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Ely Echo Editorial

Major broadband project for rural Ely needs help to complete funding package

A revised broadband project that would provide much-needed service to rural Ely residents in the Town of Morse has hit a funding snag.

The project now seeks to use cutting edge wireless technology to provide up to 200Mbps service to customers within line-of-sight of towers and repeater sites. Customers without line-of-sight may be eligible for service up to 25Mbps.

Currently these residences and businesses have to choose between nearly non-existent speeds from Frontier or gamble on satellite connections.

Isaac Olson of Treehouse Broadband, LLC gave an update to the Morse board Tuesday, describing how the point-to-point and point-to-multipoint wireless broadband system would serve over 300 locations in the Burntside Lake, Little Long Lake and Wolf Lake areas.

The \$600,000 project would include two 100 foot towers along with repeater sites and at customer homes and businesses Treehouse would install 18-inch receiver dishes and indoor WiFi coverage.

The project has a \$150,000 funding gap as it currently sits. The Town of Morse has committed \$100,000, Treehouse Broadband has pledged \$200,000 and the IRRRB has shown interest in half of the remaining \$150,000.

Under current funding rules, the IRRRB only provides up to 25% of the funding, looking to state broadband monies to provide the rest.

But those monies have been committed for the current fiscal cycle, meaning if the state legislature approves additional funds, Morse would have to compete with other projects statewide and wait until next year to proceed.

State broadband funding hasn't been made available in the past until late fall, meaning projects are faced with winter construction or waiting another year to be completed.

Treehouse Broadband has been providing high speed internet from a series of antennas mounted on the Ely water tower with connections to a fiber line.

Morse officials have been looking for ways to fill the gap and have been working with Sen. Tom Bakk and Rep. Rob Ecklund along with St. Louis County Commissioner Paul McDonald.

The hope is some federal broadband monies will come to the Range from a stimulus bill that could be made immediately available.

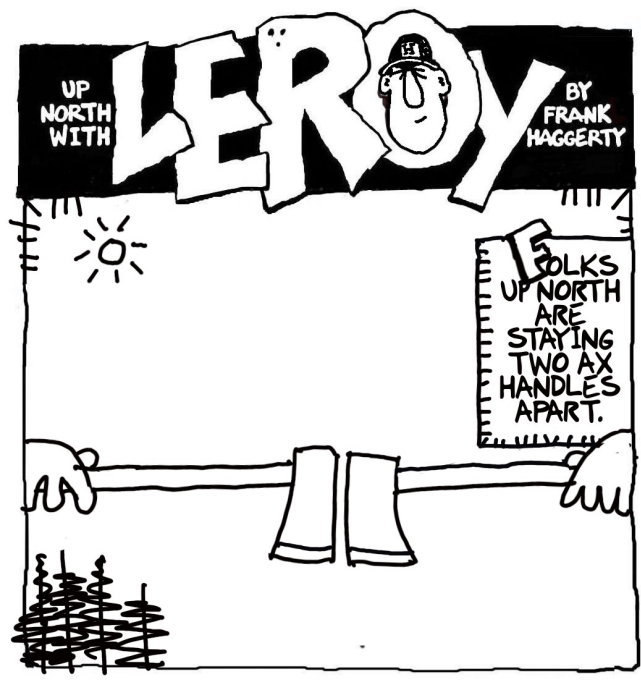
If not, the best Ely area residents could hope for would be service in late 2021.

We'd like to see another funding source for this project and finally get our school children and business owners to have what most others already enjoy: fast, reliable internet.

Let's hope there's a way to make this happen sooner rather than later. The need is there. Frontier is not going to upgrade its service and a previous project Morse did with Frontier was shot down by the state because of Frontier's customer service issues.

In today's coronavirus pandemic, the internet is no longer a luxury. It is a utility and a necessity for the world we live in.

Here's an inexpensive broadband project that will help hundreds of people. It just needs \$150,000.



Letters

... This "Howl from Home" experience

To the Editor:

I howled at the full moon tonight and was answered by about ten people in my neighborhood.

This "Howl from Home" experience was created by Adam Bisbee of the International Wolf Center. People went outside at 9:35 and howled, waiting to hear others respond.

What a thrill to hear lots of people on the east end of Ely also howling.

Howling was for me a release of anxiety, worry, and fear. I felt an immediate sense of relief. Knowing that my neighbors were in this together with me filled my heart. These kinds of community efforts are just what we need in this difficult time.

Carol Orban
Ely

...people step-up and show a can-do attitude

Editor:

In these most trying times for all of us, I have seen many people step-up and show a can-do attitude.

City of Ely staff have kept our community going despite the new challenges of each of their duties.

I am very proud of all of them, but today, I want to publicly acknowledge the way Casey Velchef has ensured the smoothest possible operation of the City's virtual meetings.

A month ago, I am not sure anyone would have even considered what we are doing today.

Seeing the way things had to change, Harold Langowski, Casey Velchef, Jim Robbins and Mauro Caruso got together and came up with a system to allow this.

All over our world, people adapt in ways we never fathomed they would need to. I salute all of you. Hang in there.

I look forward to the day we can say: "Wow, those were crazy times – I'm so proud of the way we worked together to get through it. What a great community we have!"

May God bless you all.
Al Forsman
Ely, MN

...if coronavirus is in this area yet or not

To the Editor

The other day when I was in the grocery store, I noticed that about a quarter to a third of the patrons wore masks. Why would they do that? Just because medical authorities from the CDC, National Institutes of Health, universities, and other institutions say it's a way to help control the COVID-19 pandemic, doesn't make it so. Even if it were so, masks are only a fourth line of defense anyway, and we don't even have the disease up here.

The fact is, we don't know if coronavirus is in this area yet or not. People can carry the virus for up to two weeks before showing symptoms, or carry the virus without ever showing symptoms at all. The fact is, a mask does protect the wearer to some degree, but it is more for the protection of others. Apparently, most people don't know they might be spreading the disease to those they come in contact with, or to those who handle items after the carrier coughs or sneezes on them.

One dufus I saw was coughing all over with no attempt to even stifle or cover it. He must be either ignorant or egocentric. Either he has no knowledge of how viruses that thrive in the respiratory system are spread, or he doesn't care about anyone but himself. Maybe it's both. Wearing masks and coughing into the crook of your elbow are more for those around you than yourself. We're better than the guy in the store. Let's all start showing some consideration for others. Any one of us might be carrying the virus right now, and a few who catch it from us will suffer dire consequences.

By the way, if masks are the fourth line of defense, what are the first three? We've heard them many times: wash your hands frequently, don't touch your face, and stay separated. Also, when wearing a mask, continue with the first three lines of defense, including social distancing, and keep from adjusting the mask frequently or you will partially defeat its purpose by touching your face.

Rich Floyd
Ely

...gratitude for the work the librarians did

Letter to the Editor:

In this trying time, we need to do everything we can to keep each other safe. We are all in the same boat.

Recently while I was in town, I noticed that I was the only person wearing a face covering - in the grocery store and the post office and on the street.

When I mentioned that fact to a friend, she said, "We are not that bad yet."

Well, no, we are not "that bad yet". But we don't want to be "that bad"!

The virus molecules can travel up to 6 feet from another person's breath. That's

...The BWCA is no different and our lives are no less important

Letter to the editor:

Can we believe the Friends of the Boundary Waters that we get 250,000 visitors per year coming here to enter the BWCA? They do tout this as the most visited wilderness park in the USA.

Of course, they don't all come through Ely, but a significant portion do, and all the other entry ports all along the BWCA border have similarly small towns that cater to these tourists.

We are about to be subjected to literally 1000's of tourists from God knows where from all across the USA and world.

Are they all going to self-quarantine themselves before entering town and where would this happen? Are every one of these people going to be COVID-19 free and have zero chance of bringing the virus to our towns?

I was alarmed to read that Steve Piragis was saying in the March 29 issue of the Star Tribune trying to figure out how to get around social distancing by suggesting that his employees would meet his clients at the entry point.

What control does Piragis have that all of his clients will be social distancing and not contaminate anyone else while here?

What proof will he provide that all of his clients are contamination free?

Commenting about his employees and 40 years in the business he stated, "We're trying to keep most of them on the payroll. But we have expenses including \$200,000 for new canoes."

Given all the horrific COVID-19 sickness and death going on right now, inviting tourists to come here is irresponsible and selfish.

While this will be unpopular for saying, but tourism is not an essential business and there is no acceptable reason to put so many people at risk.

We have been successful so far with social responsibility and distancing to prevent COVID-19 from taking root here and it is unacceptable to have 1000's of tourists come here and create a new hot spot.

Governor Walz said we have not seen the scourge of the virus in epidemic proportions yet in Minnesota, but he said it is still "entirely possible" and MN is using this valuable time to prepare. The MN Health department suggests the MN peak could be in June or July. Dr. Fauci said we cannot become complacent and we will not be safe until there is an effective vaccine.

The federal government already shut down Yellowstone and Grand Teton parks because communities rose up and complained they were unnecessarily being put in harm's way for the sake of tourists.

The BWCA is no different and our lives are no less important. The only responsible action for the Forest Service is to close down the BWCA for the remainder of the year and as long as necessary.

These are not normal times and playing Russian roulette with COVID-19 is an unacceptable risk for some tourist's wilderness experience. They can come back another year.

Infamous anti-mine leader Steve Piragis is noted in the latest Due North TV program which has become a new propaganda piece for

the Campaign to Save the BW, saying 'not this mine, not here'. He should be saying, 'no tourists now, not here, not now.'

Contact the Forest Service at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/about-agency/contact-us> to leave a comment. Write Forest Supervisor, Connie Cummins at: Forest Service, 8909 Grand Avenue Place, Duluth MN, 55808

Or call 218-626-4393 to leave a message with the Duluth forest service PR department, apparently they are not taking calls.

Contacting the local Forest Service district office will not be helpful as the district ranger Gus Smith is no longer here and they referred me to call Tim Engrave at the Lac LaCroix office at 218-666-0025.

There is no wilderness experience for these tourists or any fish in the lake that is worth taking risks to contaminate our town with COVID-19. It is inconsiderate to think their canoe trip is more important than our health and safety.

Respectfully,
Mike Banovetz
Ely, MN



From the miscellaneous drawer

by Anne Swenson

We're all adapting to new life conditions. And some of us are having internal discussions about death.

Although my mom lived to age 100 and my Dad died at 97, I don't find that comforting.

Their quality of life was gone Both finished out their lives at the Ely hospital's nursing home.

Two incidents with them are remembered.

Visiting my Dad and discussing a business problem, hoping for his long time business experience and advice, he told me that an answer was no longer possible for him.

He could no longer concentrate nor create answers. Soon after he

stopped eating and died.

Toward the end of my Mother's life, I visited her at lunch time. She was seated at a table with Catherine Merhar.

"Oh, look," she said to everyone, "Here comes my Mother."

That was surprising since her parents had died when she was five.

I have never seen Lora's photo to know if there is a likeness

Luckily I still can live at home. My son Nick and his family help out and my neighbor Nancy does household chores for which I am no longer able. Bless them all.

Last summer when my heart problems began, I had a glimpse of the

end. I was standing by the washing machine, when I felt my body collapsing into a white-lit fog and I fell to the floor.

If that was a preview of death, I wouldn't mind it.

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In the Ely Echo for April 14, 1980, the headlines were:

- Joe Seliga's canoes are collector's items;;
- USFS research biologists travels with the deer;
- Disposal of resort businesses presents problems to USFS;
- Oberstar seeks BWCA aid;
- State to complete Taconite Trail.

As I watched the virus spread its dark cloud on this earth, Anxiety and fear springing up, and tensions getting birth.

Don't go out, wash your hands, please provide me extra room, Shelter in place, watch the tube that's promoting gloom and doom. Let's be real I will admit it is a scary thought,

Today you're well, you're fed and warm, be grateful for these things. Yesterdays past can be forgot and who knows what tomorrow brings? To waste your joy on the unknown is not a pleasant task, So I will focus on today and in its sunshine bask.

Lawrence Aho