



# Outdoors

Our lives in the Northwoods

## HOME AND GARDEN

### Lawn and shrub damage likely caused by voles

A high rodent population meant this past winter was among the worst in recent years

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

REGIONAL — If you're like many homeowners in the North Country, you may still be dealing with the impacts from vole damage this winter. When the snow melted in April, many homeowners in the area were surprised to see a significant amount of damage to both

lawns, shrubs, and young trees. A high population of voles, particularly meadow voles, was responsible for much of the damage. Lawns were among the hardest hit as snow melted to reveal that voles had been busy feasting on grass under the snow, leaving trails of dead and heaped grass in their wake. According to the University

of Minnesota Extension Service, if you see raised, grass-lined tunnels and big bare patches left behind after the snowmelt, you're almost certainly looking at damage from voles.

While the grass will grow back in most cases, since voles typically don't eat below the soil level, where the growing crown of most grasses is located,

Right: Bare ground and heaps of dead and dry grass were common sights in the area as the snow melted earlier this spring— telltale signs of vole activity.

they can slow the springtime recovery of your lawn.

Shrubs and small trees

See **VOLES...**pg. 5B



## RECREATION

### Trail comes to life

Volunteers make headway on new Ancient Cedar Forest Trail

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

TOWER — A small contingent of volunteers have begun work on the toughest portion of a roughly mile-and-a-half-long loop trail through a primarily upland forest dominated by old white cedar. It's like a forest primeval, within the city limits of Tower, cut off over the years by a protective moat of wetlands that have made access to the site difficult.

But thanks to funding from the North St. Louis County Trails Task Force, itself funded by the Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation, and Lake Country Power's Operation Round-Up, volunteers are building a roughly 500-foot boardwalk that will traverse the moat and give easy access to the upland portions of what is being called the Ancient Cedar Forest Trail.

It's a project that's been in the "talking about" stage for several years, but the project is finally a go thanks to the grant funds and the volunteer effort. "It's pretty satisfying to see the work finally underway," said Jodi Summit, president of Friends of the Vermilion Country School, one of

Top: Jodi Summit wields a drill gun while Miranda Kishel looks on.

Right: Victoria and Todd Ranua saw boards while Summit readies the router.

Below right: The end of the trail so far, with dozens of cross ties spread along the trail ahead.

photos/M. Kishel

three partners on the project. "We're really thankful to our funders for helping to make it possible." The Wagoner Trails Club and the Tower Economic Development Authority are the other two partners in the effort. The construction of the boardwalk is the biggest expense for the project, given the cost of lumber and the large torx screws used to assemble it all. In addition to the boardwalk, the grant dollars will fund both directional and interpretive signage beginning along the Mesabi Trail, near the historic train depot.

Volunteers are building the boardwalk from rough-sawn tamarack, which is both very strong and rot resistant. The rough-sawn lumber, cut

See **TRAIL...**pg. 5B



## Wildflower Watch

This week's featured flower  
**EARLY CORALROOT**



The Early Coralroot, *Corallorhiza trifida*, is one of our smaller orchids and it is often distinguished from other orchids by the lack of any prominent leaves.

Its tiny flowers have the typical orchid-like features, albeit nowhere near as showy as many other members of the family. These flowers can be easy to overlook, given that the narrow stem and flowers may stand no more five or six inches high. They're usually found in small groupings on the forest floor, usually in deeply shaded, and often wet, locations.

Like other coralroots, the Early Coralroot lacks leaves because it doesn't need the chlorophyll that most plants require to produce their own food. Instead, this orchid feeds off of decaying vegetation, utilizing the abilities of various fungi in the soil.

## Wildfire danger continues in area

CROOKED LAKE — A June 2 wildfire in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area is the latest reminder that despite recent rains, the area remains drier than normal and that all it takes is a day or two of dry weather and wind to boost fire danger to dangerous levels.

As local residents, cabin owners, and visitors spend more time in the outdoors across the Superior National Forest, forest officials are asking the public to be extra vigilant.

The June 2 wildfire was reported late in the day near Thursday Bay on Crooked Lake, along the U.S.-Ontario border. Fire crews responded and quickly suppressed the fire, limiting it to about five acres in size. Fire officials determined that an escaped campfire, from a shore lunch at an unofficial camp site, was the cause of the fire.

Since April 23, Forest Service fire crews have responded to 18 fires across the Superior, although most remained under an acre in size. All of the wildfires on the Superior this season were human-caused ignitions.



BE ALERT

# Give turtles a break

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

REGIONAL — It's egg-laying season for turtles in the North Country and that means drivers can help out by watching for them as they cross area roadways in search of the exposed sand and gravel. Turtles are slow to reproduce and while a single female may lay a couple dozen eggs, very few of the eggs escape predators and those few that do face many other challenges along the way.



**A snapping turtle was busy laying eggs along the shore of the East Two River in Tower this week.** photo by J. Summit

Because turtles are reptiles, rather than amphibians, they must come on land to lay their eggs, and they are particularly vulnerable when they do. Because roadsides often contain the exposed sand or gravel that turtles prefer for laying their eggs, they're at high risk of being struck by vehicles this time of year. Turtles are especially active after rain, when the

sand and gravel is easiest to dig, so be especially careful when driving either during or after a substantial rain. Studies suggest that deaths from vehicles during this time of year are a primary factor in the decline of turtle populations in the U.S. and elsewhere, so you can help by doing your part to reduce the number of turtle deaths on North Country highways.

## VOLES...Continued from page 4B

also took a hit this winter, and they often won't come back, depending on the extent of the damage. When not eating grass, voles are frequently busy eating the inner bark of woody plants and as they do so they often remove enough of the tree or shrub's circulatory system to kill the plant. Ornamental shrubs and fruit trees seem to be among their favorites. Homeowners should protect young fruit trees, in particular, in the fall by wrapping them, which helps to discourage damage from voles.

You'll need to take steps in the fall in order to reduce vole damage in the future. Total vole elimination is impossible as they are typically present in naturally grassy areas, however a homeowner can discourage them from causing damage in their yards. Each fall the homeowner should remove any weeds, wild grasses, or plant litter around their yard to get rid of food sources and protection areas for the voles.

Voles are small, brown, mouse-sized rodents, but with smaller ears and short tails. Here in the North Country, they spend the winter under the snow, where they inflict their damage usually undetected until spring.

With a little work even the unwanted damage from voles in your yard can be repaired. For more information about voles, visit [www.extension.umn.edu](http://www.extension.umn.edu) and enter "voles" in the search bar.

## LAKE COUNTRY FORECAST from NOAA weather

Friday			Saturday			Sunday			Monday			Tuesday												
61 39			65 42			69 48			71 51			77 53												
Ely	Hi	Lo	Prec.	Sn.	Emb.	Hi	Lo	Prec.	Sn.	Cook	Hi	Lo	Prec.	Sn.	Orr	Hi	Lo	Prec.	Sn.	Tower	Hi	Lo	Prec.	Sn.
06/01	72	40	0.00		06/01	71	40	0.00		06/01	73	43	0.00		06/01	81	54	0.00		06/01	71	34	0.00	
06/02	74	53	0.51		06/02	74	54	1.00		06/02	79	54	0.14		06/02	81	55	0.13		06/02	75	50	0.42	
06/03	81	49	0.01		06/03	80	46	0.00		06/03	80	56	0.00		06/03	73	54	0.00		06/03	80	47	0.00	
06/04	74	46	0.05		06/04	73	45	0.03		06/04	73	53	0.05		06/04	79	52	0.17		06/04	73	45	0.03	
06/05	79	53	0.09		06/05	78	52	0.10		06/05	77	53	0.03		06/05	70	52	0.04		06/05	78	52	0.10	
06/06	71	41	0.00		06/06	71	36	0.00		06/06	70	44	0.00		06/06	66	44	0.00		06/06	70	43	0.00	
06/07	64	45	0.15		06/07	65	45	1.05		06/07	64	44	0.13		06/07	66	46	0.00		06/07	65	44	0.00	
Total			5.22		YTD Total			5.72		YTD Total			4.75		YTD Total			NA		YTD Total			3.84	

## CLIMATE

# Despite recent rains, area remains dry

by MARSHALL HELMBERGER  
Managing Editor

REGIONAL — Despite recent rains, waters levels across the region remain below normal for this time of year, and that's a reminder of how dry it was through the first five months of the year.

Most reporting stations in the area remain well below their average precipitation as of this week.

Through the first week of June, the Ely area should have experienced approximately 9.2 inches of total liquid precipitation. That includes rainfall and melted snow. But as of June 7, the Ely area had recorded just 5.22 inches of precipitation, or about 56 percent of its average, since the first of

the year. While significant rainfall this week helped the region make up some ground, it remains well below normal and that's reflected in low water levels in area lakes and streams.

Indeed, the Rainy River was running close to its Q90, which signifies that flows are at the bottom ten percent typically experienced in a river or stream. Flows in all of the streams in the Rainy River watershed were continuing to trend downward as of Monday's weekly report from the Department of Natural Resources.

The North Country can make quick headway against moisture deficits in June, which is typically the wettest month of the year. On average, the region should expect to see an inch of rainfall per week

during the month, yet even average rainfall in June won't help make up ground against the deficit built up since the first of the year.

That longer-term dry spell is one of the reasons that the U.S. Drought Monitor shifted much of western and northern St. Louis County, including the Orr, Cook, and Tower areas into the moderate drought category, the first time the region has been classified in a moderate drought in several years. Much of that area benefitted from rains this week, but it was unclear as of presstime whether this week's drought report will change the area's status.

The U.S. Drought Monitor report is issued each Thursday at 7 a.m. central time.

## TRAIL...Continued from page 4B



**Left: The new boardwalk makes its way through a wetland as the first leg of the new Ancient Cedar Forest Trail now under construction in Tower.**

photos by M. Kishel

custom for the project at East Dhu Sawmill in Iron, will also provide better footing when the wood is wet. Smooth, treated lumber is notorious for becoming slimy and slippery in wet conditions.

Once out of the wetlands, the cost of construction will be minimal, since it will mostly be limited to

clearing of deadfall along the route. The trail tread will be kept natural, in keeping with the wilderness-like character of the trail route, although a small amount of aggregate may be added in rough or rocky portions of the trail to improve footing.

The volunteers hope to have the boardwalk completed by the end of July. Signage will be added after that and should be up before fall. The trailhead will be located 300 feet south of the Mesabi Trail, just off the Iron Ore snowmobile trail.

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**CLEAN**

- ✓ Boats, PWCs, trailers, and gear
- ✓ Remove all weeds, mud, and hitchhiking contaminants from axles, wheels, undercarriage, motor, prop, skis, wakeboards, ropes, and life jackets before leaving

**DRAIN**

- ✓ Water from boat, bilge, motor, ballast tanks, and bladders. PWCs - run motor for 10 seconds to blow water out of jet drive
- ✓ Remove drain plug and open all water draining devices
- ✓ Trash unused bait

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