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CROW WING COUNTY

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Crow Wing County Follows Up On Land Use Permits

By Christopher Pence

The Crow Wing County Land Services Department this year has implemented several new services to provide better assistance to landowners and improve our ability to protect our natural resources. One of these new initiatives involves follow up visits to all permits issued on lakeshore parcels to make sure the work was done properly. Last year, the County issued 750 building permits, with 282 of those being riparian or located right on the lake. Land Service Specialists from the Planning and Zoning Division have reviewed all permits in the field this last winter to verify location, size and conditions. The Land Service Specialists also inspected all variances and conditional use permits that the county approved in 2008.

What have we found? Most Crow Wing County property owners are building their projects in accordance with the requirements of the approved permit. Of the 282 permits, 191 met all requirements and were complete and 63 were either in progress or had not started. Of the remaining 28 permit reviews, 18 needed to amend the permit to reflect a change in construction while 10 appear to be in violation of county zoning requirements. When a violation is found, the Land Service Specialists work with the landowner by explaining the options to gain compliance. In some situations, all that is needed to be done is amend the permit to reflect the changes. Other situations require the applicant to go before the Board of Adjustment to request an after-the-fact variance if the project does not meet the requirements of the zoning ordinance. If landowners are not willing to work to resolve such violations, we do have the authority to issue citations, which we will exercise when necessary.

The follow up inspection process is another component of the field based model which was implemented in 2008 to conduct site visits prior to issuing a permit. This has minimized the number of land use violations by catching them before they occur. The goal is to help people do the right thing when it comes to land use matters.

Another new initiative is our “Call for Service” service program. Citizens can contact our office and request a site visit with a Land Service Specialist to discuss land use plans and the best approaches that will help protect our lakes and other natural resources. The process allows citizens to understand the requirements of the zoning ordinance prior to applying for a permit. Most land use questions can be answered during this visit and clear up any questions or concerns. This proactive communication has helped cut down misunderstandings and land use violations on the back end.

Finally, we have reached an agreement with the City of Jenkins to provide office space for County staff at City offices one day a week during the construction season. This will allow citizens from the north end of the county to meet with staff to discuss land use issues or drop off a building permit application without having to make the trip to our office in Brainerd.

The Land Services Department is committed to providing excellent customer service while protecting the extraordinary natural resources we all love and enjoy in Crow Wing County. Citizens are encouraged to contact the County to discuss land use questions before starting projects. When we all work together, everyone benefits. We look forward to working with you!

Mr. Pence is the Land Services Supervisor for Planning and Zoning in Crow Wing County's Land Services Department.