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Christine Mallory, Editor

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Lake County Highway Department Presents Gravel Roads 101

By Kitty Mayo

In an effort to bring more information about what it takes to make and maintain a gravel road to the public, Lake County Highway Engineer Krysten Foster showcased a whiteboard presentation detailing gravel road basics at the most recent Lake County board meeting on May 28th.

"We want to get those most frequently asked questions addressed for the public is wondering why certain roads are in a poor condition," said Foster.

Joined by Neil Udenberg, Maintenance Superintendent, and John Schlangen, Engineering Supervisor, the art and science of gravel roads were revealed.

Udenberg explained that bumpy gravel roads are often outside of the means for the department to control.

A proper crown (four percent is optimal) on a road aids in a more drivable road, however, gravel is constantly moving around and leaving the roadway, making an ideal crown difficult to keep in place.

"Rain and weather is beyond our control, and the number of cars on a road," said Udenberg, "Filled potholes are not packed down until they are driven on, and if it's too dry when we are grading it doesn't cut as deep and it doesn't pack as tight."

"Why aren't you grading my road?" ranks as the #1 most asked question that the highway department fields, says Foster. While that answer is complicated by a host of variables, it really appears to boil down to one thing: appropriate conditions for effective grading are presented in a very narrow window.

"It's surprising how limited the ideal time is to do grading, but when the conditions are right we do ask people to work late to take advantage of when the conditions are right," said Udenberg.

The sheer number of miles of gravel road in Lake County, and the relatively low numbers of staff trained and available to work the grader further complicate matters. Averaging just four to six miles an hour in a grader to get the job done right, Udenberg says that graders are the most complex piece of machinery to learn in the garage.

The application of calcium chloride has become an issue of contention for some of the residents on Cramer Road who attended the board meeting.

Calcium chloride is used in the maintenance of gravel roads through regular application each year, with one of its positive effects of retaining moisture. Keeping dust down and aiding in a binding effect, calcium chloride plays a role in keeping a gravel road in good shape.

Very fine dirt (or "fines") is the substance that holds the various sizes of rock, gravel and sand together. That is, when the fines have a binding agent, and that agent

is calcium chloride at a cost of about \$120,000 annually.

Describing the fines as having the consistency of talcum powder, Schlangen explained that this is the dust that windy days and passing cars put into the air, something that calcium chloride helps control. While fines are messy, Schlangen also explained the necessity of having them in place in the right mixture rather than larger gravel containing rocks that crack windshields.

Residents were present at the Lake County board meeting and voiced their concerns about the application of calcium chloride. One concern is that the road becomes "slimy", and that slime attaches itself to vehicles. When dry, the slime adheres itself in a very special way, making tires go out of balance, and creating a major de-sliming job at the car wash. One resident was there in support of the use of calcium chloride for its ability to keep dust down as a safety concern.

While keeping down dust for safety, and keeping the fines on the road to keep the right mix in place were acknowledged as important, questions were raised about whether the highway department could either apply less calcium chloride, or reduce the amount of fines used on that road.

Schlangen stated that the they are following MnDOT specs for the amount of fines, and changing that is not an option. However, Udenberg stated that they would be willing to try to make some changes.

Meanwhile, Commissioner Pete Walsh says that the phone calls he has received on the topic have been split 50:50, with half his constituents weighing in on the topic saying that the road is too dusty, and the other half saying it is too slimy.

Ultimately, Foster said they would move ahead with using a lower concentration of calcium chloride on most of Cramer road this year, and would apply a heavier amount near the Trestle Inn as an experiment.

"We do have a plan at the highway department, just know when the roads are in tough condition we are out there working to make them better," stated Foster.

Since unknown variables like high bid prices for crushing contracts, and wash-outs that would demand immediate attention can throw a kink in gravel road improvement schedules, Udenberg says that the department has come up with a priority list instead of a specific year schedule.

Drummond Grade, Highway 3, some sections of Cramer Road are on that priority list for regrading and reconstruction to improve slopes and ditches. Regrading and digging ditches are high priorities for the highway department this year, with the management of rainwater runoff a critical part of a good gravel road.

Pedal for Good Continues for a Second Year

By Kitty Mayo



A human-powered scavenger hunt with all proceeds going to the Two Harbors Area Food Shelf will be held June 9th in Two Harbors. Human-powered means that participants will search for clues while walking, biking, or skateboarding (or any other non-motorized form of transportation) along the Two Harbors bike path and walking trail. Motorized vehicles are not allowed.

Brooke Torgerson, a 5th grader at Minnehaha Elementary, is the human power behind the event, which is in its second year.

When asked how she came up with the idea to spearhead a fundraiser for the food shelf, Brooke said it came out of her realization of how many groceries her family relies on.

"We buy a lot of food, and I thought 'There's some people without a lot of food'. And, I like to ride bike and I talked to my dad and we came up with the idea together," said Brooke.

Last year's Pedal for Good event went really well, according to Brooke, with 234 pounds of food and about \$400 dollars in donations from around 20 participants. Along with the lessons learned about the challenges of organizing a community event, Brooke says she hopes more people and more donations will be part of this year's success.

"We've already raised more money from our partners and sponsors and volunteers".

When asked what lessons she has learned about community organizing Brooke had this to say: "You should always get your cause and your basic idea right away, and then people will start flowing in through the years that you keep doing it."

A course a map and clues will be provided at the start of the event, and teams can have up to four people, but any teams with members under the age of 16 must be accompanied by an adult. Photographic proof of items found are required at completion to be eligible for prizes, and all riding participants must wear a helmet and sign a waiver.

The event will begin and finish at SpokeNGear bike shop, 1130 11th Avenue, Two Harbors, from 12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, June 9th with an entry fee of at least one non-perishable food item. Monetary donations are appreciated, as well.