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THE NORTHWOODS RIVER NEWS

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Zoning committee pulls motion to deny Bangstad CUP permit ARP revocation appealed to BOA

By Richard Moore
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

After seemingly poised a week earlier to deny the conditional use permit application for the Minocqua Brewing Company to have an outdoor beer garden with insufficient parking, the Oneida County zoning committee last week withdrew the motion to deny and granted owner Kirk Bangstad more time.

The committee reconvened its public hearing with the motion to deny on the table after abruptly adjourning the hearing a week earlier. In the intervening week, Bangstad's attorney, Fred Melms, met with Oneida County corporation counsel Mike Fugle and county zoning director Karl Jennrich, and the committee also discussed the conditional use permit (CUP) application in a closed session prior to resuming the hearing.

See **Bangstad...**
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Stella property owners file PFAS lawsuit against Rhinelander paper mill, 3M

By Heather Schaefer
OF THE RIVER NEWS

A group of property owners in the Town of Stella have filed a federal lawsuit against Ahlstrom Rhinelander LLC and 3M Company of St. Paul, Minn. related to alleged drinking

water contamination and are asking a judge to certify the matter as a class action.

The suit, filed Aug. 9 in the United States District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin, alleges that the application of waste from the Rhinelander

paper mill — owned and operated by Ahlstrom Munksjö — onto farmland in Oneida County caused extensive contamination of private well water.

“Over the course of decades, Defendant Ahlstrom and its predecessors disposed of millions of

pounds of waste from the Rhinelander Paper Mill by dumping and spreading the waste on farmland throughout Oneida County, and specifically in the Town of Stella,” the 35-page complaint reads.

See **Lawsuit...** page 12



HEATHER SCHAEFER/RIVER NEWS

GETTIN' DOWN ON BROWN

Rhinelander High School alumni spanning multiple generations converged on Brown Street Saturday, Aug. 12, 2023 for the annual “Hodags Take Downtown” all-class reunion. Kelly green was a popular fashion choice and live music kept everyone moving. **PICTURED:** Hodag alums dance to party rock courtesy of Six Pack Sammy.

Lake Tomahawk board to allow lake district to adopt, enforce ordinances

By Trevor Greene
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

By way of resolution, the Lake Tomahawk town board has authorized the Horsehead Lake Protection and Rehabilitation District to enact and enforce its own ordinances.

The action took place during the Aug. 9 town board meeting.

To open the discussion, town chairman George DeMet explained that town supervisor Lenore Lopez had asked for the item to be on the agenda “because she is our person on the Horsehead Lake district.”

He said the lake district is

looking to enact ordinances and regulations “concerning wake boats and jet skis and other such assumed nuisances.”

“The town, because this lake lies within the boundaries of the town, (has) the ability to enact ordinances, and because the district is totally within the town, we can make this resolution to give them the authority to write their own ordinances,” DeMet said. “Which I think is the way to go because they know what they want and we don’t.”

There was no discussion after DeMet’s comments. He

then made a motion to pass the resolution, which passed unanimously with a 3-0 vote.

The resolution included a reference to Wis. Stat. § 30.77. That statute states that a “public inland lake protection and rehabilitation district” can “enact and enforce ordinances applicable to a lake entirely within its boundaries” if a town having full jurisdiction over that lake adopts a resolution “authorizing the lake district to do so.”

Wake boats as a future agenda item

When asked about future agenda items, Lopez said she

would like the board to consider an ordinance with regard to “protecting lakes within Lake Tomahawk’s jurisdiction that are less than 20 feet deep from the wake boats.”

She said she thinks it’s important for the board to “move quickly with something like this” to protect smaller lakes vulnerable to damage from wake boats.

Though she said more research needs to be done, she indicated that what she’s learned so far is cause for concern.

See **Lake Tom...** page 10

PFAS

From page 1

The state officials announced that the number of households in Stella that have received health advisory letters due to dangerously elevated levels of PFAS in their drinking water has risen to 47. DNR officials shared the same information with members of the press Tuesday morning in an online media briefing.

As of late January, the number sat at 24. In late April, after the DNR tested additional wells, it ballooned to 39.

The PFAS readings from Stella, located just 11 miles east of Rhinelander, are some of the highest in the state. According to the Department of Health Services (DHS), PFAS levels higher than 20 PPT (parts per trillion) are considered harmful to human health.

One reading from Stella was 36,000 parts per trillion, according to the DNR.

PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) are a group of human-made chemicals used for decades in numerous products, including non-stick cookware, fast food wrappers, stain-resistant sprays and certain types of firefighting foam. These contaminants have made their way into the environment through accidental spills of PFAS-containing materials, discharges of PFAS-containing wastewater to treatment plants and certain types of firefighting foams, according to the DNR.

PFAS do not break down in the environment and have been discovered at concentrations of concern in groundwater, surface water and drinking water. These chemicals are known to accumulate in the human body, posing several risks to human health, including certain cancers, liver damage and decreased fertility.

The contamination in

Stella was first discovered late last year as part of a testing project conducted by the DNR. The initial testing was focused on households located within a one-mile radius of the town hall. In April, the DNR announced additional testing of an expanded area — wells located within 2.5 miles of the town hall.

According to the DNR officials, 28 of the wells found to have dangerously elevated PFAS levels are located within the 1-mile testing radius and 21 are located within 2.5 mile radius.

During the informational meeting, residents asked if further testing is planned.

The DNR is still formulating next steps but additional testing will be “more targeted” than the first two rounds, the officials responded.

Testing of surface water and fish in local lakes and rivers is already underway, the officials added.

In a press release issued after the media briefing, the agency announced that water from 22 sites in lakes and rivers near the Town of Stella was collected in June and July.

Some of the sites sampled include the Moen chain of lakes, the north branch of the Pelican River and the Wisconsin River near Rhinelander. Fish were also collected from Fifth Lake and are currently at the lab for analysis, the release said.

Results from these different sampling efforts will be shared as they become available and will inform additional sampling efforts, according to the DNR.

Meanwhile, the officials recommended people not swallow or ingest lake or river water. Residents have also been advised not to use well water in gardening activities.

During the question-and-answer portion of the meeting, residents asked if the produce grown in local

fields has been tested. Stella is home to a number of potato farms and, as one resident noted, potatoes are known to have a high water concentration.

The officials said they were not aware of any such studies at this point.

A similar answer was offered when residents asked if any health studies were underway.

James Yach, secretary’s director for the Northern Region, told the crowd the source of the contamination has not been determined at this point.

“There has been no source identified at this point but we’re continuing to work on investigating that,” Yach said. “We’ll continue down that path and try to get to a conclusion as to what the potential source is and hopefully be able to cut that off in the future.”

Several questions were asked regarding the land-spreading activities of the Ahlstrom-Munksjo paper mill in Rhinelander. Last week, a group of Stella property owners filed a federal lawsuit against Ahlstrom and the 3M corporation in connection with the PFAS contamination.

The suit, filed in the United States District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin, alleges that the application of waste from Ahlstrom’s Rhinelander mill onto farmland in Oneida County caused extensive contamination of private well water.

“Over the course of decades, Defendant Ahlstrom and its predecessors disposed of millions of pounds of waste from the Rhinelander Paper Mill by dumping and spreading the waste on farmland throughout Oneida County, and specifically in the Town of Stella,” the 35-page complaint reads. “Upon information and belief, this waste contained high levels of PFOA, PFOS, and other PFAS. It was this ‘land appli-

cation’ of waste that caused Plaintiffs’ wells to be among the most contaminated in the country for PFAS. In addition to Defendant Ahlstrom — which owns and operates the Rhinelander Paper Mill — plaintiffs also bring this action against Defendant 3M, which sold and supplied PFAS chemicals to the Ahlstrom facility.”

According to the complaint, the plaintiffs are seeking “to recover compensatory and all other damages, including but not limited to the costs of restoring and remediating contamination from their real properties and drinking water wells, costs of treating water, costs of acquiring bottled water, non-economic damages, loss of earnings and future earnings, damages for loss of use and enjoyment, lost property value, and household expenses, among others.”

Michelle BalkLudwig, DNR wastewater field supervisor for the Northern Region, advised that some land-spreading activities are continuing, under the purview of the DNR.

There are six sites where spreading is still taking place, she said.

She stressed that the DNR has obtained a sample of the biosolid/sewage sludge Ahlstrom is currently spreading and are testing to it “make sure that it’s not a contamination risk.” She noted that the company submitted the sample voluntarily and results of the testing are expected within the next few days.

It should be noted that Addie Teeters, head of marketing communications & public affairs for Ahlstrom Munksjo, previously told the River News that the company has received permits from the DNR for its “land-spreading activities.”

“Since Ahlstrom acquired the Rhinelander mill in 2018, it has continued participating in a regulated biosolids landspreading program ad-

ministered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources,” Teeters told the River News in January, after the DNR confirmed that Ahlstrom (or previous owners of the mill) had spread paper mill sludge on 63 different sites in the Town of Stella between 1996 and 2021. “As part of that program, we have received and operate pursuant to permits issued by the Department. We maintain records which are provided to the Department relating to our ongoing landspreading activities.”

“Ahlstrom has led the marketplace in developing PFAS-free technology for more than a decade and utilizes our FluoroFree® technology at the Rhinelander mill,” she added.

The City of Rhinelander also spread sewage sludge/biosolids from its wastewater treatment facility on farmland in Stella between 1997 and 2011, according to DNR records.

The city is not a defendant in the lawsuit.

In response to the lawsuit, Teeters issued a statement indicating the company’s review of the complaint is ongoing but the litigation “appears to focus on activities that are alleged to have occurred prior to Ahlstrom’s acquisition of the Mill in 2018.”

The plaintiffs are seeking to have the case certified as a class action. The complaint notes there are over 100 “putative Class Members.”

A putative class action is a lawsuit filed by one or more named plaintiffs on behalf of multiple people sharing a similar claim. Lawsuits are not class actions until a court certifies them as such.

For more information and resources regarding the PFAS contamination in Stella, visit <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/PFAS/Stella.html>.

Heather Schaefer may be reached at heather@rivernews.com.

Digest

From page 4

“This legislation will ensure that future administrations do not abuse national security authorities to impose tariffs without clear objectives and without Congressional approval,” Beyer said. “Tariffs are a powerful tool to combat unfair trade practices, but they impose significant costs on American consumers, and Congress must have the ability to weigh in on any future 232 trade actions.”

Under this bill, members of Congress have a 60-day period following submission to review the president’s proposal. A joint resolution to approve the proposal would qualify for expedited consideration in both chambers. The requirement would apply to all future Section 232 actions, in addition to those taken within the last six years.

The bill would restore the national security intent behind Section 232 by transferring national security investigatory authority from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Defense.

In 2022, the National Taxpayer Union (NTU) named the bill one of 10 “No Brainer” bills for Congress to pass, which meant it had bipartisan support and provided a common-sense solution to a real problem facing taxpayers.

Johnson reveals defense agency, Georgia Tech may have targeted RNC, DNC

This week, U.S. Sens. Ron Johnson (R-Wisconsin), the ranking member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), the ranking member of the Committee on the Budget, wrote to Dr. Stephanie Tompkins, director of the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), regarding a recently uncovered email that exposed a project targeting Republican National Committee (RNC) and Democratic National Committee (DNC) networks.

The senators uncovered a Sept. 25, 2020, email between a Georgia Institute of Technology researcher and DARPA employees suggesting a plan to target the DNC and RNC networks. A DARPA employee referred to the project as “sensitive stuff . . . worth doing.”

Further, the email appears to suggest that the examination was to be conducted without the prior knowledge of the RNC or DNC, the senators wrote.

“This email exchange raises questions about the work of the [Enhanced Attribution] program and government employees responsible for it,” the senators wrote in their letter to DARPA director Tompkins. The letter follows the senators’

April 28, 2022 letter to DARPA about its reported collaboration with Georgia Tech related to the 2016 DNC server hack attribution.

DARPA has failed to fully respond to this inquiry, the senators wrote.

On May 12, 2023, special counsel John Durham referred two DARPA-related matters to the Defense Department Inspector General and the Defense Intelligence Agency for further review — one involving a Georgia Tech contract and one involving “irregular conduct in 2016 of two former employees of the Department of Defense.”

ACLU opposes what it calls non-inclusive sports bills

The ACLU of Wisconsin has criticized a pair of bills introduced by the Wisconsin Legislature that would exclude transgender students in elementary, high schools, and public colleges and universities from participating in sports teams consistent with their identified gender.

“Transgender students participate in sports to challenge themselves and be part of a team — the same as their peers,” Dr. Melinda Brennan, executive director of the ACLU of Wisconsin, said. “The opportunity to participate in sports results in positive outcomes for students, including better grades, greater homework completion rates, higher educational and occupational aspirations, and improved self-esteem.”

Lawmakers should tackle the real issues with gender parity in sports, including unequal funding, resources, pay equity, and more, Brennan said.

“Promoting baseless fears about trans athletes does nothing to address those fundamental problems,” she said. “Excluding trans students from participating in sports teams consistent with their authentic gender identity is unfair and discriminatory. School sports should be inclusive for all students.”

Gov. Tony Evers has vowed to veto any bills passed by the legislature this session that target transgender Wisconsinites.

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