder
July 11-12, 18-19, 25-26, 2014
Performed along the banks of Plum Creek

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