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**Happy ski trails:
Mother Nature snows down on Volks Ski Fest**

Pristine snow conditions prime one of the nation's longest cross-country ski trail system for upcoming family-friendly celebration of winter

COOK COUNTY, MN (Jan. 17, 2010) – Volks Ski Fest, a weeklong family-friendly celebration of winter and cross-country skiing on Lake Superior's North Shore and Gunflint Trail, kicks off in a few short days. Both Mother Nature and professional trail groomers have been in high gear preparing one of the nation's longest cross-country ski trail system for this weekend's influx of skinny ski enthusiasts. With snowdrifts appearing in all corners of Cook County, Nordic skiers will find the trails in excellent condition.

Every trail is open and groomed for classic and skate skiing on the 400km system and the season's healthy snowfall of nearly 30 inches have provided very good to excellent system-wide trail conditions. Trails are averaging a 6-8" hard packed powder base and were topped off by 1-2" of fresh powder earlier last week. Grooming will continue throughout the week and the season on all trails.

"With even more snow in the forecast, the trails really are going to be excellent shape to kick off this great event," said Andrew Slade, spokesperson for Volks Ski Fest. "I've been out skiing and have been consistently amazed with the quality of grooming. Volks Ski guests are going to love the conditions."

Hosted by The Cook County Events and Visitor Bureau, Volks Ski Fest takes place Jan. 23-30 in Cook County, Minnesota. Each day during the weeklong festival, venues throughout the county will offer guided cross-country ski tours and luminary skis on trails ranging from beginner-friendly to more advanced outings. Local cross-country ski experts will lead skijoring and waxing clinics and Andrew Slade, event spokesperson, local author and North Shore trail expert, will host a book signing and fireside chat. In addition to Nordic skiing events, the festival also features guided snowshoe hikes, horsedrawn sleigh rides, dog sledding, bonfires and s'more parties, and other winter-themed events will keep families entertained in true North Shore style.

Nordic skiing with a purpose

Volks Ski Fest is set to kick off on Saturday, Jan. 23 with the Volks Ski 400, a non-competitive Nordic ski event designed with the goal of having a skier on every kilometer of the county's 400km of professionally groomed ski trails that day. Participants will have the opportunity to purchase a collector's pin designed exclusively for the 2010 Volks Ski 400 for \$5. Proceeds from the pin sales will go to PanCAN, the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network. Pins will be sold at lodges at area trailheads, including Cascade Lodge, Bearskin Lodge and Boundary Country Trekking. Skiers may also contact the Cook County Events and Visitors Bureau for more information or to purchase pins at 218-663-8058.

More information on Volks Ski Fest and the Volks Ski 400, maps, a schedule of events and activity registration may be found at <http://www.volksskifest.com>

Updated snow and trail conditions are available online at: <http://www.americasnorthcoast.org/trail-conditions/>;
<http://grandmarais.com/snow/>; <http://www.gunflint-trail.com/conditions/index.html>.

The Cook County Events & Visitors Bureau

The Cook County Events & Visitors Bureau is a tourism organization dedicated to economic development and maintaining the vitality of The North Shore/Gunflint Trail by supporting events throughout the year. For more information, call 218.663.8058 or visit www.cookcountymnevents.com.

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