Landowners set March 3 deadline for DNR to close public access on Rec Area parcel

By Paul Learned

The owners of a 60-acre property on June Lake within the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area have given the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources until March 3 to close all public access points and post no trespassing signage on a parcel where the state has built a road, parking lot and a segment of the Galloping Goose mountain bike trail — or they say they will post trespassing signs themselves.

Tim and Dawn Prinsen of Minneapolis, operating as June Lake LLC, sent the demand in a Feb. 19 letter to DNR Assistant Commissioner Jess Richards. The letter marks an escalation in what has been a two-year effort by the Prinsens to secure a road easement across state land to reach their landlocked property, which sits on the western end of the recreation area within the city of Ironton, directly west of Mucker Mountain.

The dispute centers on two intertwined issues. The Prinsens need access across DNR-controlled land to reach the June Lake property, which has no connection to any state, city or county road. At the same time, the DNR has developed infrastructure — including Overburden Road, a trailhead, parking area, signage and a segment of the Galloping Goose trail — on a nearby 40-acre parcel in which June Lake LLC holds a leasehold interest in a 1/24 undivided ownership share. The remaining 23/24 interest is held by the DNR.

The Prinsens contend that as tenants in common, they retain the legal right to exclude third parties from the parcel and that neither the property owner nor June Lake LLC has ever granted consent for public use. The letter states the presence of hundreds of thousands of visitors on the land raises serious liability and property management concerns. The recreation area drew approximately 400,000 visitors in 2023, making it the third most visited state recreation area or state park in Minnesota, with the Galloping Goose serving as a primary connector for much of the trail network.

According to the Prinsens, their surveyor contacted the DNR in December 2024 requesting documentation of the state's ownership of Overburden Road. The DNR pointed to a 1915 Right of Way Easement running east to west — which the Prinsens say has since been terminated — and various Quit Claim Deeds. The Prinsens argue those documents do not establish an easement, right-of-way or any other legal interest beyond the shared tenancy.

The Prinsens had proposed what they described as a mutually beneficial resolution: in exchange for an access easement to the June Lake property, they would gift the 1/24 undivided interest to the DNR, securing permanent public access to Overburden Road and the Galloping Goose while also opening additional land for trail development and a new portage point on Huntington Mine.

The DNR denied the easement request in a letter presented at a Dec. 3 meeting. Both sides agreed to continue discussions, but when the parties met again in February, the Prinsens said the DNR instead presented options to exchange the June Lake property for state-controlled land. Of the nine proposed exchange parcels, seven were tax-forfeited and one was School Trust Land. The Prinsens said none were remotely comparable to the June Lake property.

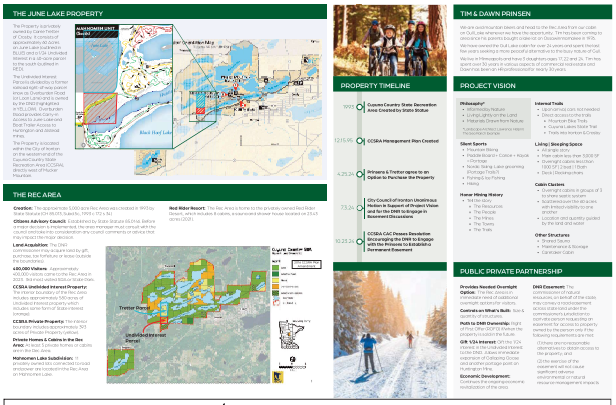
The Prinsens' long-term vision for the property calls for a cluster of small overnight cabins, a main cabin under 3,000 square feet, a shared sauna and a caretaker cabin, all designed around silent sports access and what they describe as a philosophy of living lightly on the land. The project would address what area officials and the DNR's own management plans have identified as a need for additional overnight lodging in the recreation area. The DNR's 1995 management plan called for developing campgrounds south of June Lake, and its 2008 implementation plan called for a semi-modern overnight use area in the same location.

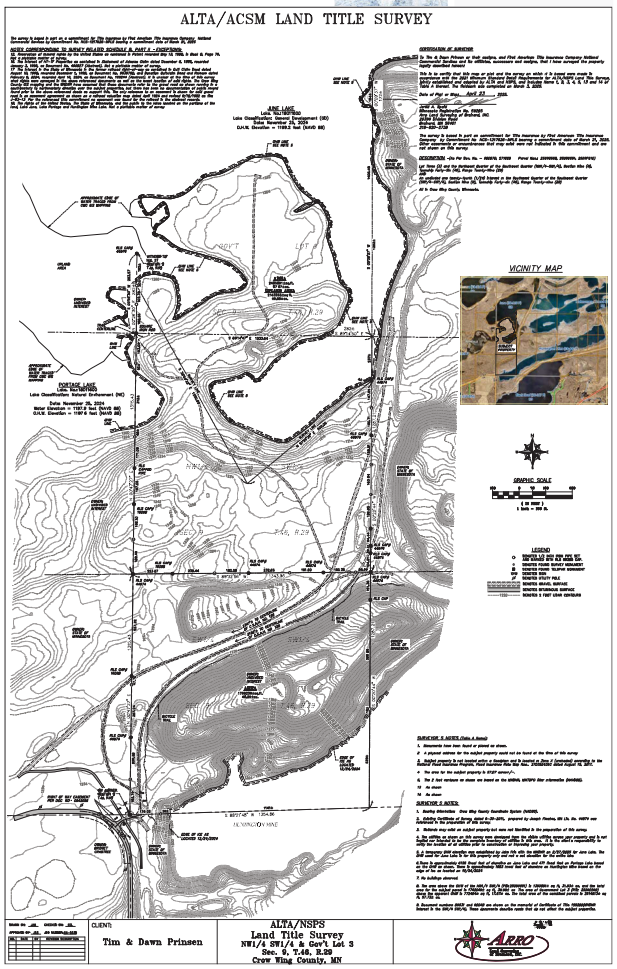
The project has drawn broad local support. The Ironton City Council passed a unanimous motion in July 2024 supporting the project vision and calling on the DNR to engage in easement discussions. The CCSRA Citizens Advisory Council passed a resolution in October 2024 encouraging the DNR to establish a permanent easement. A majority of Crow Wing County commissioners, the state representative and state senator for the district have also expressed support, according to materials provided by the Prinsens.

Former state Sen. Carrie Ruud of Breezy Point, who chaired the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Policy and Legacy Finance Committee during her time in office and now works as a governmental relations consultant, is assisting the Prinsens in publicizing the dispute. Ruud said in a Feb. 27 e-mail that the DNR has failed to negotiate in good faith over the past two years and that legislation has been drafted in connection with the matter, with trespassing signs expected to go up in March.

The DNR did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The 1/24 undivided interest in the parcel is held in title by Carrie Lee Tretter of Crosby. The Prinsens entered into an option to purchase the property in April 2024. The Feb. 19 letter was copied to DNR Commissioner Sara Strommen, multiple DNR directors, CCSRA Manager Barry Osborne, Ironton Mayor Josh Jacobson, members of the State Legislature, the Crow Wing County Attorney's Office and the Crow Wing County Sheriff.





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