

Legislators give commissioners end-of-session updates

BY SHAWN JANSEN
ASKOV AMERICAN

During the county board meeting held June 18 in the new North Pine Government Center, the commissioners heard legislative updates from government officials attending the ribbon cutting ceremony of the new center.

REP. MIKE SUNDIN

Rep. Mike Sundin of District 11A touched on being involved with various entities on a minor project, to solve the Island Lake outlet issue.

“Jill Carlier has just been stellar in problem solving with that,” he said. Carlier is the district manager for Pine Soil and Water Conservation District who helped coordinate the solution to the blocked outlet.

He also said that he has worked on a bill that requires the state to reimburse counties for utilities that challenged their property tax assessments. Enbridge fought the Minnesota Department of Revenue for overvaluing its pipelines, which a court has upheld, and now counties are supposed to pay back tax collected from those utilities, some in the millions of dollars.

“These companies can afford the legal battle,” Sundin said.

REP. NATHAN NELSON

Rep. Nathan Nelson of District 11B said every two weeks was a new challenge as he came in to his role in the House late in the session due to the special elections this winter and spring. Nelson said he has been hearing from constituents that “we really need townships”. Nelson said he is not interested in getting rid of townships as a way to make government smaller.

“I think townships are some of the most responsive,” said Nelson.

He said one highlight of the session was that St. Croix State Park gets to keep its name. He said there are other projects in the works to honor Vice President Walter Mondale. A bill had been introduced to rename the park



SHAWN JANSEN

State Senator Jason Rarick addressed the Pine County Board of Commissioners.

after Mondale.

Nelson said education funding is good as local districts are slated to receive increases. “We can always do better,” he said.

SENATOR JASON RARICK

Senator Jason Rarick said he believed the divided government at the state Capitol has more to do with geography than political party. Although many in the legislature representing outstate areas have the opportunity to come and stay several months in the metro area, his urban and suburban colleagues do not get the same extended stays in rural areas that would help them to better understand rural issues.

“I have two great reps to work with,” said Rarick of Nelson and Sundin.

One such not well understood issue was rural broadband. He said he would have liked to have seen more dollars put toward rural broadband. He said he sees the need for a statewide plan to get that infrastructure in place.

Rarick said there were four or five cable companies bringing fiber optic cable through Rock Creek, but not one company will let locals tap into those lines.

“That’s why we’re not getting our rural areas served,” said Rarick. He said he is working to have the state make allowing local entities to tap into lines a requirement for those companies getting state or federal funding for those broadband projects.

As for counties having to pay back the utilities being overvalued, Rarick said, “The state created the issue, the state needs to step up and take care of that.” Rarick said those counties will also be looking at decreased property taxes because of the ruling that the state will also need to look at.

COUNTY PRIORITIES

Commissioner Steve Hallan of Pine City told Rarick that something needs to be done with out-of-home placement costs. Hallan said every single year the county pays \$2 million for out-of-home placements, about half of which results from the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).

“We are in the minority statewide,” said Hallan, but the county is in the top five of those 19 counties affected.

Hallan did thank the legislators for the increase in County Program Aid and the good session, but he said, the

other glaring hole is transportation. He said the county has 700 miles of roads to take care of, and the townships have even more collectively. One example he gave was 17 miles of County Road 32 east of Askov that was suitable only for four-wheel drive traffic this spring.

“We cannot do it with the same amount of money that we’ve had in the past,” said Hallan. The cost of everything has gone up, he said.

Rarick said he serves on the transportation committee. “I’d be willing to look at a small gas tax increase if it comes with similar dedicated money ... like sales tax.”

Rarick said that money goes into the Highway User Fund. The problem, he learned from the committee chair, is that the legislature is not funding the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) enough to cover salaries. When that happens, Rarick said, MnDOT uses the Highway User Fund to cover the gap instead of those funds going to small cities, counties and townships for their roads.

“I always bristle when I hear there’s a surplus. Because I submit to you that there’s no surplus until you have fully funded the programs that you said you were going to fund,” said Hallan.

Minnesota statute 244.19 says the state is to pay 50% of the costs of probation officers’ salaries to all counties of not more than 200,000 population.

Hallan said Pine County last received 29% reimbursement for probation agents’ salaries.

County Administrator David Minke said Minnesota is 49th out of 50 states in state funding for ICWA.

Miranda Janssen of Congressman Pete Stauber’s office said Stauber serves on the transportation and infrastructure committee because he has all forms of transportation in his district. The committee also works on rural broadband issues. She invited constituents to set up a meeting if needed.

TRYGGESTAD: Educator returns to Pine City School District as superintendent

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through both interviews was his openness to calm communication.

“Parents and guardians all want the best for

their children,” Tryggestad said. “Keep the focus on students.”

In the days ahead, the school board and Tryggestad will be working on a contract plus discuss-

ing opportunities for staff, students, parents and community members to meet him for the first time or greet him from their past to discuss “... giving the communi-

ty the best educational value we can for our children.”

Tryggestad will replace Pine City Schools Superintendent Annette Freiheit who informed

the board in May that she had accepted the superintendent position with Winona Area Public Schools and resigned her position in Pine City. Freiheit, who grew up

in southern Minnesota and went to school at Winona State University, said she took the new position in order to be closer to her family.

DNR asks motorists to ‘give turtles a brake’

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MN DEPT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is reminding motorists that turtles are crossing roads to nest this time of year. Motorists are asked to watch for them and, whenever possible, allow them to cross the road safely.

Each year at this time, many female turtles move from lakes, ponds, wetlands, rivers and streams to nesting areas. They are looking for suitable locations to deposit their eggs. Many nesting areas are a significant distance from turtles’ wintering areas.

As they attempt to cross roads, moving at a turtle’s pace, many are hit and killed by cars. Roadway mortality is believed to be a major factor in turtle population declines throughout the United States. “Wildlife rehabilitators have

noticed an increase this year in turtles brought in with cracked shells after being struck by cars,” said DNR herpetologist Carol Hall. “Turtles pre-date dinosaurs by millions of years, and they’ve outlasted them. But if we want them to be around into the future, we should lend a hand.”

Helping turtles safely cross roads can help preserve Minnesota’s turtles, Hall said. She provided a few pointers:

- Mostly importantly, don’t put yourself or others in danger. Simply pulling off the road and turning on hazard lights may alert other drivers to slow down. Be aware of surroundings and traffic.

- Allow unassisted road crossings. When turtles can safely cross roads unaided due to a lack of oncoming traffic, allow them to do so. Observe from a distance and avoid rapid movements, as doing other-



MN DNR

There are certain guidelines, which vary depending on the species of turtle, that people should follow if they come across a turtle crossing a road.

wise will often cause turtles to change direction, stop or seek shelter within their shells.

- If necessary to pick them up, all turtles except snappers and softshells (also known as leatherbacks) should be grasped gently along the shell

edge near the mid-point of the body.

If it is a snapping turtle or softshell turtle, try to use a car mat and pull it across the road. Many turtles empty their bladder when lifted off the ground, so be careful not to drop them

if they should suddenly expel liquid. Avoid excessive handling that can disrupt turtle behavior.

- Maintain direction of travel. Always move turtles in the same direction they were traveling when encountered. Turtles should always be moved across roadways in as direct a line as possible.

- Help document turtle crossing and mortality areas by participating in the Minnesota Turtle Crossing Tally and Count Project. More information can be found at mndnr.gov.

Turtles injured while trying to cross the road may be taken to your nearest permitted wildlife rehabilitator, which can be found by calling a local DNR office.

More information about Minnesota’s nine turtle species is available at www.dnr.state.mn.us.