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DNR proposes cutting statewide walleye limit from six to four



"Minnesota River walleye, another catch and release" courtesy of Jaclyn Rose Andrade.

Minnesota anglers may soon be heading home with fewer walleyes in the live-well.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is proposing to reduce the statewide inland water walleye possession limit from six fish to four, a change officials say is aimed at protecting the state's most iconic game fish for generations to come. The regulation, unchanged since 1956, would take effect March 1, 2027, if approved.

Under the proposal, the long-standing rule allowing anglers to keep only one walleye over 20 inches would remain in place. DNR fisheries managers

say the proposal reflects how much has changed — both above and below the water's surface — over the last seven decades.

"The goal is to be proactive," the DNR said in outlining the proposal. "We want to ensure future generations can continue to enjoy the excellent walleye fishing Minnesota is known for."

Since the current limit was set nearly 70 years ago, Minnesota's lakes have faced a host of new pressures. Climate conditions have shifted, invasive species have spread, and advances in fish-finding technology have made anglers more efficient than ever. Together, those factors have

prompted fisheries managers to take a fresh look at regulations that date back to the Eisenhower era.

The proposal would apply statewide to inland waters, though special regulations on certain lakes would still take precedence.

Public input is now part of the process. The DNR is accepting comments on the proposed rule change until 4:30 p.m. Thursday, March 5.

Anglers and other members

of the public can weigh in by:

- Email: fisheries.rulemaking.comments.dnr@state.mn.us (include "walleye limit" in the subject line or message)

- Phone: 651-259-5235

- Mail: Fisheries Rules and Regulations Coordinator, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155

More details on the proposal, including prior public

feedback and the biological factors behind the recommendation, are available on the DNR's website at www.dnr.state.mn.us/fisheries/management/walleye-limit.html.

For many Minnesotans, walleye fishing is more than a pastime — it's tradition. The DNR's proposal now sets the stage for a statewide conversation about how best to protect that tradition in a changing world.

Fish free statewide with kids

of year.

The annual weekend is designed to make it easier for adults to share the fun of ice fishing with kids, whether it's their first time watching a bobber dip below the ice or their tenth winter chasing panfish and walleyes.

From metro lakes to remote backcountry waters, Minnesota offers thousands of frozen options this time of year. The DNR encourages families to keep safety in mind by checking ice conditions, wearing appropriate gear and making sure young anglers stay warm.

For many families, the weekend is about more than

catching fish. It's about drilling holes together, telling stories in the ice house, sipping hot chocolate and creating memories that can last long after the ice melts.

More information, including tips for fishing with kids and ice safety guidance, is available through the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Take a Kid Ice Fishing resources on the DNR website.

If you've ever thought about taking a child ice fishing, this weekend might be the perfect excuse to give it a try — no license required, just time together on the ice.



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Mille Lacs Energy Trust Board grants

Members of the Mille Lacs Community Trust Board recently awarded \$15,400 in Operation Round Up grants to local nonprofit organizations, bringing total grants distributed since the program's start to more than \$1.6 million. Pictured above are Kim Waffensmith, Aggie Stroot, Mary Aulie, Kimberly Clement, Tim LaForce, Evie Ladd, Jeremy Janski, Rich Aulie and Bob Nelson.

Winter fun and romance at Ruttger's

If winter needs a signature event, Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort may have found it on the ice.

Blending the strategy of bocce with the sliding finesse of curling you will fall in love with Rockin' Ice Bocce. The co-ed elimination tournament is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 14, for a full day of outdoor fun on Bay Lake, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., with games beginning promptly at 9 a.m.

Teams of four — with no more than two males per team — will compete for

bragging rights and prizes, but organizers say the event is just as much about atmosphere as it is about competition. Expect ice games, bonfires, music, food and drinks, and plenty of laughter throughout the day.

"It's not all about winning," organizers note. "It's about getting outside, having fun and enjoying winter together."

Team registration costs \$100, with prizes awarded to first-, second- and third-place finishers — plus a crowd favorite prize for the

most uniquely dressed team. Registration closes Monday, Feb. 9, and space is limited. Spectators are welcome to attend for free and join in the festivities.

The event takes place at Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort, 25039 Tame Fish Lake Road in Deerwood. Teams can sign up online through Ruttger's events page.

Valentine's Day finale

After a day on the ice, couples or friends can trade snow boots for candlelight at Ruttger's Sweetheart Supper, also on Saturday, Feb. 14, from 5 to 8 p.m. at Ruby's on the Lake.

The \$185 dinner for two includes a complimentary glass of champagne for each guest and a multi-course gourmet menu featuring dishes such as grilled lamb and shrimp with blueberry habanero reduction, winter berry and burrata salad, short rib French onion soup, and a choice of firecracker shrimp, coffee-chili rubbed ribeye, or a shared surf 'n' turf with lobster tails. Dessert is a pistachio honey baklava cake served with vanilla bean ice cream.

Reservations are recommended and can be made by calling 218-678-4644.

Whether you're sliding stones across the ice or savoring dessert by the lake, you will fall in love with Ruttger's with a weekend that promises to be "cool" and cozy.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

January

17th - Northern Lights Needle Felting at Ruttger's Bay Lake Resort, 11a.m. - 1 p.m. Join artist Lisa Ackerman of Lil Fish Studios for a creative exploration of needle-felting. This class is perfect for beginners and equally enjoyable for those with prior felting experience. For more information call 800-450-4545

19th - Prayer Quilting Group, 8 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. Full size quilts are made for individuals with medical issues. If you like to cut out fabric squares, match colors, pin quilts, hand tie, or sew on a machine while praying for the recipient your help is greatly needed. You can also support this great group with financial donations to cover postage and supplies. Located on the third floor Conference Room at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.

19th - Cribbage players wanted, 1 -2:30 p.m. at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.

21st - Hot Dish Cook Off at Trinity Lutheran Church at 1420 S 6th St in Brainerd, starting at 4:45 p.m.

21st - Cascade United Methodist Church Come and Eat free monthly supper at 5:30 p.m. To reserve your spot call 218-534-3507. Cascade Church is located between Deerwood and Crosby at 22781

Black Lake Road, Deerwood on Highway 6 and 210.

22nd - The Crow Wing County Chapter of Minnesotans Citizens Concerned for Life (MCCL) Annual March for Life (the anniversary of the 1973 Roe versus Wade decision.) Gather at the corner of South Sixth and Oak Streets before 11:30 a.m. For more info, contact Lisa at 320-293-9694.

22nd - Prayer Quilting Group, 8 a.m.- 3:30 p.m. Full size quilts are made for individuals with medical issues. If you like to cut out fabric squares, match colors, pin quilts, hand tie, or sew on a machine while praying for the recipient your help is greatly needed. You can also support this great group with financial donations to cover postage and supplies. Located on the third floor Conference Room at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.

26th - Cribbage players wanted, 1 -2:30 p.m. at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.

31st - Justin Morneau Ice Fishing Classic 8 a.m. - 1 p.m. Nitti's Hunters Point Resort on Mille Lacs Lake

31st - Brainerd Jaycees Ice Fishing Extravaganza at Hole in the Day Bay on Gull Lake. The largest charitable ice fishing contest on the planet and a winter tradition like no other. Over \$4.5 million donated to charity. A \$3 million annual economic impact on the Brainerd Lakes Area. Thousands of anglers.

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February

2nd - Cribbage players wanted, 1 -2:30 p.m. at The Brainerd Center, 803 Kingwood St., Brainerd.

Send your community events information to hopper@crosbyironton.net or send us a message via www.NewsHopper.net/contact/

Area Births, Open Houses, Engagements, Weddings & Community Events are published **FREE!**

OBITUARIES

LAWRENCE FULTON

Lawrence "Larry" Martin Fulton, 53, of McGregor, passed away unexpectedly on Wednesday, December 31, 2025 at his home.

A celebration of life will be held at a later date.

He was born March 25, 1972 in Aitkin to Lawrence "Pudge" and Joyce (Sanda) Fulton. Larry enjoyed drag racing, hunting, ice fishing and especially spending

time with his son, Tyler.

Larry is survived by his son, Tyler; mother, Joyce Fulton; sisters, Lynette Fulton and Lori (Randy) Akins; nephew, David (Nikki) Weiner; grand nieces, Harlow and Josie; other relatives and friends.

Larry is preceded in death by his son, Isaac and father, Lawrence.

Arrangements are with the Sorenson-Root-Thompson Funeral Home in Aitkin. To sign the online guest register please go to www.srtfuneral.com.

BERNDT GUSTAFSON

Berndt Huntley Gustafson, 75, of Brimson died Friday, December 12, 2025 of B-Cell Lymphoma. He died at home without pain surrounded by his family.

A springtime memorial service will be held Saturday, May 16, 2026 at 11 a.m. at the Bassett Community Church, 1561 Town Line Rd., Brimson, MN, with burial of ashes following at the Basset Lake Cemetery. In lieu of

black, the family requests those attending wear their best jeans and logger flannel or northwoods plaid.

He was born October 12, 1950, in Duluth, Minnesota, the son of Gustav and June (Johnson) Gustafson. He grew up in French River and attended Clover Valley schools. He joined the US Army directly out of high school and became a Medic and Jump Master, serving in the 82nd Airborne Division. He attended the College of St. Scholastica for sev-

eral years on the GI Bill and later married Debbie

Susan Male on June 29, 1974. Over the next three years they lived in Moose Lake, MN and Denver, CO before settling in Emily, MN where he raised his family until they moved to Trommald in 1996. He was a trained welder and gunsmith, a logger for the majority of his years, and also small scale farmed. He later worked for Brown & Wilbert and for Lakes Gas. He was a loving husband to Debbie and a wonderful father and grandfather. Berndt loved the woods, hunting, fishing, and spending time at the family cabin at Bassett Lake near Fairbanks, MN. His gentle, patient, and wise presence was a gift to all around him.

He is survived by his two sons: Bjorn Gustafson (Philip Faggiano) of Eagan, MN; Leif Gustafson (Melissa Gustafson) of Trommald, MN; brother, Ted Gustafson of Brimson, MN; sister, Erose "Pixie" Wright of Knife River, MN; grandchildren: William Gustafson, Sven Gustafson, Emma Gustafson, and his great-grandchild, Matthew Starks.

He was preceded in death by his wife Debbie, brother Richard Gustafson, sister Linda Kiefer, and his parents and grandparents.

Arrangements are with the Sorenson-Root-Thompson Funeral Home in Aitkin. To sign the online guest register please go to www.srtfuneral.com.

LEGAL NOTICES

(Published in NewsHopper Saturday, Jan. 10, 17, & 24, 2026)

LIBBY TOWNSHIP BOARD MEETING

The Libby Township Board will meet at 1:00 p.m. on Tuesday, January 27, 2026 at the Palisade Community Center. Township supervisor Tom Anderson may attend remotely via phone or Zoom. The purpose of this meeting shall be to discuss and decide matters that may come before the board.

Dated this 30th day of December, 2025
Jane Grimsbo Jewett, clerk
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Multi-million remodel for Aitkin County Health and Human Services building



Construction is busy at the southeast corner of the courthouse block in Aitkin.

Ann Schwartz photo

By ANN SCHWARTZ
If you're heading to Aitkin County Health and Human Services and find yourself pulling into the VFW parking lot instead, you're in the right place.

Health and Human Services has been temporarily relocated to the Aitkin VFW, 36558 410th Ave., Aitkin, while its longtime facility undergoes a

major \$4.6 million remodel. The temporary move is expected to last until early spring or summer of 2026, with county officials pledging to notify the public once services return to the original building.

Despite the change in scenery, county officials emphasize that services remain fully available.

At the temporary VFW loca-

tion, just north of Aitkin and cross the bridge and right, residents can make payments, drop off paperwork, initiate services, and speak directly with a financial worker.

A secure drop box is also available at the VFW site and can be accessed 24 hours a day, seven days a week, offering flexibility for paperwork drop-offs outside normal business hours.

Office hours remain Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

For specific services, residents are encouraged to call ahead. For WIC applications and 218-927-7201 and any other public health matters: call 218-927-7200.

Importantly, the mailing address, phone numbers, and fax numbers have not changed, even during the temporary relocation. Mail should still be sent to 204

First Street NW, Aitkin, MN 56431. The main phone line remains 218-927-7200, with fax services continuing with 218-927-7210 for the main fax, 218-927-7461 for child support and accounting, and 218-927-7262 for public health.

Major investment

The temporary move makes way for a significant renovation project at the Human Services annex, located on the southeast corner of the courthouse block. While the annex

received an extensive upgrade in the 1990s, county officials say the current remodel will modernize the facility for decades to come.

The \$4.64 million project, funded through a combination of state bonding dollars and local fund balance, includes \$1,979,707 for general construction; \$165,000 for elevator installation; \$524,320 for electrical, safety and security upgrades; \$1,139,544 for HVAC improvements; and \$633,195 for architectural,

engineering and administrative costs.

Several major bids for the project were awarded during the June 2025 county board meeting, marking a key step forward in the long-planned renovation.

For now, county staff have settled into their temporary home at the former VFW site, while construction crews get to work on building a more accessible, efficient future for Aitkin County Health and Human Services.

Enjoy first Free Park Day of 2026

Pierce, director of the DNR Parks and Trails Division. "Having a free day in each season encourages people to explore parks at times of year they may not normally visit. From snow-covered trails to crisp winter landscapes, state parks shine in winter."

That day marks the first Free Park Day of 2026, when the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources will waive vehicle permit fees at all 73 state parks and recreation areas statewide. The fee-free day invites visitors to explore Minnesota's parks in the heart of winter — no permit required.

Free Park Day is one of four scheduled throughout the year, with one offered in each season. The remaining 2026 dates are Saturday, April 25; Saturday, June 13; and Friday, Nov. 27, giving Minnesotans a chance to experience parks year-round.

"Minnesota state parks and recreation areas are open year-round, and winter offers a quiet, peaceful time to experience them," said Ann

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Winter fun doesn't have to depend on snow, however. Popular snow-free activities include birding, wildlife watching, hiking, photography, or simply warming up by a campfire with hot chocolate

and s'mores. When ice conditions are safe, ice fishing is also a favorite pastime in state parks and recreation areas.

The DNR encourages visitors to come prepared by dressing for the weather and packing water and snacks. Those new to winter recreation can find helpful tips on how to dress for Minnesota winters, along with ice safety guidance, on the DNR's website.

Before heading out, visitors should check park websites for updates in the visitor alert section. Free downloadable maps are available online and can be used with the Avenza maps app, which works even without cell service. Paper maps are also available at ranger stations.

While vehicle permit fees are waived on Free Park Days, other costs — such as camping, lodging or equipment rentals still apply.

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