

MN Receives Grant For Moose Habitat Restoration

A new federal grant award will fund collaborative planning by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to further large-scale moose habitat restoration in northeast Minnesota.

The award from the National Fish and Wildlife

Foundation, through the new America the Beautiful Challenge, will provide \$443,600 to the DNR for the planning effort, with a goal of an implementation plan for moose habitat restoration on three areas of 10,000 to 50,000 contiguous acres each.

“This grant is great news for efforts to address the long-term moose population decline in Minnesota,” said Kelly Straka, wildlife section manager. “This grant supports an effort that has broad support from a number of tribal, federal, county and non-governmental partner organizations, and all are critical players in planning for long-term habitat improvements.”

Tribal, federal, county and non-governmental partner organizations helped develop the planning approach and signed letters of support for the DNR’s grant application, which was one of 55 chosen nationwide from more than 500 applications.



The patchwork of tribal, federal, state, county and private land in northeast Minnesota makes large-scale habitat restoration particularly challenging. The grant will fund a series of workshops with tribal, federal, state, county and non-governmental partner organizations in 2023 and 2024 to identify the challenges facing large-scale moose habitat restoration, find strategies to address the challenges, identify areas for large-scale habitat restoration and create an implementation plan for the restoration. The implementation plan will also identify potential sources of funding to complete the agreed upon large-scale habitat restoration.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation along with its public- and private-sector partners announced a total of nearly \$91 million in grants through the America the Beautiful Challenge (nfwf.org/Programs/America-Beautiful-Challenge).

DNR Ice Safety Guidelines



Snowstorms that dropped heavy, wet snow significantly affects ice conditions, according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Slush adds weight to the ice and its effects can be unpredictable. In some areas, slushy conditions are impacting travel on the ice, while in others — especially where ice was in the early stages of forming — the conditions are not adequate to support ice shelters and vehicles, resulting in break-throughs.

When on the ice, people should check the thickness for themselves and not rely on tracks in the snow or what they’ve heard second hand. When measuring the thickness of slush-covered ice, measure only the clear ice, not the slush or snow on top of it. While forecasted cold weather this week could help strengthen ice, it’s vital to check ice thickness regularly. The DNR recommends at least 5 to 7 inches of ice for snowmobiles, 7 to 8 inches for side-by-side all-terrain vehicles, and at least 20 inches for heavy-duty trucks pulling wheelhouses.

“The final week of December has become the unofficial kickoff to the ‘wheelhouse season,’ but just because you had your wheelhouse out during that week last year doesn’t necessarily mean it’ll be safe this year,” said Col. Rodmen Smith, director of the DNR Enforcement Division. “There are many tools to help you determine whether the ice is safe — augers, drills, spud

bars and tape measures — but the calendar isn’t one of them.”

General ice safety guidelines No ice can ever be considered “safe ice,” but following these guidelines(mndnr.gov/safety/ice/thickness.html) can help minimize the risk:

- Always wear a life jacket or float coat on the ice (except when in a vehicle).
- Carry ice picks, rope, an ice chisel and tape measure.
- Check ice thickness often; conditions can change quickly.
- Bring a cell phone or personal locator beacon.
- Don’t go out alone; let someone know about trip plans and expected return time.
- Before heading out, inquire about conditions and known hazards with local experts.

The minimum ice thickness guidelines for new, clear ice are:

- 4+ inches for ice fishing or other activities on foot.
- 5-7 inches for a snowmobile or a small ATV.
- 7-8 inches for a side-by-side ATV
- 9-12 inches for a car.
- 13-17 inches for a truck.
- 20+ inches for a large truck with a wheelhouse shelter.

Double these minimums for white or snow-covered ice.

For more information, visit the DNR’s ice safety (mndnr.gov/icesafety) or boating safety pages (mndnr.gov/boatingsafety).

Larsen Named New Mgr. Of West Otter Tail SWCD

A familiar face will lead West Otter Tail Soil and Water Conservation District after its current manager Brad Mergens retires after 38 plus years of service.

Aaron Larsen, project manager for the West Otter Tail SWCD, will become the district manager for the West Otter Tail SWCD on January 1st, 2023, after being selected by the West Otter Tail SWCD Board of Supervisors at their December meeting.

A native of Morgan, Minn, Larsen joined the West Otter Tail SWCD in 2013 after starting his employment in the office in 2008 as a Farm Bill Biologist with Pheasants Forever. Larsen began his career working with farmers and landowners to enroll in conservation programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and the Reinvest in Minnesota (RIM) program. After transitioning to the SWCD, he began working on addressing erosion control in agricultural fields and shorelines and managed project funds that provide financial assistance to landowners for installing conservation practices.

Mergens, who joined the SWCD in 1984, is retiring after 38 years at the end of December 2022. Under Mergens leadership, the SWCD has been recognized statewide for its contributions to conserving the natural resources of Otter Tail



AARON LARSEN

County.

Most notably, in 2015 the SWCD was chosen as the SWCD of the Year and Mergens was chosen as the SWCD Employee of the Year by the Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts. In addition, the SWCD received the 2011 Living Snowfence Award from Minnesota Department of Transportation, the 2016 Brood Booster Award from Minnesota Pheasants Forever, Polaris Habitat Stewardship Award from the Pelican River Chapter of Pheasants Forever, and the 2021 DNR Division of Ecological and Water Resources Appreciation Award.

Recent Snow Impacts Access To Some State Parks

Recent significant snow events are impacting winter recreation access in state parks and trails in northern Minnesota, according to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Heavy, wet snowfall last week made many roads and trails impassable and cut power to several state parks. Additional snow and bitter cold temperatures this week further impacted conditions at some state parks and trails across Minnesota.

“We’re working hard to dig out from all the winter weather,” said Ann Pierce, director of the DNR Parks and Trails Division. “While we still encourage folks to get outdoors and enjoy the peace and beauty of a Minnesota winter, right now we also want visitors to know that some of our state parks and trails have limited access. In some cases, we’re outright asking people not to use certain trails because of downed trees and branches that still need to be removed before trails can be used safely. Information about current conditions is on our website.”

People visiting affected state parks and trails should use extreme caution until maintenance crews are able to clear trails, plow roads and remove hazards. Those planning to go to a state park should check visitor alerts on the park website for information about conditions at that location. State park pages can be found on theDNR website (mndnr.gov/parks).

Before heading out, skiers and snowmobilers should check the snow depth and groomed trail conditions page of the DNR website (mndnr.gov/snow) for the latest information.

For more information, contact the DNR Information Center by emailing info.dnr@state.mn.us or by calling 888 646-6367 from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday-Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday.

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Ask A Trooper



By: Minnesota State Patrol Sergeant Jesse Grabow

Question: If I am driving down a two lane road and a State Trooper is driving toward me with their flashing lights on, am I supposed to move over?

Answer: When approaching any authorized emergency vehicle equipped with emergency lights, the driver of each other vehicle shall yield the right-of-way and shall immediately drive to a position parallel to and as close as possible to the right-hand edge or curb of the highway clear of any intersection, and shall stop and remain in this position until the authorized emergency vehicle has passed, except when otherwise directed by a police officer.

A portion of state statutes were used with permission from the Office of the Revisor of Statutes. If you have any questions concerning traffic related laws or issues in Minnesota, send your questions to Trp. Jesse Grabow – Minnesota State Patrol at 1000 Highway 10 West, Detroit Lakes, MN 56501-2205. (You can follow him on Twitter @MSPPIO_NW or reach him at jesse.grabow@state.mn.us).

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It's A Seven Day Work Week...

Just about the time you think you have things figured out, you don’t. That’s what happened to me during my first month of incarceration at Hillcrest of Wayzata. That is a nursing home and rehab center where I was being held prisoner after a painful fall on a elk hunting trip to Colorado, a long diagnostic period, a botched surgery, a successful surgery on a broken back, a loss of the ability to walk and now the rehabilitation necessary to see how much of that could be fixed.

For the first couple of weeks at Hillcrest I had been under the care and training of Leilani and Sarah, a couple of young therapists who were attempting to fix me both physically and occupationally. Sounds like kind of a tall order. They worked Monday through Friday from about 7:30 until done sometime late in the afternoon or early evening. For the first couple weeks my weekends had been free. Nothing to do but read, relax and watch TV.

On my third weekend I was rousted from my sloth-like existence by JoJo whose duty it was to see that I got no rest. She had hauled me off to the gym on Saturday with the terrifying announcement that she owned me for two hours on Saturday and Sunday of each week. I was getting no days off. This was a seven-day a week regime that I was going to be going through.

Our first date together proved she was a wicked taskmaster. We did a workout on the parallel bars with me struggling first to gain a standing position and then stumble down the entire 10-foot length of the parallel pipes. Therapists Leilani and Sarah had given me credit for a trip when I reached the end of the bars. Not so with JoJo. She counted it as a trip when I not only made it to the end of the parallel bars, but I then had to turn around and drag my worthless left leg back to the wheelchair. A round trip for her counted as one, no halfway measures for that girl.

But maneuver those bars we did. When we finished with that, we did a bunch of seated exercises using the stretchy rubber bands of various tensions. Under her rigorous workout schedule I was feeling it pretty good in a little less than an hour and she had decreed that we were going for two hours under her schedule.

When we finished with the bars and stretchy bands she introduced me to a new torture device. “You can rest here,” she said pointing to a stationary recumbent bike. It was a rest due only to the fact that I could sit down. You still had to peddle the elliptical bike and the degree of resistance could be set at different levels. “Let’s see how long you can go on this,” she said as I assumed a comfortable position. “And keep your hands off the side levers, your surgeon doesn’t want you working your upper body just yet.”

The bike came equipped with foot pedals and levers, almost like ski poles that all worked in tandem with each other. Taking away my arms meant that the machine was then operated with foot power only, no assistance from my upper body. I don’t know if that arrangement doubled the workload for the legs but it added a lot.

I began the new exercise using legs only. It was a chore getting everything moving but eventually the stiffness wore off and we made some pretty good progress with the bike. “You’re doing great. Just keep it up. After a little while you might want to challenge yourself a little and set up a little more resistance in the pedals. You have fun, I’m going over to the other side of the gym and do some paperwork while you work.”

And that’s what we did. I worked out pedaling the bicycle while the arm bars flopped in the wind. Against my better judgment I also increased the degree of resistance every five minutes or so. I pressed through the backlash pain in my legs protesting me making them do more than they wanted to do. JoJo finished her paperwork, came over to the bike and pulled up a chair. She looked at the elapsed time on the machine’s clock and suggested about eight minutes more. That would take it to a half hour on the bike and over an hour and a half with JoJo.

We chatted as those eight minutes crept by. Rather she chatted. I tried to gasp out replies. Eventually we hit the half hour mark and went into the cool down mode. While that light exercise was going on, we got to know each other better. She was a little older than Sarah and Leilani, somewhere in her early 40s I guessed but you never ask a lady her age. Put it this way, she had a bit more obvious maturity than did her two young cohorts.

JoJo had immigrated to the United States a couple of decades before I met her. She and her husband, also a Filipino, were both physical therapists but worked at different facilities. She was not the head of the rehab department at Hillcrest, that was a guy named Chris.

But JoJo was responsible for recording the charting and progress of all of the rehab patients. She would take all of the notes initiated by the various therapists and create a portfolio of information on each client that would satisfy the powers that be at the various insurance levels, particularly at the Medicare level where most patients at this facility fit.

We would have a number of long chats during our cool down sessions after a vigorous workout. It was more difficult working with JoJo than it was with Leilani or Sarah. That was due to the fact that she took me on as a patient in one two-hour block while working with the other duo, I got a breather in between sessions.

In our first session she told me how lucky I was. I had made the cut for weekend drills with her on Saturday and Sunday. If not her, there would be a replacement on weekends but I was going to do exercises seven days a week. The announcement of this new schedule did not make me feel lucky nor fill me with brimming enthusiasm.

At least it didn’t at first blush. Then JoJo explained that I was one of the few in the facility who was getting this much time because they felt they could do me a lot of good. The patients that were getting the weekends off, needed them. They were exhausted after five days of light workouts. For some, it was doubtful that they were ever going to get much better than they were. But they had plans for bigger and better things for me. Didn’t make my aching muscles hurt any less but I guess that’s good news.



I was still bound either to my bed or to my wheelchair but I was making progress. Each work session had me on my feet behind a walker or between parallel bars, getting a little better each time.