



News and Highlights

Chris Muller
Emergency Management Director

Destructive Derecho

June 21, 2025

Derecho: a widespread, long-lived, and damaging wind storm associated with a band of rapidly moving thunderstorms, characterized by intense, straight-line winds that cause extensive damage.

During the early morning hours of June 21, 2025, Beltrami County was struck by a derecho that caused catastrophic tree and property damage across northern Minnesota. Despite advance warnings, the magnitude of the disaster was hard to fathom. When the winds and rain subsided, 911 emergency calls started ringing. It would take several days for many roads to be made passable and gas leaks capped as numerous uprooted trees pulled lines out of the ground. Some customers were without power for nearly a week. When the sun rose, the community came together and a symphony of chainsaws were heard for weeks.

In the days leading up to the derecho, Emergency Management had been closely monitoring the forecast. It is unusual for the Storm Prediction Center (SPC) to issue an enhanced risk, level three on a five-point scale, several days in advance, and such forecasts occur only a few times each year in Minnesota. The night before the storm, the SPC went further, issuing a rare moderate risk for the region, level four out of five. In response, Emergency Management used social media to urge residents to prepare for potentially destructive winds.

Late on Friday evening, the National Weather Service issued a severe thunderstorm watch that included Beltrami County. Shortly after midnight Saturday morning, this was upgraded to a severe thunderstorm warning and eventually a tornado warning. Wireless Emergency Alerts, NOAA radios, Emergency Alert System, CodeRED, and sirens were all activated to warn residents to seek shelter. The Beltrami County Emergency Communications Center was immediately overwhelmed with 911 calls reporting downed trees, power lines on fire, gas leaks and structure damage from south of Solway, through Bemidji, and towards Pennington.

It was quickly evident that the Bemidji area had taken a direct hit from catastrophic winds. The City of Bemidji and Beltrami

County called in additional staff and crews. The Emergency Operations Center (EOC) was activated and planning efforts commenced with life safety as the priority. More than 30,000 customers were without power in the region, though the full scale of the destruction remained unknown until daylight.

After witnessing the widespread damage and seeing displaced residents seeking refuge at the fire station, Bemidji Fire Chief Justin Sherwood requested assistance from the American Red Cross. They arrived on the scene just as Public Health Director Amy Bowles finished clearing trees from her own driveway and joined efforts to open a shelter. As noted in last quarter’s newsletter, Emergency Management and Public Health had conducted shelter training in April, which greatly improved the County’s preparedness. By 7 a.m., the shelter was operational, housing more than 100 people for two nights.

Emergency Management began immediately messaging and requesting assistance from the State. The EOC held twice-daily briefings to assess conditions and prioritize immediate needs. Solid Waste recognized the demand for expanded operations and extended hours to handle the debris. That afternoon, County Board Chair Craig Gaasvig declared a State of Emergency, followed shortly by the City of Bemidji. County, city, and township crews then worked long hours clearing roads and restoring parks and trails.

Damage assessments revealed that roughly half the structures in the area had some level of roof damage. Several homes were destroyed, along with numerous garages and outbuildings, while many businesses suffered extensive damage. Volunteer organizations helped clear debris, and the Salvation Army provided hundreds of meals to both responders and residents who had lost their food.

Though many initially believed the storm was a tornado, the damage swath stretched nearly 10 miles wide across the entire southern edge of the county. The National

Weather Service described the storm as feeling like a hurricane, estimating peak winds at 120 mph, with an observed gust of 106 mph at the Bemidji Regional Airport which is comparable to a Category 3 hurricane. While embedded tornadoes within the storm line were possible, the widespread straight-line damage, with trees all blown in the same direction, caused the most prominent damage.

More than two months after the devastating storm, many residents are still repairing their homes and significant tree debris remains to be cleared. Thousands of loads have already been processed through Solid Waste and the Demolition Landfill, with the City of Bemidji and several temporary collection sites helping manage the immense volume. In total, an estimated nine million trees were downed or damaged. Beltrami County alone reported about \$8.3 million in uninsured property damage to public infrastructure and debris removal. Although Minnesota fell just \$800,000 short of qualifying for federal assistance, the state program will reimburse 75% of eligible costs.

Beltrami County extends heartfelt thanks to all agencies and organizations that supported our disaster response. While the full list is too extensive to publish, we want to highlight the American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Team Rubicon, numerous faith-based relief groups, United Way of Bemidji, and Community Resource Connections. Your generous efforts and contributions made a tremendous difference. We also thank our residents for their patience as recovery efforts unfolded and for the countless ways you supported your neighbors in need.

Additional articles in this edition of the County Newsletter provide more detail on specific aspects of the disaster response.



Chris Muller
Emergency Management Director

State Disaster Declaration

Despite catastrophic damage across Beltrami County, six other counties and a tribal nation, Minnesota’s damage total fell short of the \$10.7 million threshold to be eligible to apply for federal assistance. Immediately following the destructive derecho on June 21, 2025 that produced winds estimated to have reached 120 miles per hour in the Bemidji area, Beltrami County Emergency Management began tracking damages and the cost to clear debris.

When the Minnesota Homeland Security and Emergency Management Public Assistance team conducted their Preliminary Damage Assessment (PDA), just under \$8.3 million dollars in damage was documented for Beltrami County. This includes uninsured damages to public infrastructure, staff time, equipment use, and other eligible activities. With the other jurisdictions added, Minnesota’s total was approximately \$800,000 short of the state threshold.

Minnesota has a program known as the Disaster Assistance Contingency Account (DACA) that can assist communities recovery following significant natural disasters that don’t meet the threshold for federal assistance. A jurisdiction needs to exceed 50% of their federal indicator, which is \$109,000 for Beltrami County. DACA was created following a similar situation back in 2012 when Beltrami County experienced a destructive severe weather event, but Minnesota fell short then as well. DACA provides 75% reimbursement and follows Federal Emergency Management Agency guidance. Governor Tim Walz approved Beltrami County’s request to access the fund on August 12, 2025.

Unfortunately, DACA does not provide assistance to private property owners or individual assistance. The United Way of Bemidji, Community Resource Connections, City of Bemidji, and others have been collaborating to meet the needs of residents. This has varied from debris removal, home repair, resource referral, and recovery.



Emergency Mgmt Director, Chris Muller, Gov. Tim Walz, Homeland Security EM Director, Allison Farole & Regional Program Coordinator, Jennifer Olson, view the storm damage

Lori Clark
Recreation Resource Coordinator

Storm Damage in the Parks

In the wake of the storm on June 21, some of the county parks have experienced significant tree damage, but fortunately, no major structural damage has been reported. The storm brought strong winds, leading to numerous trees being uprooted or broken. Movil Maze Recreation Area, Mississippi High Banks campsite, Rognlien Park, and Wilton Hills Recreation Area have been the most affected within the park system.

Cleanup efforts started immediately, with the majority of the fallen trees already removed from the main trails. Here are the updates on specific parks affected:

- **Movil Maze Recreation Area** was temporarily closed just after the storm to keep visitors safe and allow volunteers and staff to clear the trails. All trails are now open.
- **Mississippi High Banks** remains inaccessible due to the number of trees down not only at camp but also on the road leading to the site. The campsite is closed for the remainder of 2025 and will be evaluated once the road has been cleared. The 2026 season is uncertain at this time.
- **Rognlien Park** was in a hard-hit area. The park is small, so having more than 20 trees down was significant. The road into the park was devastated, and power was out for over a week.

- **Wilton Hills Recreation Area** had wind damage adjacent to the entrance road and in and around Wilton Hill. Blowdown will be surveyed by foresters to see if salvage sales are appropriate.

Many thanks to all the staff and volunteers who have helped clean up the parks and get them open to the public. Be aware that trees are still down or damaged and can pose a risk to recreational users. Please recreate with caution.



Rognlien Park was hit hard!

Text-to-911

Call When You Can,
Text When You Can’t

During the afternoon of June 22, just after the destructive derecho hit the southern edge of Beltrami County, the northwest corner received severe weather as well. The National Weather Service issued tornado warnings for the area north of Fourtown. Shortly after the storms rolled through, the Beltrami County Emergency Communications Center received a Text-to-911 from someone that was trapped due to trees being downed.

There are miles of gravel roads, heavy forests and areas where there is literally no cellular service up there. As the tornado crossed the roadway, it downed trees and trapped a vehicle and its occupants. They did not have enough service to make a phone call but were able to get a text message to go through. Dispatchers were able to dispatch deputies to the scene.

There were too many trees down and too much damage for the deputy to clear the road with a chainsaw. The deputy assisted the passengers from the vehicle and back to their squad car and gave them a ride to safety. The National Weather Service did confirm that two EF1 tornadoes touched down in Beltrami County. So don’t forget, even though dispatchers would rather have a voice call from you, “Call when you can, text when you can’t”.

Shane Foley
Natural Resource Management Director

Tree Damage
County Wide

I'd like to start my article by thanking the people who manage the severe weather alerts on our phones. It woke up my family and also alerted the staff at the camp where my son was staying, no doubt protecting many people in our community.

Lives are by far more valuable than timber, so I am thankful no lives were lost, but the financial effects of the storm are going to leave a lasting mark on many families in our community and the county itself is sharing in some of that pain.

The Beltrami County Natural Resource Management Department manages about 150,000 acres of forest land for timber revenue and recreational uses. Several thousand acres of our pine and aspen forests blew down in the southernmost two townships, across the width of the entire county. Pine and aspen are the two most valuable forest products produced on our lands.

Blowdown areas are more challenging and time consuming to harvest and as a result, the wood has to be sold at reduced prices at our timber auctions. Some of the wood is not able to be salvaged at all, further compounding the financial strain and the requirements in place to maintain our forest certification. Our department operates under a forest management plan which specifies the number of acres that can be harvested each year for each of the different species we manage. Since the blowdown accelerated our harvest of pine and aspen this



year, we will have to slightly reduce our acres to be harvested over the next few years to “catch up”. In addition, our planting costs will increase dramatically over the next few years to replace the pine forests we lost.

Like everyone affected by the storm, our lives got a bit more complicated, but it is only for a time, and with a little persistence we will come out stronger on the other end. The last thing I would like to leave you with is that there are many dangerous trees out on the landscape, so please be observant and safe as you use public land for hunting and recreating this fall and I hope you have a successful season.

Brian Olson
Solid Waste Division Director

Solid Waste
Storm Clean-up

The Solid Waste Division has been working countless hours since June 21st. These are unprecedented times not only for our community, but also for our workers. During the storm the Bemidji Transfer Station also experienced significant damage, yet we still provided service without power. I would like to thank all the employees in this division for the countless hours they have put in over the past two months, and the weeks and months ahead.

We have and are still experiencing a large amount of storm debris, as well as demolition debris, furniture, grills, and large loads of household items. As you can see from the number of paying customers at both the Bemidji Transfer Station and Demolition Landfill, our volumes have increased. This does not include the regular customers that use

our services that are included in the annual solid waste assessment.

Our landscape will be changed forever and between the City of Bemidji and Beltrami County, we have seen a lifetime amount of tree debris in the past month and half, and it is still coming in. The Demolition Landfill took in 3800 loads of trees in June, and 4640 in the month of July, and currently averaging 175 loads a day.

The Target/Old Fair Grounds site took in a total of 5300 loads from June 27 to July 20. We had to process all the wood debris that came to this site which ended up being 120 semi loads of wood chips/mulch. We did open that site up to the public to get the finished product for a few weeks but closed it on August 8th, and are currently only sending an operator over when we have a semi-trailer to load.

A special thanks to our partner counties for allowing us to rent their grinders from them, and to the MPCA for providing staff to help run both the Target site and the Demolition Landfill. Without their support we would not have been able to do what we did.

I also want to thank the contractors that we hired, who stopped what they were doing to help out in a natural disaster. Without their support we also would not have been able to complete the task at hand.

The future of the wood chips/mulch piles: Residents can still get wood chips/mulch for free at the Demolition Landfill. We just can't afford to have an operator on site to load a couple of trailers at the Target site. We currently believe we have an outlet for the material at the Target site that will not cost the county any money to haul it so we are going with that option because we are trying to do the most cost effective approach when dealing with the disposal of all the tree debris. The cheapest is burning it, which is why we are piling it up at the landfill. Because we did not meet the FEMA disaster threshold, we will still have to cover 25% of the recovery cost; and grinding and hauling tree debris is expensive.

A big THANK YOU to the County Board of Commissioners for approving two temporary two-year staff positions to help during the recovery efforts at Solid Waste facilities.



Tickets Generated	Jul-24	Jul-25	Increase
Bemidji Transfer Station	1677	2111	26%
Demolition Landfill	325	1107	240%

Ehren Inkel
Director of Operations

On the Radar
Bemidji Regional Airport

Airport Storm Damage
As many experienced significant storm damage on June 21st, the airport is no exception. There were a total of six buildings with extensive damage, three of which were airport owned structures and one of the private structures was completely destroyed. There were multiple aircraft damaged as well, with one sustaining major damage and multiple others in repairable condition. The airport was able to keep most commercial flights operating with a few exceptions, causing cancellations in a few flights. There were several trees lost in our parking lot area along with some trees lost in the forested north part of the airport property. The airport is back to normal and all flight operations resumed the same day we received power, with a few damages still awaiting repairs.

Construction Update
The t-hangar and self-serve fuel system are in progress with potential completion within the next month and a half. The concrete and asphalt work are complete with the fuel system being completed at the time of this writing. The t-hangar building assembly will begin mid-August. The self-serve fuel system will allow pilots to fuel their aircraft 24/7. With open fueling hours, we will attract more “transient” aircraft traffic, who often go into the community to either sight-see, eat at local restaurants, and even stay for multiple days at a time. The extra hangars will be rented out to pilots and create more space for those looking to move to our community.

Planning Area #3 is also set to be completed by fall. Planning Area #3 is a new development area for folks looking to build hangars and workspaces related to aviation on land that is leased by the airport authority. The initial corridor will allow multiple spaces to be accessed on an asphalt road with water, sewer, and electric utilities.

Highlight: Bemidji Regional Airport’s Maintenance Crew
The Bemidji Regional Airport operates as an independent airport authority. This means that the airport staff is integral for all maintenance and snow removal needs at the airport. Currently our maintenance crew consists of three full time employees and five part time employees.



Our three full time employees do the majority of the maintenance at the airport including but not limited to airport structures, runways and taxiways, all lighting systems, terminal repairs, mowing grass (about 300-400 acres), and working with contractors required for all other repairs.

Our five part time employees help with mowing in summer and snow removal in the winter.

During snowstorms, commercial operators need certain runway conditions requiring our maintenance team to remove snow right up until flight arrival or departure. And just for some context, our runways total about 46 acres. If you include the taxiways and apron areas, the total amount of surface that requires snow clearing during winter events is about 83 acres.

The Bemidji Regional Airport Authority also operates its own ARFF (Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting) program. Almost all of our maintenance staff are ARFF trained and cover firefighting duties for all commercial flights. The staff members train monthly for currency and proficiency and staff the ARFF station for every commercial flight in and out of the airport.

Notices:
The Real I.D. is going to be required soon to fly domestically in the United States. For an undetermined amount of time, you will be able to fly with a standard state issued picture I.D. with the possibility for extra screening at TSA checkpoints. Once fully instated, you will need a Real I.D. or passport to fly domestically. If you are renewing your license, consider getting your Real I.D. Federally issued and recognized Tribal I.D.’s are also currently accepted for domestic flights. For more identification or travel information, please visit: www.tsa.gov/travel/tsa-cares

Also remember, for anyone traveling from the Bemidji Regional Airport, Delta Airlines baggage check-in policy states that baggage shall be checked at least 45 minutes before departure. We always recommend showing up between, at least, one to two hours early for flights from Bemidji Regional Airport.

Brent Rud
Environmental Services Director

How will we
Replace the Trees?

The storm damage we saw this summer damaged or destroyed a central part of our beloved Northwoods. We cherish our trees and we need our trees to provide the sense of place and identity, as well as environmental benefits that those tree canopies provide such as cooler temperatures, stormwater protection, and natural erosion control. So, with the millions of trees lost, where do we start? It will take decades to grow those large pines and we can’t plant millions of trees at the snap of a finger, but we can get started now with small simple acts. As we begin planting trees, we should consider planting diverse species, diversifying the ages of our woods, and planting native disease resistant stock. Taking care of the trees that remain and planting the next crop of trees now will guarantee that our Northwoods will be restored and protected for future generations.

The Beltrami Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) can help you with any technical assistance you may need with tree planting advice, forest stewardship planning, and providing trees for landowners to plant. The SWCD has been providing low-cost conservation trees, tree protection products, and technical assistance with tree planting to area landowners since 1979. Over 1.25 million trees have been planted in the area as a direct result of the SWCD tree program. The tree program typically provides bare root trees for planting around May 1st. This year we are offering a fall tree program intended to help those interested in getting a jump start on replacing trees lost. We will be offering a limited number of potted conifers as well as bare root conifers and oaks that will be available for pick-up in late September and mid-October. These trees are available for purchase online at our new online tree sale store at www.beltramiswcd.org/shop or can be purchased in person at the SWCD/Environmental Services Department. Purchase your trees now as tree quantities are limited and are available until they are sold out.

Fall is a great time to plant trees, so we want to provide that opportunity for anyone ready to plant now. We are working with a few groups on a large, coordinated effort to provide more trees in the spring. Keep an eye out for the spring tree order information that will be released later this fall with additional species available at that time.

If you have any questions or would like additional information, please see our website at www.beltramiswcd.org , email us at esd@co.beltrami.mn.us, or call us at 218-333-4152.



Amy Bowles
Public Health Director

Storm Response

Rapid Shelter & Resource Center Mobilization

In the early hours of Saturday morning on June 21, at 4:00 AM, a call came in from the City and County Emergency Management requesting immediate support for emergency sheltering due to the storm. Within hours, our team mobilized at the Sanford Center with support from the American Red Cross, launching a shelter and resource center that would serve over 4,800 people and 3,250+ households in just under two weeks.

Saturday – Rapid Activation:
With limited power and no air conditioning, minimal working outlets, and non-functional restrooms, the team improvised. Snacks and water were rationed, and Sanford Center General Manager, Bobby Anderson, brought his grill to serve lunch. Portable toilets were brought in and bottled water was reserved for home use while shelter residents drank from the faucet to conserve supplies. Food donations from the cancelled Loop the Lake event allowed us serve dinner, and as families continued arriving late into the night, we used up our breakfast bars and PB&J supplies just before electricity was restored. By 12:30 AM, Bobby and I made a plan to make a hot breakfast using the eggs, bacon, sausage, and tater tots we found in the catering supplies.

Sunday – Scaling Support:
The Salvation Army arrived and we arranged to have them take over lunch and dinner feeding operations, while our staff focused on triage and service coordination. Local shelters were being restored to assist with unhoused or displaced guests.

Monday – Transition Planning:
With over 100 guests, we began the process of transitioning from an overnight shelter to a daytime resource center. Every guest went through a formal “check-out” process to ensure safe housing. Seven adults needing housing were placed at a local hotel, and by Monday evening, the shelter officially closed overnight operations.

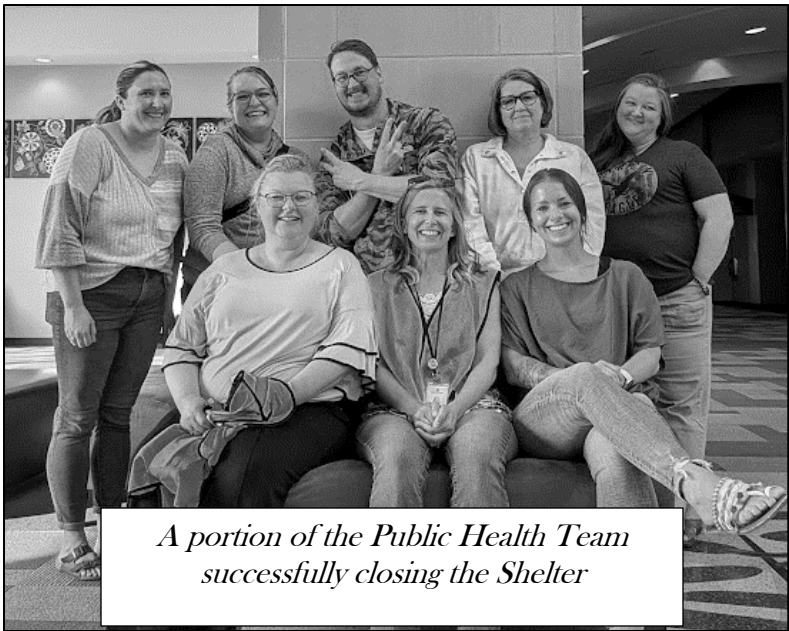
Midweek – Recovery Support:
With 15 HHS staff, we transitioned all guest activities to the Sanford Center’s ballroom to allow for building restoration. While the shelter closure was not related to an upcoming wedding, we were proud to help preserve the bride’s special day despite the storm.

Relocation and Ongoing Recovery:
By Thursday, resource center operations shifted to the former First National Bank downtown (June 27–July 2). To combat misinformation, a coordination process was created with United Way and Community Resource Connections. Public Health continued to manage donated supplies while available at 616 America Ave NW #130.

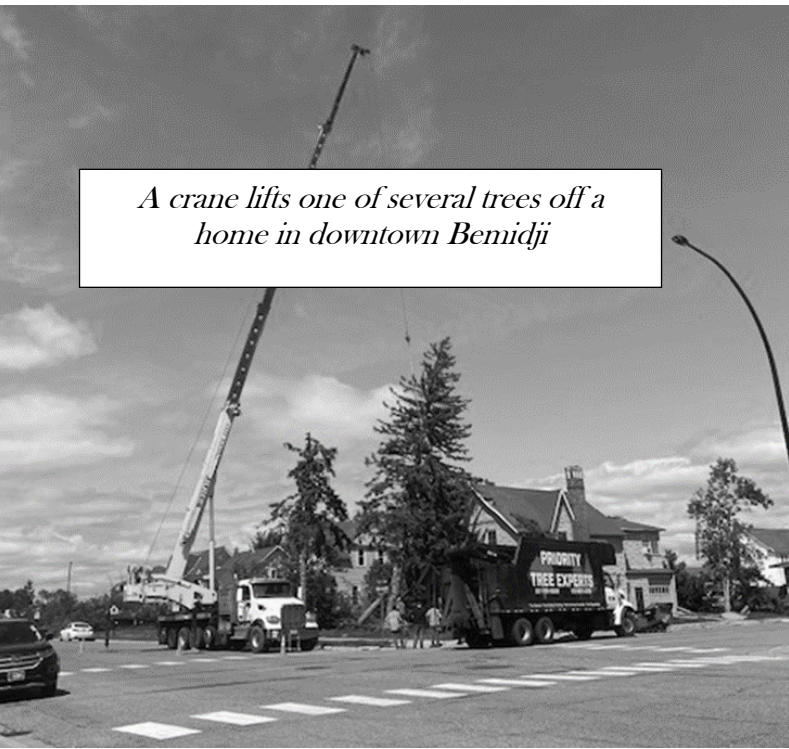
- By the Numbers:**
- 4,838 people served
 - 1,050+ meals provided
 - 164 sheltered (not including Airbnb’s and hotel placements)
 - 500+ staff hours contributed, not counting volunteers

This storm tested our community, but our collective response demonstrated resilience, compassion, and the power of rapid coordination. Thank you to everyone who supported the shelter and helped our neighbors in need.

A special thank you to the following:
Country Inn and Suites, Loop the Lake, Luekens, Roseau County, TC Energy, Sanford, Polk-Norman-Mahnomen County, Raphaels, Starbucks (Kate Boyd), United Way of Bemidji, North Country Food Bank, Journey Outreach, Savanah Martin, Cassandra Carpenter, Jill Geroy, T-Mobile, Harmony Coop, Laporte Public School – Student Council, Walmart, PR Radio and SuperOne Foods, and MN Department of Corrections Cyber Titans (Becky Friesen). Your donations made our response and recovery support possible.



*A portion of the Public Health Team
successfully closing the Shelter*



*A crane lifts one of several trees off a
home in downtown Bemidji*

Amy Bowles, Public Health Director

Community Health Assessment

Hot off the Press

The Community Health Board (CHB) has approved, submitted, published, and printed the 2025-2030 Community Health Assessment combined with the Community Health Improvement Plan.

Our team worked hard to listen to the voice of our community, including the value placed on connecting and community activities. As you review the report, hopefully you will feel connected to the places you live and the community you call home, and learn about success and areas we strive to improve. It's important to note, while this report is published by the CHB, it is a living document that requires the collaborative work of all residents. It is our hope that you will celebrate the privilege of being part of a strong and resilient community and join us in working on goals set in the Improvement Plan. If you would like to view the report online, it can be found at the link below. If you would like a printed copy of the report, please stop by Public Health at 616 America Ave. NW Suite 130. If you have questions about the report or your organization would like a presentation on the CHA/CHIP, please contact amy.bowles@co.beltrami.mn.us

https://www.co.beltrami.mn.us/media/bdpbhcd0/final-cha-chip-booklet_2025.pdf

Check out the **Community Health Board** on the County website to learn who we are and what we do!

<https://www.co.beltrami.mn.us/our-government/community-health-board/>

Storm Debris in Road Right-of-Ways Must Be Removed

This summer's powerful windstorm left a trail of damage across southern Beltrami County—toppled trees, damaged homes, and piles of debris. The Beltrami County Highway Department has been working hard to clear roads and restore safe travel, just as residents have been working tirelessly to clean up their properties.

However, some storm debris—such as tree limbs, stumps, logs, brush, and other materials—have been placed in the road right-of-way. While this may have been a temporary solution during cleanup, these materials present a serious safety hazard for motorists, bicyclists, ATV riders, and snowmobilers. The County is asking all property owners to remove any debris they placed in the right-of-way as soon as possible.

Minnesota Statute 160.2715 prohibits placing any objects in the public right-of-way. Such obstructions are dangerous because they can block sightlines, damage vehicles, and cause serious injury in the event of a crash. They also interfere with essential road maintenance, including upcoming snow removal.

Questions about road right-of-way? Contact Beltrami County Highway at (218) 333-8173.

Tony Hansen, UMN Extension

SNAP-Ed

Position Layoffs

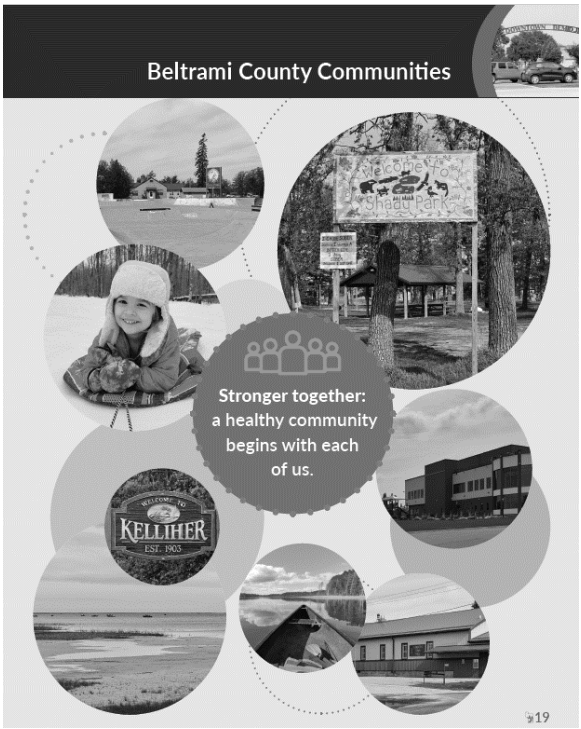
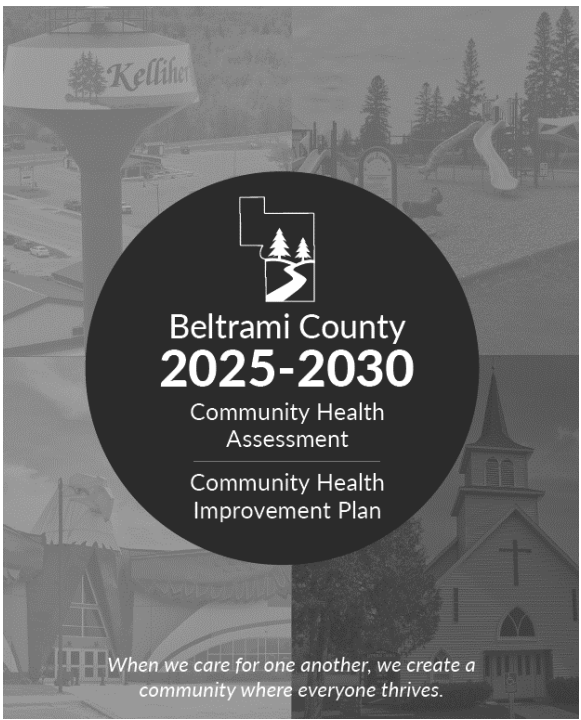
For the past year, the Beltrami County Extension Office has been the home base for two SNAP-Ed Health and Wellness Coordinators. They work to partner with other organizations across the county to provide health and nutrition programming to youth and adults.

As part of the federal reconciliation bill approved in July, the SNAP-Ed program will be ending in Minnesota effective August 22. Fifty nine positions have been cut all across the state of Minnesota, including our two SNAP-Ed staff here in Beltrami County. The local health and nutrition programming services provided by the Beltrami County Extension Office will be ending as a result of this change.

Staff partnered with many organizations across the county as part of their programming, including, but not limited to: Bemidji Boys & Girls Club, Evergreen Youth & Family Services, BI-CAP Head Start of Bemidji and Blackduck, Kelliher Public Library, Kelliher Elementary, and Lincoln Elementary. This programming has helped to introduce children to new fruits and vegetables and has promoted healthy eating and wellness. This year, the SNAP-Ed team also collaborated with the Beltrami County Master Gardener program through the One Vegetable, One Community program.

The SNAP-Ed program has positively impacted many lives through its programming. Last year in Minnesota, 756 community partners worked with Extension SNAP-Ed to implement community-level changes that benefitted 173,702 Minnesotans across the state.

We are very thankful for the support of the many organizations and volunteers who have partnered with the SNAP-Ed program in Beltrami County. If you have any questions about University of Minnesota Extension services or programming, please contact the Beltrami County Extension Office at 218-444-5722.



Lastly, the CHB has been working with the North Country CHB and have several educational videos available for personal or in educational use. You can also watch the CHB quarterly meetings here: <https://www.youtube.com/@BeltramiCHB>

Jason Riggs
County Sheriff

New Adult Correction Center

Making Progress

Beltrami County is steadily advancing on its ambitious \$80 million project—the new Adult Corrections Center—marking one of the county’s most significant undertakings to date.

Construction at the new Beltrami County Adult Corrections Center is moving along very nicely. Pioneer St. has a large crane that arrived in mid-July and has been putting up precast walls since that time. From the start of walls going up it was estimated that it would take roughly 55 working days to complete the precast walls and concrete slab inside the facility.

As we move forward with construction, people are still asking about what is going to be done with the current facility. In February of this year, commissioners approved a facility evaluation—using a \$12,800 contract—to determine whether the building can be repurposed or should be demolished, potentially making way for green space, other county services, and/or options for reuse. In April, the Board revisited the issue at a work session, discussing options that ranged from remodeling and maintaining judicial access to full teardown.

The Board of Commissioners received a new jail project update during the August 19th Board meeting, where they were provided with current construction progress, costs, design, and operations planning along with current options that would pertain to the fate of the current facility. The new facility project slated to be completed by April 2027 is on schedule and within budget.

Sheriff’s Office administrative staff continue to meet with community leaders, tribal leaders, programming specialists, mental health professionals, and court administration to look ahead to reduce recidivism and to make our community healthier. Believe it or not, the new facility will be a cornerstone to benefitting mental health and assisting not only with public safety but also a commitment to the community for health and wellness.

The Beltrami County Jail project is moving steadily, from voter approval to design, funding, groundbreaking, planning, and now construction. As the Beltrami County Sheriff, I am seeing this project through every phase and remain resolutely committed to delivering a facility that honors both safety and rehabilitation as well as being fiscally responsible with taxpayer’s dollars.



“The first six months of building, you will see a lot of rapid progress, with foundation and walls going up. It’s very exciting, seeing this come together!” Sheriff Jason Riggs

Tom Barry
County Administrator

Minnesota Legislature Pushes Costs to Counties Amid Mounting State Deficit

The 94th Minnesota Legislature convened on January 14, 2025, under a rare 67–67 partisan tie in the House of Representatives—only the second such occurrence in state history. A narrow DFL majority held the Senate, but House business was stalled for weeks after DFL members boycotted the opening session, prompting a legal standoff over Republican Lisa Demuth’s election as Speaker. Lawmakers reached a power-sharing agreement in February, and despite losing nearly seven weeks to procedural gridlock, the session produced record legislative activity: 6,893 bills were introduced, leading to 39 new laws during the regular session and 15 more in a June special session.

A dominant theme of the 2025 session was Minnesota’s deteriorating fiscal outlook. Just two years removed from a historic \$19 billion surplus, the State is now projected to face an estimated \$6 billion deficit by fiscal year 2028, largely driven by new mandate costs, structural spending obligations, and slower-than-expected revenue growth. Rather than pursuing comprehensive mandate reform, lawmakers turned to cost shifting — transferring state financial responsibilities onto counties, particularly in the health and human services areas. Governor Tim Walz’s budget proposal included a roughly \$460 million shift in costs for disability waiver services, mental health care, court-ordered competency restoration, and sex offender programs. County officials warned that the changes could result in 7% to 15% increases in local property tax levies by 2029 to maintain services the state still requires but no longer fully funds.

While lawmakers delayed some cost-shift provisions until the next biennium, many went into effect immediately. In Beltrami County, for example, state funding formula changes and newly shifted costs are driving an estimated \$550,000 increase in the county property tax levy this year, with another \$1 million to \$1.5 million expected in the next fiscal year. That figure excludes additional burdens resulting from federal policy changes—including administrative cost shifts tied to SNAP and Medicaid. All told, Beltrami officials estimate the County could be facing \$2.5 million to \$3.5 million in newly shifted state and federal costs by fiscal year 2028.

To respond, the Beltrami County Board has launched its budget process earlier than usual, established clear fiscal priorities, and is evaluating long-term strategies to manage these compounding pressures. County officials emphasize the urgent need for the Legislature to pursue serious, sustained mandate reform. Without relief, the growing financial weight of unfunded state and federal mandates will increasingly fall on the shoulders of local taxpayers.

So what can you do? We encourage residents to reach out to their State and Federal representatives to share their thoughts and feelings regarding these cost shifts. There is still time to make a difference.

Beltrami County Fair

The Great Beltrami County Get Together on August 6-10, 2025 hosted close to 29,000 Fairgoers who enjoyed the many attractions. Main events included Beltrami Electric Night at the Fair, Motocross, two nights of Rodeo and the Barnyard Olympics plus a variety of barns, static exhibits, both 4H and open class, robotics, music, arts and crafts, and other entertainment.

The Beltrami County Agricultural Association, led by a 21-person volunteer Board, manages the Fairgrounds. They are a team of annually trained volunteers that work in the background staffing a Communications Center, First Responders, parking, transportation and security, plus all barns and venues. If you are interested in becoming a volunteer, visit <https://beltramicountyfair.org>. We guarantee an enjoyable experience in being part of our team.

The Fairgrounds are also open year-round for events to include weddings, birthday parties, auctions, rummage sales, family reunions, and other occasions. Call 218-444-8169 to make reservations.

Beryl Wernberg, Secretary/Manager, BCAA

Board of Commissioners	
District 1—Craig Gaasvig	218-766-9699
District 2—Joe Gould	218-259-4342
District 3—Scott Winger	218-556-7589
District 4—Tim Sumner	218-407-7589
District 5—John Carlson	218-766-5010

Administration Building
701 Minnesota Ave NW Bemidji MN 56601

Administrator—Thomas Barry	218- 333-4109
Assessor—Kaleb Bessler	218-333-4116
Auditor/Treasurer—JoDee Treat	218-333-4175
Environmental Services	
Brent Rud.....	218-333-4158
Facilities Manager Steve Shadrick	.218-333-8475
Geographic Info Systems (GIS).	
Kevin Trappe	218-333-8457
Human Resources	
.....	218-333-4155
License Center.....	218-333-4148
Information Technology (IT)	
Kevin Warne.....	218-333-4151
Natural Resource Management	
Shane Foley	218-333-4210
Real Estate & Tax Services.....	218-333-4138
Recorder—Charlene Sturk.....	218-333-4170

Community Service Center
616 America Ave NW, Bemidji MN 56601

Health & Human Services	
Director Anne Lindseth.....	218-333-4195
Social Services Division Director	
Jeff Lind	218-333-4196
Economic Assistance Division Director	
Curt Anderson.....	218-333-4199
Public Health Division Director	
Amy Bowles.....	218-333-8116

Veterans Services Officer	
Shane Gustafson	218-333-4192

Law Enforcement Center
613 Minnesota Ave NW, Bemidji MN 56601
Sheriff Jason Riggs.....218-333-9111
Bemidji Police Chief Mike Mastin 218-333-9111

Judicial Center
600 Minnesota Ave NW, Bemidji MN 56601
Attorney—David Hanson.....218-333-4219
Court Administration..... 218-888-5060

County Jail
626 Minnesota Ave NW, Bemidji MN 56601
Main phone number..... 218-333-4189

Public Works Department
2491 Adams Ave NW, Bemidji MN 56601

Public Works Director	
Bruce Hasbargen	218-333-8173

751 Industrial Park Dr SE
Solid Waste Director
Brian Olson

County Extension
7223 Fairgrounds Rd NW, Bemidji MN 56601
Extension Secretary