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INSIDE

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WEDNESDAY, MAY 18, 2022

High winds create dangerous fire conditions

By STEPHANIE DYE
LIFESTYLE EDITOR

Significantly high winds created dangerous conditions and multiple damaging fires across the North Woods on May 9.

Several trees and power lines were downed by the storms and grass fires ensued due to the current dry climate conditions. The high velocity of the winds allowed for the sparks and flames to spread quickly into surrounding areas.

Between the times of 12:30 and 5:31 p.m., Vilas County emergency dispatch handled over 350 phone calls reporting incidents related to the winds. After each of these calls, they are required to dispatch emergency services accordingly,

contact outside authorities such as power companies, if needed, and process multiple calls regarding the same incident.

"For every call dispatched, there are up to 15 telephone calls per incident," said Chief Deputy Patrick Schmidt of the Vilas County Sheriff's Department. "That's just answering phone calls, not dispatching emergency services or any of the other functions dispatch performs."

"To say they were slammed is an understatement. They did a phenomenal job handling it the way they did, and the reason our communication division is so successful," Schmidt added.

In all, authorities answered calls for 11 downed power lines where fire departments were needed, 10 grass fires and 18 trees down that were blocking roads within a five-

hour timeframe on May 9.

In many of the fires that developed initially, crews were able to prevent flames from reaching nearby structures. According to authorities, multiple fire crews worked quickly and efficiently to stop the fires before flames spread to surrounding homes.

Responding fire departments included Eagle River, Land O' Lakes, Watersmeet, Mich., Boulder Junction, Arbor Vitae, Plum Lake, Manitowish Waters and Presque Isle, amongst others. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) had crews from the Trout Lake, Woodruff, Rhineland, Tomahawk, and Merrill ranger stations that also aided on the scenes.

The Vilas County Sher-

To DANGER, Pg. 2A



Various divisions of emergency service departments banded together to fight multiple fires scattered throughout the North Woods area on May 9. —Photo By Bob Hughes



SPRINGTIME — Migrating trumpeter swans and a reflection of new, light green leaves from the lakeshore all point to springtime in

the North Woods. These two swans were feeding in a shallow bay on the Three Lakes Chain. —Staff Photo By KURT KRUEGER

Two Presque Isle fire, power line victims identified

By SARA CARIAS
ASST. EDITOR

Two bodies were discovered in Presque Isle last week after emergency responders extinguished a fire.

Vilas County Sheriff's Department released the names of the two people found deceased — Linda Rottman, 63 and Matthew Rottman, 23 — both from Presque Isle and the Chicago, Ill. area.

The bodies were discovered after Presque Isle Fire Department and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Fire Services put out the flames, and found the bodies in the immediate location of where downed power lines were in the area of the fire.

The sheriff's office released a statement which

said on May 10 at 12:43 p.m., its office received a wireless call of a fire off of Baer Road, and the sheriff's office was requested to respond to the fire scene by Presque Isle Fire Department after discovering the two victims.

Vilas County Sheriff's Department Chief Deputy Patrick Schmidt said both deaths were the result of the downed power lines, and that the power lines were on the ground due to a pine tree that fell on them during the May 9 storms.

The fire was determined to be caused by the downed power lines, and the incident was determined not suspicious in nature and was ruled an accident, he added.

Proposed projects face opposition on Rustic Road 60

By SARA CARIAS
ASST. EDITOR

Concerned area residents and the Vilas County Highway Committee converged at the courthouse May 17 to speak on issues of brushing maintenance and proposed construction the county's only Rustic Road.

Rustic Road 60, a 12-mile stretch of Highway K between Star Lake and Boulder Junction, is the only Rustic Road in Vilas County.

The Rustic Roads program was created over 40 years ago to provide hikers, bicyclists and motorists an opportunity to leisurely travel through the state's scenic countryside, according to the Wisconsin Department of Transporta-

tion (DOT) website.

"The Rustic Roads program is the longest continually running program by DOT and is unique in the nation," said Wisconsin Rustic Roads Board Vice Chairman Dan Fedderly.

According to DOT's website, all Rustic Roads have outstanding natural features along its borders such as rugged terrain, native vegetation, native wildlife or include open areas with agricultural vistas. They are lightly-traveled local access roads and are not scheduled nor anticipated for major improvements which

To RUSTIC, Pg. 8A

ATV/UTV trails open in Vilas, Oneida

By MICHELLE DREW
NEWS EDITOR

ATV and UTV trails across Vilas and Oneida counties, including all state-funded trails, "troutes" and routes are now open as of May 13.

According to Todd Bierman, Vilas County Parks and Recreation supervisor, the Landover ATV/UTV Club, St. Germain ATV/UTV Club and Lakeland ATV Club — sponsors and operators of the existing trails — put in many volunteer hours of brushing, signing and trail work to safely open the trails.

Club maps are available at many area businesses and riders can check out the Vilas County MapIt app at vilaswi.com/trails.

Bierman asked the public to be aware that the new Highline Trail on the St. Germain Trail System is not open at this time. Riders should

To TRAILS, Pg. 7A



Trail systems opened last week after work was completed to safely open ATV and UTV trails. The machines are allowed both on wooded trails as well as on area roads. —STAFF PHOTO