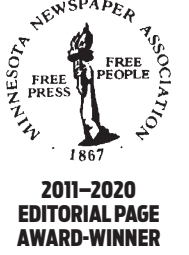


# OPINION



PILOT EDITORIAL

## Loon Lake silt issue should trouble us all

The fact Loon Lake is filling with silt shouldn't just bother those who own lakeshore property. It should bother us all. After all, it's our lake; we own it. As owners, we can fish it, we can swim in it, we can camp alongside it. As owners, we benefit from fees paid to the county by others who camp alongside it. As owners, we pay the state to take care of it. It's our lake, and it's being ruined. As pointed out on the front page of this week's Pilot, exactly who is responsible for the problems facing Loon Lake and who is responsible for fixing them have yet to be sorted out. What doesn't need to be sorted out is who is responsible for ensuring that somehow in some way the problem gets fixed. As owners, that responsibility is ours. This may require calls and letters and emails to county and state officials. This may require attendance at public hearings and other meetings. This may require an expression of interest in something that, while it may not affect our daily lives, is still worthy of our attention. After all, it is our lake.

## Proposed gas tax hike is the wrong way to go

The most recent COVID-19 stimulus bill and incoming infrastructure package have included billions of dollars for the state government and local governments. That spending, of course, will eventually have a cost for all of us, but it remains strange the Minnesota House of Representatives is proposing a slight increase to gas taxes as a whole. With at least \$2.6 billion in federal funds coming to the state from the stimulus package alone, I don't think now is an especially sensible time to be raising gas taxes. Taxing transit in the Twin Cities area is a similarly bad idea. To be blunt, taxes on transportation are inherently regressive, especially in rural areas. Middle- and

lower-income people, on average, use older cars that are less fuel efficient than newer models. It's also essentially a tax on Greater Minnesota, since people here have to drive farther to access certain necessities, visit family or work. There's another problem too. A tax on transit is, by definition, a tax on all statewide commerce. All commercial activity requires the transportation of persons and goods from place to place. Everything from international shipping to your average commute exemplifies this fact. Now is a particularly bad time to be taxing commerce. The prices of lumber, steel, tin, food and gas have been increasing in recent months, thanks in part to the shocks dealt to the international economy

by the pandemic, labor shortages in shipping hubs and trade disputes between countries. It's simply not a good time to consider a tax hike. If we were in the middle of an economic boom with reasonable prices for commodity goods, that discussion might be worthwhile. As it stands, a tax increase on gas, even one as modest as what the House is proposing, would serve to worsen an already difficult situation with respect to gas prices. At a minimum, we ought to wait for the federal funds to be doled out and spent before we look at increasing taxes on our side of the equation. I'm not opposed to raising revenue to invest in infrastructure, but if federal money is already coming to cover

this — with possible tax increases to boot — we should wait and see before passing any tax increases of our own. Right now, we're in the middle of a very fragile economic recovery, characterized by COVID-19 outbreaks, intermittent supply shortages and price spikes due to those outbreaks. The last thing we need is to slow the recovery by increasing the cost of living and doing business in our state.



**JUST JOSHIN'**  
Joshua Schuetz

## Follow basic trail etiquette

In a report from April 2020, the Parks and Trails Council of Minnesota stated more than 300 million Americans, representing 95 percent of the population, were under stay-at-home orders. In 2020, governors across the country mandated restrictions and closures, and everything from entertainment venues to schools were closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The great outdoors were, for the most part, left alone, leaving parks and trails open. Americans have taken to trails and parks in the past year. In Greater Minnesota, there has been an increase in folks bicycling and walking. When Minnesota's stay-at-home order went into effect in March 2020, trail use increased 73 percent; weeks after the stay-at-home order went into effect, trail use continued to increase, ranging from 93 percent to 146 percent, depending on the week. The Friends of the Jackson County Trails, Jackson County Parks

and Trails and Des Moines Valley Health and Human Services Public Health teamed up to conduct their own trail counts that began in April 2020 and ended in November 2020. How did we collect data? We used manual counting — using tallies over a two-hour period for three days in a row — and infrared counting — namely, a stationary device that collects data as an individual goes across an invisible beam. Manual counting took place in a variety of locations over the spring and summer of 2020; we manually counted a total of 933 walkers and 204 bicyclists. Infrared counting was isolated to two locations, with the first being at the Loon Lake Trail and second at Sunset Loop Trail. Infrared counts had a cumulative total of 1,972 over a period of less than a month. We plan to complete these counts again throughout 2021. We realize folks use our trails, but the data from 2020 reveal trail use was six times higher in 2020

than compared to past years. The Friends of the Jackson County Trails would like to remind folks as spring reappears about basic trail etiquette. It is great to see so many using the trail for recreational purposes, healthy goals or just as an opportunity to be outside. Be aware of the winter debris on the trails. Basic trail etiquette: 1. Travel in the right-hand lane. Walk on the left side of the trail; bicycle on the right side of the trail. Be courteous if using the trail as a group. Move to the right to accommodate trail users meeting you or coming up behind you. 2. Pass on left. Be aware of your surroundings prior to passing. 3. Announce your passing to other path users. There might be "walker or rider on your left." 4. Bikers and walkers move off the path when stopping. Fixing your bike, adjusting your footwear or visiting should be done off the

trail. 5. Travel at speeds that are safe and appropriate. 6. Be courteous to other path users. 7. Keep pets under control, on a leash and clean up after them. Your pet may be friendly to you, but not a stranger. Carry a disposal bag for pet droppings and dispose of properly. 8. Do not litter. You can report litter/debris concerns to the city of Jackson as part of the Adopt-A-Trail Program. 9. Respect private property. 10. Do not disturb vegetation or wildlife. We have a wonderful trail system in Jackson and Jackson County. These trails are for your use. Please help us in keeping our trails usable for all. (About the author: Luke Ewald is secretary of the Friends of the Jackson County Trails Committee.)

**GUEST COLUMNIST**  
Luke Ewald

**LAST WEEK'S ONLINE POLL**  
Q: How closely are you following the Derek Chauvin trial in Minneapolis?

Very (11%)	██████
Somewhat (37%)	██████████
Not at all (44%)	██████████████
What trial? (8%)	██████

Source: Jackson County Pilot Website

**THIS WEEK'S ONLINE POLL**  
Q: How likely are you to attend a Minnesota Twins game at Target Field this year?

Vote online at [jacksoncountypilot.com](http://jacksoncountypilot.com).

<b>James Eigenberg</b> james.eigenberg@co.jackson.mn.us	<b>Phil Nasby</b> phil.nasby@co.jackson.mn.us
<b>Cathy Hohenstein</b> cathy.hohenstein@co.jackson.mn.us	<b>Scott McClure</b> scott.mcclure@co.jackson.mn.us
<b>Don Wachal</b> don.wachal@co.jackson.mn.us	

**CONTACT YOUR COMMISSIONERS**

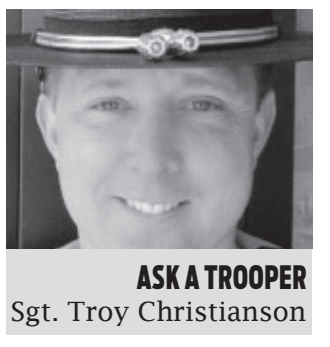
## What you can do about speeders

**Question:** I'm concerned about the high speeds of drivers I'm seeing these days, both in my city and on the interstate. What can I do about it?  
**Answer:** The Minnesota State Patrol is extremely concerned about the high rates of speed troopers are seeing throughout our state. In fact, as of Feb. 25, troopers have cited 132 drivers for speeds of 100 mph or more this year. That compares with 68 during the same time period last year. With the alarming number of speed-related traffic incidents we're seeing, the Minnesota State Patrol is teaming up with law enforcement across the state with an educational and enforcement campaign

aimed at motorists who are driving dangerous speeds. It's part of a campaign the Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Traffic Safety is coordinating in collaboration with the Minnesota Departments of Health and Transportation. In addition to enforcement, education and awareness influence positive behaviors as well. We're getting the message out through social media, media relations and advertising across Minnesota. Preliminary reports show 120 motorists died in speed-related crashes in 2020, the most since 2008. The 395 traffic fatalities in 2020 are the most in five years, with speed contributing to 30

percent of all fatalities last year. Twenty people have already lost their lives this year in speed-related crashes in 2021 compared with 10 this time last year. Troopers don't want to meet you on the side of the road for dangerous driving behavior, or worse, respond to a crash with fatalities or serious injuries that involve you or your loved ones. If you speed, expect to be stopped. If you are concerned about a person speeding or driving aggressively, find a safe place to call 911 and provide as much information about the vehicle as possible. By driving smart and slowing down, we can all save lives on Minnesota roads and help everyone

arrive home safely at the end of the day. If you have any questions concerning traffic-related laws or issues in Minnesota, send your questions to Sgt. Troy Christianson, Minnesota State Patrol, at 2900 48th St. NW; Rochester, MN 55901-5848. Or reach him at [Troy.Christianson@state.mn.us](mailto:Troy.Christianson@state.mn.us).



**ASK A TROOPER**  
Sgt. Troy Christianson

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Justin R. Lessman	<a href="mailto:justin@livewireprinting.com">justin@livewireprinting.com</a>	Publisher									
Dan Condon	<a href="mailto:danc@livewireprinting.com">danc@livewireprinting.com</a>	Sports Editor									
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