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## Clubs: Great start to the snowmobile season

### Officials urge caution on lakes

BY LAUREL BEAGER  
Editor

Winter may have hit Borderland with a storm, but area snowmobile enthusiasts urge caution if venturing onto area trails.

Mother Nature gave the state a one-two punch with the start of December. Last week's seemingly never-ending snowstorm that finally left the area midweek with more than 16 inches of snow has been followed by dangerously cold

temperatures and wind chills.

Snowmobile trail officials say the big snow will offer a wonderful riding experience once trails are readied.

#### IVSC

Jim Bigler, president of the International Voyageurs Snowmobile Club, said the season really began in Saturday's -26 temperatures with club members clearing fallen trees from the Hagerman Trail, a main artery of the trail system.

Despite the temperatures, club members had a hot dog roast along the trail, but Bigler said it was "too dang cold" to take off his gloves to snap photos of the group.

"The groomers will head out this week," he said Monday. "They'll get the back side of Hagerman, to the Rat Root (River) and then head west."

The IVSC maintains 134 miles of groomed trails in the International Falls and Rainy Lake area of northern Minnesota.

The blanket of snow is only marred by a few spots of water in the bogs and low areas, which Bi-

gler said groomer operators would fill with snow.

"People can go out now," said Bigler. "All they have to know is to be careful until the groomers have all the trails done."

The big dump of snow is an excellent start to the season, he said. "It feels really good," he said. "Winter is my favorite time of the year. I like waking the next morning with sore arms and shoulders because of the first snowmobile ride."

Bigler said lake trails, typically the last to be marked and groomed, have not yet been groomed and he

urged all riders to exercise caution while riding in the early part of the season.

"The main focus is to be careful," he said. "It's especially important on the lake or in bog areas where it could be wet."

He noted that Sunday a groomer "was buried" in the deep snow and slush in a wet area and had to be pulled out by another groomer.

"Common sense goes a long way," he said. "The big thing for the club is to obey the rules and watch the speed limits."

**Snowmobile to A7 ►**



STAFF PHOTOS BY EMILY GEDDE AND ROB DAVENPORT

Charlie Greenlee-Castillo, left, and Kane Grover, don ties for Friday's winter concerts. The students were among several of their classmates who dressed their best for the annual holiday event. To see more photos, turn to A10.

## Christmas carolers

Falls Elementary students performed before family, friends and community members at their annual winter concerts Friday. Complete with props, instruments and some playful choreography, children sang holiday classics with smiles on their faces. Concerts continue Wednesday at Falls High School with the junior high band and choir at 9 a.m.; elementary band and choir at 1 p.m.; and the senior high band and choir at 2:15 p.m.



A second-grade student waves to his family before Friday's concert begins.



First-grader Shae Jensen appears to sing her heart out at Friday's concerts.

## State budget surplus to pay back schools

### Falls superintendent says it's good news, but won't help the local finances

BY LAUREL BEAGER  
AND EMILY GEDDE  
Staff Writers

After years of borrowing, all of the \$2.8 billion borrowed from Minnesota schools has been repaid due to the budget surpluses generated by Minnesota's growing economy, announced Gov. Mark Dayton's office Thursday.

A new economic forecast released by the Minnesota Department of Management and Budget shows the additional \$1.086 billion surplus projected for the current biennium will permit the immediate repayment of the final \$246 million still owed to the state's schools. Changes made last session by the Legislature and Dayton accelerated repayment by mandating in law any additional surplus would go immediately to the schools.

Falls Superintendent Nurdy Nelson called the repayment "good news," however, said it won't bring in additional funds to the cash-strapped district.

"We'll get our actual cash that the Department of Education and the state has withheld from the Falls and all the other schools," Nelson said. "It should help next summer so we don't have to borrow cash to pay our bills. When we borrow money, we get charged interest...it's a loss of money."

The portion of the state's \$1.086 billion budget surplus to be returned to the Falls schools is already recognized in the district's audit report, but it isn't actual money in the bank, Nelson said.

"(The repayment) doesn't increase what we have, it is money the auditor already recognizes," he said. "The district has a certain amount of money, but in essence, we don't have it in cash...the state uses the money they owe the school district to help balance its budget."

Nelson said unless "something drastic happens and the state withholds the money again," the district can avoid borrowing money this summer to cover its bills.

"Hopefully, most of (the money) gets returned," he said. "In the past, they've withheld a little bit."

**Budget to A7 ►**