LOCALNEWS

Sand Bay ice road benefits from temperatures

Ice road starting at marina open for use

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Borderland's cold temperatures are giving the area some notoriety as well as some long awaited thickness to the ice on Rainy Lake.

"I'm outside in the truck and it's terrible," reported Travis Thompson Thursday morning, when temperatures dug to 42-below zero setting a new daily temperature record.

The duration of the frigid temperatures has allowed Thompson to open an ice road for anglers on Rainy Lake's Sand Bay.

Thompson said he wasn't sure he'd be able to offer the road this year as the last three or four weeks brought terrible conditions due to the 16-plus inches of snow that fell in just a couple days at the start of December.

The heavy snow forced the just-forming ice down causing slush and water to rise to the surface.

"It was all water since we had that snow," Thompson said. "Finally, it cured enough I could drive a truck out. We went from really bad conditions to really good conditions."

Thompson said plowing the road this year was the most challenging he's encountered. "When the winter started, I didn't think I would be able to open it," he said. "I've never had a foot of water around the corner (of the point). If we'd had more snow, I probably wouldn't have been able to open it"

He said he wouldn't open the road until he felt conditions were right. "It's been treacherous this year, and very unsafe when I tried to plow. I don't mind black ice, but I don't like slush ice — that scares me the most."

But the daily high temperatures of less than zero have helped the ice, he said.

"It's safe now," he said. "That's the main thing."

However, he urged people not to wander off the road too far as they may find slushy conditions. "Now, you can drive anywhere and that's the problem," he said.

A check of Sand Bay's ice on New Year's Day revealed an average of 19 inches of ice near the road, he said. However, he noted he found 14 inches in one spot and the thinnest ice at 13.5 inches below snow.

While the road could have been opened about a week ago, he said some vehicles would have likely been stuck in slush, which could have created dangerous situations for people attempting to walk to help or spending the night in a vehicle in the frigid temperatures.

STAFF PHOTO BY LAUREL BEAGER

The Sand Bay ice road is open for use. Call Travis Thompson at 218-244-4152 for a season pass or, deposit the $5 daily rate in a box at the entrance ramp at Rainy Lake Marine.

"I have a good track record of not having people die out there," he said. "Even though it's not my responsibility when they're on the ice, I don't want anyone to get hurt."

Thompson, who spends many hours preparing and maintaining the road at his own cost, will sell season passes for use of the road. He asks regular users call him at 218-244-4152 to purchase a pass, which may at some point in the season be available at area bait stores.

Last year, he said, he had 100 season passes available, but sold only 20 of them.

Occasional users are asked to pay a daily rate of $5, which can be left in a box at the entrance ramp at Rainy Lake Marine, County Road 225, off County Road 20, east of Ranier.

Thompson urged people to take advantage of the ice conditions.

"Go out there now that it's open," he said of the ice road. "Ice fishing is cheap fun for the family."

Thompson has a few recommendations for people to follow:

- Get off the road a bit before placing a house and drilling holes. If you need space for a house plowed, call him; his telephone number is printed at the ice road access ramp.
- Place your fish house at least 100 yards away from other houses to avoid interference between electronic depth and fish finders.
- Don't drill holes next to the road or next to a snow bank — the weight of the snow will force water up through the holes causing flooding and slush.
- Don't park next to a fish house thinking you'll get more bites because the other anglers know where the fish are. "Park away from them and you'll catch more fish," he said.
- Understand the ice road will be plowed when it makes sense for Thompson, a veteran plow jockey, to do it. That means don't go out on the ice during storms that cause drifting as you may get stuck and the road may not be plowed immediately.
- Drive a vehicle appropriate for the conditions. If the area received several inches of snow recently, don't drive the sports car onto the ice road because you may get stuck.

Volunteer companions needed locally

KAO STAFF REPORT

The Senior Companion Program needs volunteers to visit isolated Koochiching County seniors.

This nationwide program offers support to neighbors when family members and friends cannot be there to help.

"Senior Companions can make a huge difference in the lives of the clients they serve," said Koochiching Aging Options Program Specialist Leslee Loop, who is the site coordinator of the Senior Companion Program in Koochiching County. She noted that the program is making a special invitation to Baby Boomer volunteers.

Senior Companions assist seniors to maintain the highest level of dignity and independent living possible by visiting homebound isolated adults, assisting with vital services such as grocery shopping and appointments, and becoming a friend who listens and cares.

Volunteers may be men and women age 55 and over who are in good health. They are asked to commit 15-20 hours of service per week, although due to new rules Baby Boomers may now serve in weekly segments of 10 hours.

Besides making an impact on the lives of others, a number of other benefits are offered to the volunteers, according to Loop. These include a non-taxable hourly stipend to those financially eligible, transportation reimbursement, insurance while volunteering, and on-going training and recognition.

"I know of no other program as effective in helping seniors to stay healthy and in their homes longer," said RaNae Whitbeck, adult services social worker with Koochiching County Community Services.

The Senior Companion Program is regulated by the Corporation for National and Community Service and the Minnesota Board on Aging and is sponsored by Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota.

If you are interested in becoming a Senior Companion, please call LSS toll free at 1-888-205-3770 or call Koochiching Aging Options at 218-283-7030.

Q & A event on Mnsure Jan. 16

JOURNAL STAFF REPORT

KOOTASCA Community Action has planned a "MNsure Health Care Connect" event in International Falls Jan. 16.

KOOTASCA Community Action will play host to two informal question and answer sessions to inform low-income area residents of MNsure and how MNsure may be able to help them find an affordable health insurance plan.

Participants will also be able to make an appointment with MNsure navigators to help with the navigation process.

What is MNsure?

MNsure is a one-stop health insurance marketplace where Minnesotans can find and compare health plans, and choose coverage that fits their needs.

MNsure is the only place where individuals and families can qualify for a no-cost or low-cost plan and access financial help to reduce the cost of insurance.

MNsure is the only place Minnesotans can collect federal tax credits to reduce the cost of health insurance.

The sessions will take place from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. Jan. 16. Both sessinos will be held in the conference room at KOOTASCA, 2232 2nd Ave. E., International Falls.

The sessions are free and require no advance registration.

KOOTASCA Community Action is a private nonprofit agency that served 9,300 low-income people last year through its programs that include Head Start, Family Homeless Prevention, PC's for People, Energy Assistance, Weatherization, Teenage Parent Program (TAPP), Crisis Nursery, and Circles of Support.

Contact Jeff Poenix, KOOTASCA health care promoter, with questions at 218-999-0835, toll free at 877-687-1163, or by e-mail: jeffp@kootasca.org

This is Northwoods Eating

Breakfast Specials
Mon.-Sat. $6.29 • Sunday $7.29

Mon.	Big Moose Skillet with hashbrowns
Tues.	Breakfast Sandwich with hashbrowns
Wed.	French Toast w/eggs & sausage or bacon
Thurs.	Blueberry Pancakes w/eggs & sausage or bacon
Fri.	Biscuits & Gravy w/eggs & hashbrowns
Sat.	Cinnamon Swirl French Toast with ham & eggs
Sun.	Blueberry Cream Cheese Crepes with eggs & ham

Dinner Specials

Mon.	Half Chicken Dinner	$10.99
Tues.	Full Rack of BBQ Ribs	$17.99
Wed.	Pan Fried Walleye	$14.99
Thurs.	Mozzarella Girasole w/Marinara Sauce	$10.99
Fri.	Fishermen's Catch	$16.99
Sat.	Rib Eye Steak	$17.99
Sun.	Chicken Kiev	$11.99

Dinners include choice of potato & salad. Choice of soup for $1.00

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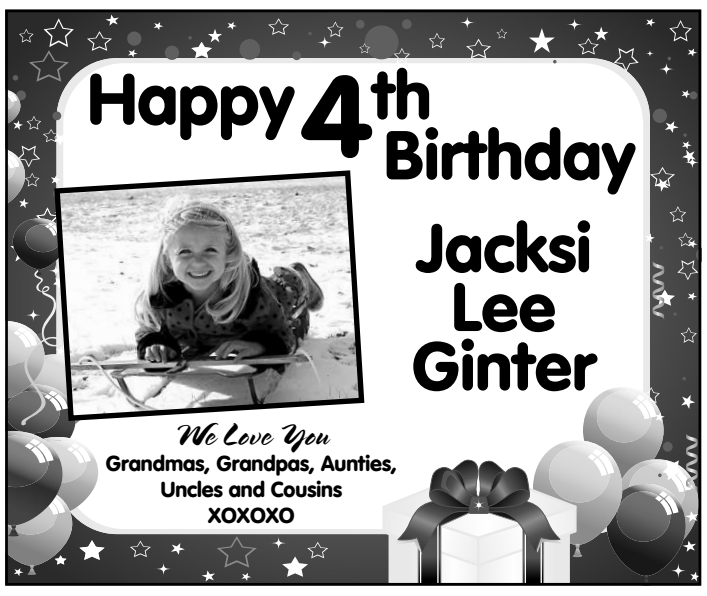

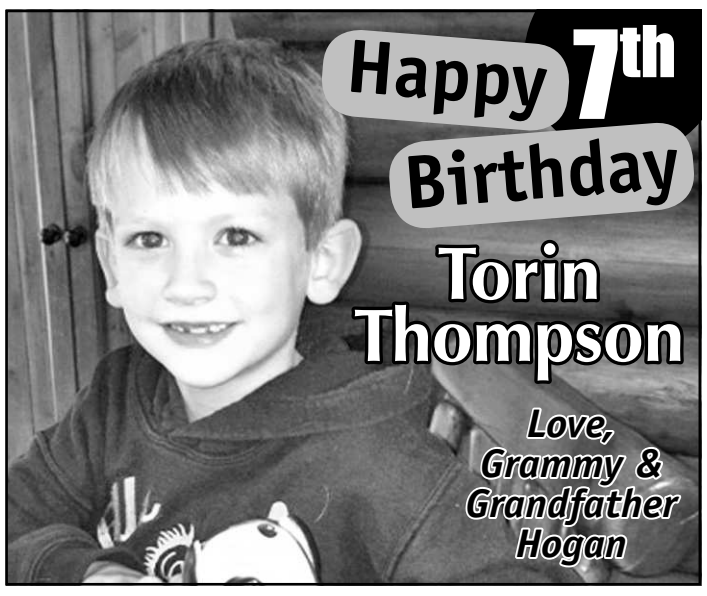

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