

International Falls Journal

Saturday, October 13, 2018



International Falls, Minnesota

www.ifallsjournal.com

\$1.50

County Board agrees to hire engineering consultant for CR 24 project designs

BY WHITNEY JACKSON
Staff Writer

A local project is one step closer to construction following action taken by the Koochi-ching County Board this week.

Commissioners Tuesday unanimously agreed to authorize County Engineer Joe Sutherland to hire an engineering consultant to design and prepare construction bidding documents for the County State Aid Highway 24 bridge over the Canadian National Railway tracks.



Joe Sutherland

Southbound CN trains often block the dead-end County Highway 24, also known as the Van Lynn Road, making it difficult for residents and emergency vehicles to access houses there. County officials have proposed construction of an overpass to carry vehicle traffic over the railroad tracks and a connector road that would allow vehicles to exit that road onto Highway 11 east of Ranier.

"After we've selected a consultant and worked out the fees, then we'd like to come back and talk to the board about those details," said Sutherland. "We'd like to get moving with the actual design."

The board was in agreement to move forward.

"We need to really get moving on this thing," said Commissioner Kevin Adee. "There's times that two trains are going at the same time, sometimes the second one doesn't actually start until the first one is almost done, so now you're sitting there for two whole trains ... we can't have that."

Board to A12 >



STEAMY topic

School officials discuss Juuling; educators urge parents to be aware

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

Juuling may seem like a foreign term to many adults, but chances are most young people have not only heard about it, they've been exposed to it.

A JUUL device looks like a USB flash drive, but is actually an e-cigarette brand that is quickly growing in popularity in Borderland and across the nation.

The devices are sleek,

Vaping series

This story is the first in a series about Juuling and vaping in the Borderland communities. The Journal will also talk to local law enforcement officers and medical professionals for their input on the issue. Watch for those stories in upcoming editions.

odorless and can often go undetected when in use. In fact, they are so discreet some students are using them in classrooms.



STAFF PHOTOS

On the left, a Juul device is similar to that of a USB flash drive, shown on the right.

JUUL pods come in different flavors making them an attractive target for teens and other youth.

"They taste like bubblegum, watermelon and

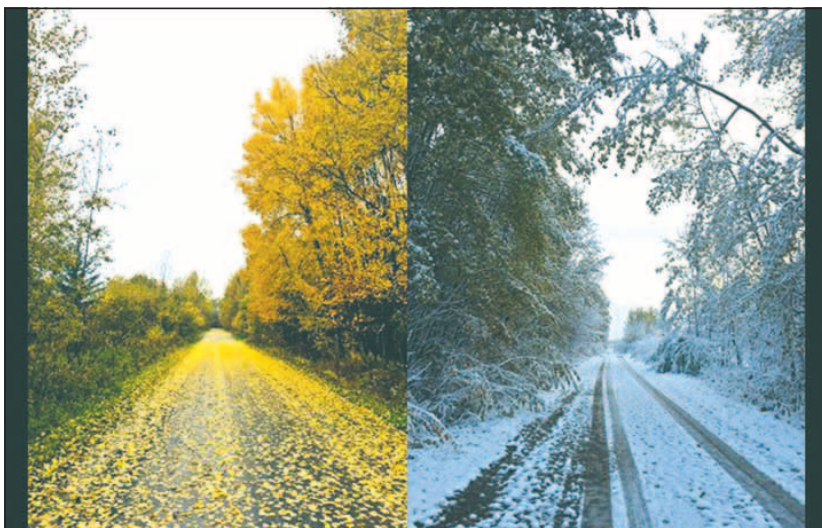
cherry," said Josh Koenig, health teacher at Falls High School. "Look how it is marketed."

Juuling to A12 >

Weather in northern Minnesota can be pretty unpredictable.

The photo on the left was taken Wednesday morning, while the one on the right was taken only about 24 hours later in the same location.

Wednesday's snowfall amount of 2.5 inches broke a record for Oct. 10 in International Falls.



STAFF PHOTOS BY WHITNEY JACKSON

Get out the shovels

BY EMILY GEDDE
Staff Writer

The good news is the rain stopped.

The bad news is it turned to snow.

And it broke a record.

Borderland got its first dose of a winter wonderland Wednesday night with 2.5 inches of snow blanketing the ground, breaking the previous record of 0.8 inches set

on that date in 2009. However, it's not the earliest date Borderland has had more than 2 inches of snow in October. On Oct. 1, 1980, 4.5 inches of snow fell on the ground, holding that record.

Still, the early-onset of the winter season caused snow plows to emerge from their summer hideout and shovels were dusted off as the

Weather to A12 >



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BOARD

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Adee also said constituents are calling him with complaints all the time.

“It’s got to come to a stop,” he said. “(CN) also told us that they generally do not double-track across a road and that’s exactly what they did, so you can’t trust them.”

Sutherland in July applied for a Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development, or BUILD grant, which would aid in funding the project.

The minimum BUILD grant award for a rural project is \$1 million, and \$25 million maximum. Officials estimate the bridge project to cost \$4 million and the road project to cost \$7 million.

A benefit cost analysis conducted in June showed that the overpass is more fundable than both constructing just the road and the road and bridge together.

In other business, the board Tuesday:

- Accepted a donation from Lakeland Public Television in the amount of \$31,984. The funds will be used for the PBS translator station channel changes, as requested by the donor.

- Ratified the U.S. Department of Transportation Grant Agreement for the Airport Improvement Program Project of \$5.9 million toward reconstruction

of runway 13/31 and further.

- Approved an addendum to a temporary burning permit issued in December 2017 to Minnesota Power, extending the expiration to Dec. 31, 2019, and adding an additional parcel.

- Agreed to set the 2019 timber auction dates of Feb. 6, May 1, July 31 and Nov. 13.

- Heard a notice of hire of Charlene Tomczak for the Land and Forestry Department deputy administrator position with a start date of Nov. 12.

- Authorized Jaci Nagle, information systems manager, to execute a five year contract for Metro Ethernet with Paul Bunyan Telephone for the Veterans Service Office’s off-campus space.

- Accepted the low bid of \$69,474 for a compact truck loader from McCoy Construction & Forestry.

- Accepted the low bid of \$10,920 for a rotary brush cutter from Diamond Mowers, Inc.

- Authorized Sutherland to advertise for bids for a 2018 aggregate crushing contract.

- Approved a road vacation request from Tom and Donna Gedney, legally described as part of Grand View Way, Forest Point.

- Authorized the Land and Forestry Department to apply for a 2019 Minnesota Department of Agriculture noxious weed and invasive plant grant.

JUULING

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Koenig, who is also a coach and a parent, said it is frustrating that teens see nothing wrong about Juuling and are unaware of the harmful effects.

“People think it’s a safe alternative to smoking,” he said. “It isn’t.”

One JUUL pod contains about the same amount of nicotine as a pack of cigarettes, setting off health alarms and raising concerns about stunting students’ brain development.

Local school officials are trying to tackle the rising trend by educating parents and discouraging young people from picking up the habit, but the task comes with challenges.

Local concerns

Because JUUL devices emit very little, odorless vapor, catching students using them can be difficult. Falls Superintendent Kevin Grover said a few students were recently caught vaping on school property and disciplined, according to the school’s guidelines.

“It’s treated as a tobacco violation,” he said, adding punishment includes suspension from athletics for two weeks or two games, a day of in-school suspension and a report to law enforcement if the student is underage.

The superintendent said he imagines news of students being cited spreads quickly and may lead to the perception everyone is doing it.

Luckily, that isn’t the case.

Beth Slatinski, coordinator for a planning and implementation grant, which focuses on alcohol abuse, but can include other components, said most of the students in the district are making healthy choices by avoiding habits such as Juuling.

“We live in a community where we hear about the few who are doing what they shouldn’t be doing” she said. “We want to change that conversation and let adults know most kids are not using... There is a very small number who are Juuling, it’s just everyone knows about that small number.”



STAFF PHOTO

JUULs are available at local smoke shops and convenience stores.

Limited research

Still, Grover and Slatinski said the trend is a concern, and are helping spread awareness beyond the schools’ walls.

Part of the problem, however, is the lack of research.

“We’re behind the industry,” Slatinski said. “The industry has been pounding out more products than we’re aware of.”

Grover said there hasn’t been years of studies done to determine the harmful effects of Juuling and use of other vaping devices.

“So far, (medical professionals) are seeing three things with vaping,” Slatinski said. “They’re diagnosing popcorn lung, wet lung and are seeing some cases of cancer.”

Wet lung is also known as acute respiratory distress syndrome, or inflammation of the lungs. Similarly, popcorn lung is the nickname for bronchiolitis obliterans, which is a condition that damages the lungs’ smallest airways, creating a cough and shortness of breath.

“There are high levels of nicotine in these products,” Slatinski said. “It’s getting into the system so quickly and so concentrated compared to if you were to have a traditional cigarette.”

Educators fear many students are unaware of the harmful effects and are only Juuling because of the cool factor.

Grover said because e-cigarettes are marketed as an alternative for adult smokers, it gives off the perception it’s safe.

“It goes back to lack

of knowledge,” he said.

“We need to make people in the community more aware of these products.”

Regional issue

When meeting with other grant coordinators in the region, Slatinski said everyone had seen some form of vaping in their schools.

At Littlefork-Big Falls School, Superintendent Jamie Wendt said the issue is a hard one to grip.

“It’s everywhere,” she said, adding consequences of being caught at L-BF also result in suspension. “The kids have a way to conceal it and can easily go without being noticed... We all need to better educate ourselves.”

It appears not all schools in Koochiching County, however, are noticing a problem.

Laurie Bitter, principal at Indus School, sent out an informational email to staff last month from the Minnesota Department of Health warning schools about the use of e-cigarettes. When The Journal last week reached out about Juuling in her school, she said it wasn’t an issue.

“I haven’t heard too much here at Indus,” she said. “There hasn’t been anyone who has reported any vaping.”

Northome School had a similar report.

“I have yet to deal with a Juuling or vaping incident this year,” said Principal Jeremy Tammi. “I haven’t had any staff or parents report any incidents as well. I am not saying students aren’t doing any of this, but I believe it is not very prevalent within our school.”

Juuling isn’t just a con-

cern unique to the area’s high schools. Officials are seeing it at the collegiate level, too.

“Two years ago, I knew of a few students who vaped, but last spring, I realized it was a trend that was growing much more rapidly than I expected it to,” said Stephanie Turban, partnerships for success grant manager at Rainy River Community College. “I would certainly say it is something to be concerned about, but it is important to remember that most students aren’t doing it.”

Similar to high school students, many people Turban talks to at RRCC are unaware of the harmful effects of vaping. Instead, they see it as safer than smoking cigarettes and don’t realize the health dangers it carries.

“They don’t realize the amount of nicotine they are consuming, especially if they are using the JUUL devices, which contain the same amount of nicotine as a pack of cigarettes,” she said. “Because these are new products, it will take years to get the full picture. What we do know is that the vaping liquid or JUUL pods contain nicotine, which is addictive. This is especially concerning with teen use because their brains are still developing, and nicotine can alter this development.”

Further conversations
Laura Zika, L-BF nurse, said now that she is aware Juuling is a problem in the schools and community, she will be initiating conversations at home.

“As parents, we need to educate our children and teens with the right information before they get their information from a different source, like their friends,” she said. “Don’t assume they haven’t seen or heard of vaping. Chances are good they have already heard of it or been exposed to it.”

Slatinski echoed Zika’s advice and encourages parents and guardians to start or continue having conversations with their children to find out what they know about vaping.

“Those early conversations are a step in the right direction,” she said.

Grover agreed.

“The more people we have know and are educated, we’ll have more people watching,” Grover said, adding the issue is something of which the entire community needs to be aware. “We need parents talking to kids, parents talking to each other and just continue the education community-wide.”

WEATHER

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snow appeared after seven days of off-and-on accumulated precipitation.

The rain kicked off the month with another record-breaking day on Oct. 4 when 0.9 inches of rainfall fell, pushing ahead of the previous record of 0.67 inches set in 1990.

As the weekend progresses, the forecast doesn’t look to improve as far as dry weather. Saturday night and

Sunday call for light snow possibly mixed with rain. Light snow accumulations are also expected.

As the work week begins, Monday could see some partly sunny skies, but light snow returns Monday night into Tuesday.

With the chances of inclement weather, travel conditions could be impacted and motorists should use caution while driving. The latest road conditions for Minnesota can be found at 511mn.org.

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Unable to attend? View our live stream!
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Major Accomplishments

2016: Rep. Rob Ecklund chief-authored legislation for \$2.5 million in funding for private forest management.

2017: Due to Rob’s work, the final 2017 Environment Bill included \$2 million for forest road maintenance, \$1 million for private forest management; funding for reforestation; an analysis of harvesting 1 million cords of timber annually from DNR-administered forest lands; and funding the replacement of the outdated forestry IT system which will improve efficiency

2018: Rob crossed party lines to pass a bonding bill that not only included much-needed infrastructure improvements for northern Minnesota, but also included \$3 million for reforestation and stand improvement.

This message paid for by the committee to re-elect Rob Ecklund.
Treasurer Dave Peterson 2823 Crescent Drive, International Falls, MN 56649