

Exam stations

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Harrington said he has also heard for individuals on this issue. The department has heard from farmers trying to figure out CDL tests for truck drivers to allow them to get their crops in. It has heard from school districts asking about school bus drivers' tests to allow them to get their students to school. The department has also heard from parents inquiring about finding a driver's test for their children, expressing their desire to not have to travel a long distance for this.

"They're (parents) sometimes frustrated by how many availabilities we have open and I want you to know we understand their frustration," Harrington said, "and that DVS has been responding by staying open later, staying open on weekends. We freed up space at 100 spots for our testing capacity. And so we are doing everything we can to try and meet as many of the public's needs that we're aware of."

Throughout Minnesota, it has hub locations that serve satellite locations. Thief River Falls and Bemidji serve as the northwest area's (Area 10's) two regional hubs. The satellite locations of Roseau and Hallock are served by the Thief River Falls regional hub.

According to a presentation given by Xiong at the hearing, on May 19, 2020, 15 exam stations—all regional hubs—reopened; this included Bemidji, but not Thief River Falls. From November 2020 through March 2021, 10 more exam stations—all regional hubs—reopened, but this still did not include Thief River Falls.

Harrington expressed how the department is committed to getting 100 percent of these exam stations open "as soon as possible." He expects many of these exam stations to be open by the fall and all of them by January.

Currently, the department has 26 exam stations open. It anticipates having 32 open by the end of

November, 41 by the end of December, and all by the end of January 2021, according to Xiong.

Staffing represents a factor behind this slow reopening, as confirmed by Senator Johnson and Commissioner Harrington. In a conference call with DPS midsummer, Senator Johnson said he received word that the department was having difficulty hiring up.

"Now that, that could be legitimate," Senator Johnson said. "We know that there's a labor shortage."

But, he added how he is hearing of people who work for DPS, such as at the Thief River Falls location, getting shipped all over, including to Detroit Lakes and Bemidji to assist them, versus opening up their own facilities.

"Once the facilities open up again, I haven't heard any status or any indication," Senator Johnson said, "that they're using the people that they already have on payroll to open up the places that were previously open."

Senator Johnson referred to this hearing as an opportunity to ask questions related to this issue, such as what DPS is doing with the staff that were hired and why they can't have these staff members return to their home stations.

Harrington addressed the staffing shortage at the hearing.

"We like every other employer in the state and in the country," Harrington said, "are struggling to get enough staff to meet the needs that we have."

Xiong passed along a message related to staffing during the hearing. He asked for support in helping identify and encourage Minnesotans to apply for DVS positions.

"They are challenging positions, but this is really a noble service. And I think that they will, Minnesotans, will find a lot of gratitude in working for the state and doing good work for Minnesotans,"

Xiong said. "... We welcome you to invite others to apply for jobs that we have posted, and that will really aid in getting us to be able to open exam stations sooner."

Of the issues he hears from his constituents in District One, only mask mandates and school issues are more common than testing sites.

"It's mostly the extreme inconvenience that we have in northwest Minnesota. Senate District One doesn't have one facility in its jurisdiction for these testing sites," Senator Johnson said. "So whether it's the CDL driver that we talked about earlier or you know mom or dad taking their new 16-year-old driver to take their driver's test, it's at least a day's worth of effort to go and do this... Why can't we have our sites open again like we're used to?"

Asked why this was an issue important to him, Senator Johnson pointed out how his district is a larger geographical district in the state, so for his district to not have one testing facility open he said is a "major" issue.

"That's a bare bones, basic government service that we should be able to provide in this state. I know there are a lot of demands across the state for services from our state government," Senator Johnson said. "But when you think about the bread and butter of what state services should be, this is definitely one of those services, so to not have one is really a dereliction of our state's duty."

He said the state has to get to the basics of how to serve its constituents.

"This is one simple way that... we need to fix, we need to remedy," Senator Johnson said, "in order to make sure that we're functioning as a government should."

To view this committee hearing, visit the following link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Trpn52icqPU&t=13s.

Minnesota DNR announces \$13.3 million funding proposal to address 2021 drought impacts on natural resources

Minnesota DNR

Funding would support water conservation in communities, address high tree seedling mortality, and promote shade tree resiliency.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources today announced \$13.3 million in funding proposals in response to the significant effects of this summer's drought on two of the state's critical natural resources: water and trees.

The DNR proposes \$3 million in funding for municipal, tribal, and other community water suppliers to implement proactive water conservation measures related to the built infrastructure, including finding and repairing leaks in pipes, meters, hydrants, and treatment plants, and installing water-efficient equipment.

These proven strategies can help individual cities across the state to conserve millions of gallons of water a year. The proposal also includes \$300,000 for an individual and small community well interference fund.

Additionally, the drought has stressed well-established shade trees in communities and caused an extremely high mortality rate for tree seedlings planted in 2021. The DNR proposes \$5.5 million in funding to replant public and private

forest lands where seedlings were irrevocably damaged by the drought and \$4.5 million in community shade tree grants. Combined, this funding will be essential to support tree health, carbon storage, habitat, water quality and other benefits of forests and shade trees.

"This year's drought was challenging on many natural resources fronts. While the DNR took necessary steps to mitigate the drought's impacts, in accordance with the Statewide Drought Plan, more needs to be done," said DNR Commissioner Sarah Strommen. "This proposal includes high-impact resiliency measures in order to conserve water and preserve our precious tree cover. This funding proposal will help protect the resources we all value and depend on for our quality of life in Minnesota."

The entire state entered the drought warning phase in mid-July of 2021. With this designation, the Minnesota DNR took a number of measures laid out in the Statewide Drought Plan, including convening the State Drought Task Force, a panel of state, federal, regional and local experts with water-related responsibilities.

VOTE INFORMED. #GMRVOTE2021

OUR STUDENTS, OUR COMMUNITIES, AND OUR BUSINESS OWNERS ARE COUNTING ON YOU.

Voting information

- ▶ **Early Voting:** Voting in person or by mail has already begun. You can vote in person at Greenbush Middle River district office located at 401 Park Ave West, Greenbush during regular business hours (8 a.m. - 4 p.m.).
- ▶ **Election Day:** Vote yes on Nov. 2. Polls are open from 7 a.m. - 8 p.m.
- ▶ **Polling location for Roseau and Kittson counties:** Greenbush Community Center, 244 Main Street N, Greenbush, MN 56726.
- ▶ **Polling location for Marshall County:** Middle River Community Center, 250 Hill Ave, Middle River, MN 56737.

For more information, visit
www.middleriver.k12.mn.us.

Vote YES on Nov. 2

▶ If this passes, will my farmland be taxed?

NO. You are only taxed on your house, garage and one acre of land for an operating levy. Seasonal recreation property (IE: hunting cabins) are also excluded from referendum taxes.

▶ Why can't the school make some cuts?

In the past 5 years, 28 staff positions have been eliminated from GMR school. This has affected many options for our students, and increased workloads for current staff. \$450,000 in budget reductions are scheduled for implementation in 2021-22 alone.

▶ What happens if the school closes?

Our district will be absorbed into neighboring districts and GMR taxpayers will pay higher taxes already established in those districts.

▶ How do I know how much I will pay?

Use the tax calculator located at <https://www.ehlers-inc.com/microsite/gmr2021/>

▶ Aren't our school taxes already high?

NO. We pay less than area schools. On a \$100,000 home est. market value, GMR: \$229, MCC: \$416, Badger: \$724, Tri-County: \$737, Goodridge: \$1003, Lancaster: \$1174. If GMR is forced to consolidate or dissolve, you will pay these already higher taxes in neighboring school districts. **Because of this, a NO vote does NOT mean lower taxes. If this fails, you WILL pay higher taxes elsewhere.**

VOTE YES NOVEMBER 2ND

PAID FOR BY SUPPORTERS OF THE GMR SCHOOL DISTRICT.

www.middleriver.k12.mn.us

