

Businesses, Events Across EUP Facing Challenges of Mild Winter Weather

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weeks at least, the area should see colder temperatures and more snow.

"For all those who like snow and cold, we should be seeing some of that now," he predicted. "With the lakes as open as they are, we should see several rounds of lake effect snow over the next few weeks."

Mild Winter Tests Area Business Owners

The mild winter has affected Eastern Upper Peninsula businesses, winter events, and wildlife.

The average snowmobiler in Michigan spends \$4,128 annually on equipment and travel, according to the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association. With 290,000 snowmobiles registered in the state, that could add up to more than \$1 billion in Michigan.

This winter is testing even the most frugal business owner.

Eighty-five percent of winter business for Karene Kerversky's Cut River Inn in Naubinway is from snowmobilers. She said her business benefits from snowmobilers even if there is no snow in Naubinway because she attracts snowmobilers on their way to where the snow is.

But this year, she said, "There just isn't any or enough snow in the U.P."

Like many businesses, Cut River Inn has been forced to cut back on hours and staff.

"We usually will have 12 people on staff at this time of the winter," Mrs. Kerversky said. "Right now, we have two."

The Cedar Pantry in Cedarville would typically be loaded with snowmobilers by now, since it is right across the street from a popular snowmobile trail.

"We'd have a lot of out-of-towners right now, but business is just poor," said Pantry employee Bette Nye.

Dave Swope of Budget Host Inn at St. Ignace remembers the area suffering through a similar predicament during the winter of 2001, when the EUP did not receive snow until February.

"Our occupancy rate in January 2001 was 16.04 percent," said Mr. Swope. "We typically would be in the high 30s to 40s."

In 2001, however, February turned out plenty of snow for businesses to rebound, at least somewhat, remembers Mr. Swope, who said another winter like this may force businesses to make drastic changes, with some considering closing for good.

"We're not rolling up the floor mats yet, but if this becomes a trend, we won't be the only ones seeing the end of the line."

- David Swope, Budget Host Inn



A group of idle snowmobiles sits on the lawn in bright sunshine as late in the season as Sunday afternoon, January 7, at Cedarville Inn in Cedarville. The rental vehicles were set out late last year, when a week of heavy snowfalls in December looked promising for the local snowmobile season. All of the snow melted or was washed away by rains, and it will take awhile to rebuild the trail base, even though the weather seemed to turn a corner Monday, January 8.

"If we don't get snow this year, it's going to be bad for a lot of businesses," he said. "With the state economy like it is, having no snow is like a double-whammy for local businesses."

There just isn't another loop in the belt for businesses to tighten.

Mr. Swope, who is president of the St. Ignace Visitors Bureau, is still hoping for the best for February.

"Typically, that is our strongest winter month," he said. "We're not rolling up the floor mats yet, but if this becomes a trend, we won't be the only ones seeing the end of the line."

Local dealerships that sell or rent snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) have reported that ATVs have caught up in sales with snowmobiles, however, business is slow, overall.

"We're doing a lot of things around here that we've been putting off for awhile, only because we're so slow," said Dave Masse of Cedarville Marine. "ATVs are becoming more popular now that people can equip them with snow-

plows and track systems for driving in the snow, but business right now absolutely stinks."

Mike Soder of Curtis Fish and Hunt Shop said ATV sales have risen in the last couple of years owing to lack of snow for snowmobiles. The ratio of ATV sales to snowmobile sales downstate is near four-to-one but only about two-to-one in the U.P. because there are more "diehard snowmobilers" in the U.P., said Mr. Soder.

The Fish and Hunt Shop, where rentals of snowmobiles and boats are a big part of its business, has used the Internet to expand, with some success.

"We're reaching out further Midwest and south," he said. "But this mild winter affects everybody. I don't care what business you're in. It has slowed down everyone."

Winter Event Planners Making Back-up Plans

It has also forced the Soo Area Sportsman's Club, hosts of the annual Walleye Jamboree near Pickford, to move the event from January into February. Carley Ball, one of the coordinators said the event, held on Munuscong Bay near the St. Marys River, is rescheduled for February 21 to February 25.

The popular International 500 snowmobile race in Sault Ste. Marie, scheduled for February 3, could be canceled or moved to March, said Jan Bailey, the event's

coordinator.

"We didn't put water down on the track until January 14 last year, so we're not that far off, but we don't have any snow that the city can bring in," she said. "We'll have to make a decision by January 22 or 23 as to whether we cancel it or reschedule it for March 10."

She said March 10 would be the earliest reschedule date because the big snowmobile racing circuit dates this winter already are filled. "We're still thinking positive," she said.

Cedarville's annual Snowfest will go on as planned, said event coordinator Dana Torsky. The event, to be held February 16 to 18, will have some changes, however.

The tent that holds a dog show and chili cook-off each year will probably be set up at the township

park next to Cedarville Bay instead at its traditional location on the frozen lake. Mrs. Torsky said the high school will probably house the event's craft show.

"There was a lot of talk that Snowfest was going to be canceled," she said, "but we're going to hold the event, no matter what."

The annual Curtis Winter Carnival Saturday, February 17, will most likely be relocated off the frozen lake onto the mainland,

said event coordinator Sue Fleischmann. She said the event's popular fishing contest will probably be moved to nearby Portage Creek.

"We will have some kind of carnival," she said, "but this winter is ridiculous. Our family has three rental cabins, and right now, they're just sitting there empty."

Mark Sposito is already designing an alternative plan for a pond hockey tournament, scheduled for Moran Bay in St. Ignace

February 24 and 25. He expects to bring in 96 six-man teams. In case Moran Bay does not produce good ice, the event could be moved to Chain Lake on Cheeseman Road or, if need be, to a frozen parking lot.

Mr. Swope said Moran Bay's shoreline has never not had ice during the winter, however, he said, this year may be the first time it does not freeze.

"We're still hoping for snow," said Mr. Sposito. "We still have some time before the event."

A broom ball tournament scheduled for Saturday, January 20, at the Driftwood Bar in St. Ignace will continue with or without snow, just as long as teams show up.

Warm Winter and Wildlife

For most of the EUP's wildlife, the stress of winter will be minimal, said Rex Ainslie, a wildlife biologist for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources in Newberry.

Deer, he said, will fare pretty well, as will predators like coyotes and wolves.

"If the winter continues like it has, you'll probably see a high survival rate for fawns and a high production rate for does in the spring," he said.

Black bear, and small-game animals like snowshoe hare and grouse, however, are more likely to struggle in a mild-climate winter, he said.

"Snowshoe hare are highly vulnerable because there is no snow for their white coats to blend in with, which is resulting in a high success rate for both predators and hunters," said Mr. Ainslie. "Grouse are struggling too, because they bury themselves in snow to protect themselves from predators and to preserve heat."

The warmer temperatures may also interrupt hibernation for black bears, which would increase energy demands and force them to burn fat reserves which otherwise would allow them to rest throughout the winter months, said Mr. Ainslie.

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New Homes Sought for Dogs

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Alban to collect donations for the medical care of a female beagle found injured and emaciated on Hiawatha Trail in Mackinac County. Mrs. Froslund estimates the dog had been outside without food for at least two weeks. The dog had somehow gotten its front leg stuck through its collar, and suffers from skin injuries as a result, as well as from porcupine quills. The one-year-old beagle, now named "Minnie" by Dr. Alban's staff, is not yet healthy enough to be offered for adoption, and is being cared for at Dr. Alban's office in St. Ignace.

"She has a sweet disposition, and is a real lap dog who will put her head in your lap," Dr. Alban said. "She's not afraid of people, and is very affectionate. This one will make it."

Donations toward the dog's medical expenses can be sent to Mackinac Straits Veterinary Clinic at 104 High Street in St. Ignace.

In another matter, Mrs. Froslund said that the spate of missing cats reported to her in early fall seems to have abated in the past two months, although the investigation of these cases remains open. More than 45 pet cats had been reported missing by St. Ignace, Cedarville, and Hessel residents in August and early September, she told *The St. Ignace News* in reports published in September, while a typical number of missing cat reports would be about one per week. At that time, the department did not note an

unusual number of complaints about missing dogs, and did not receive missing cat reports from the west end of the county.

Reports about missing cats have returned to normal levels, Mrs. Froslund said January 5.

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