



WISCONSIN OUTSIDE | October 2025

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

In late August, I joined other state directors and public health leaders in Washington, D.C. for a Roundtable on Strengthening Health Through Outdoor Recreation hosted by the National Governors Association. While mounting research extolls the health benefits of time spent outside, the successful integration of nature therapy and outdoor recreation into conventional public health initiatives lags. At the convening, speakers and participants shared emerging data, novel programs and related policy, creating a robust discussion on how leaders can work together to advance these cross-sector efforts

meaningfully.

It's exciting to see outdoor recreation recognized as a significant asset on such a large scale, as we are starting to see in the public health conversation. This recognition also presents a growth opportunity for the outdoor industry to engage in collaborative initiatives and programs with non-endemic partners in the health care industry. Who are potential partners in your community? How could you leverage your outdoor infrastructure, product or service within the health context?

Ready to share your thoughts and move this discussion forward? The Office is again co-hosting our third Wisconsin Healthy Communities Summit with the Wisconsin Bike Fed. Mark your calendars to join us April 23-24, 2026, in Wausau. This every-other-year gathering explores the connections between cycling, outdoor recreation and health. As we plan for the next Summit, we seek proposals from experts and local leaders who can share insights, research, successful programs or education that equip attendees with inspiration and knowledge to shape healthy, vibrant communities. More details are shared below.

Finally, late last month, Wisconsin became an official member of the [Confluence of States](#) during a brief signing ceremony at the [Outdoor Economy Conference](#) in North Carolina. It marks an important step in our evolution as an Office, with opportunities to bring the Wisconsin perspective to the national discussion and leverage the knowledge and expertise of leaders from around the country as we work to strengthen our economy and quality of life through outdoor recreation.

Ever onward, ever outdoors,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cassie". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'C'.

Cassie Mordini
Director, Office of Outdoor Recreation



Pictures from the signing of the Confluence Accords with 16 of the 21 state members. Photos courtesy of Julie Magnussen Photography and Confluence of States.

The Office is interested in making industry connections.
Click [here](#) to update your information and help build Wisconsin's outdoor recreation directory.

Wisconsin Outside is a monthly newsletter from the Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation. Please share it with friends or colleagues with a vested interest in Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry by forwarding this email or [subscribing here](#).

Data, DMO Collaboration and Destination Development: Creating Wisconsin's Basecamp in Wausau

The team at [Visit Wausau](#), recognizing the incredible natural resources and recreational opportunities of the area as well as their proximity to culinary delights plus a thriving arts and culture scene, envisioned how the region could position itself as a destination for travelers seeking both experiences. Akin to a base camp — where shelter, supplies and provisions are available and adventures, exploration or missions radiate outward from it — the Wausau area provides the creature comforts every traveler seeks and outdoorists appreciate after a day of discovery.

“When we talk about Wausau as Wisconsin’s Basecamp, it’s more than a brand — it’s how people experience the area. This is a true basecamp: a launching point for discovery, anchored by outdoor adventure, incredible food, arts and community. That mix is authentic to Wausau, and visitors are responding,” explains Tim White, Executive Director at Visit Wausau. “By combining data with authentic experiences, Wausau is proving that Wisconsin's Basecamp is not just a brand — it’s a growing reality.”

Part of that strategy includes understanding visitor patterns and behaviors. Last year, Visit Wausau participated in the Office's [Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact program](#) with team members from Wausau and Marathon County Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department and the Village of Rib Mountain. It was a strategic partnership, as each participating organization had data, insight and a vested interest in the outcome of their project studying the economic impact of outdoor recreation at Nine Mile County Forest. Through their visitor intelligence partner, [Zartico](#), Visit Wausau was able to provide data that included visitor counts and related spending in the area, which are key to calculating economic impact and helped the team uncover [\\$3.25 million in business activity](#) within the county from out-of-town visitors to Nine Mile.

With information about visitor usage, demographics, behavior and spending, Visit Wausau has been able to hone its marketing strategy to increase participation for outdoor recreation events in the area, with the understanding that these visitors contribute to the local economy. For the Wausau 24, already the Midwest's largest 24-hour mountain bike race, held at Nine Mile, data insights that led to a shift in targeting resulted in a 42% increase in registered participants. The 2025 race attendance jumped from 600 to 850 racers and sold out in just two weeks.



Last fall, Visit Wausau was recognized by Destinations Wisconsin with a Trailblazer Award in the Outstanding Destination Development category for its collaborative efforts helping to create and

promote the Great Pinery Heritage Waterway. Pictured from left to right are Julia Hertel, executive director of Destinations Wisconsin; staff of Visit Wausau and area business leaders Jodi Maguire; Tim Van De Yacht; Brenton Wildman; Gao Her; Tim White; Jamie Polley; and Greg Fisher, along with Wisconsin Secretary of Tourism Anne Sayers. Photo courtesy Visit Wausau.

Data has also been instrumental in demonstrating the value of outdoor recreation infrastructure to local leaders, funders and investors, helping to advance projects. Usage patterns at river launches along the [Great Pinery Heritage Waterway](#) provide evidence of increasing usage and create a compelling case for communities to consider being part of a trail expansion. Similarly, the data has been used for grant reports and a successful application for [National Recreation Trail designation](#), which was announced in June. Other projects underway in the area that benefit from this data include mountain bike optimized and multi-use trails at Rib Mountain, an expansion at Granite Peak and mapped gravel bike routes, among others.

While many data vendors are available, there are also other ways to count visitors and collect insights. In [A Do-It-Yourself Guide: Conducting Visitor and Recreational User Research to Tell an Economic Story](#), Chapter 4 discusses several ways to count and estimate visitors (manual counts, trail counter devices, ticket sales, etc.), and Chapter 5 explains crafting a survey plan that will reach your intended audience, be representative and deliver the demographic and behavior information you seek. (Interested in digging in deeper? The Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals is hosting a [four-part webinar series](#) on the topic. More information is in the Resources section below.)

Through data, Visit Wausau has gained a greater understanding of its visitors. They know that 58% of out-of-town visitors engage in at least two types of outdoor recreation activities, and about 65% of residents do, too. They know where visitors are going, where they came from, how long they stay, how much they spend and where they spend their money. With this data knowledge, not only can Visit Wausau optimize its marketing efforts, they are helping empower destination development efforts and placemaking investments that create not only an attractive destination to visit, but also an attractive place to live.



Save the Date & Call for Proposals: Wisconsin Healthy Communities Summit

Save the date for the next [Wisconsin Healthy Communities Summit](#) co-hosted again by the Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation and the Wisconsin Bike Fed! Don't miss the opportunity to gather with community leaders, outdoor industry and health professionals, planners, advocates and business leaders to explore how outdoor recreation, biking and active transportation work together toward healthier, more vibrant communities across Wisconsin.

The Summit, scheduled for April 23-24, 2026, at the Hilton Garden Inn in Wausau, will feature interactive workshops, keynote speakers and networking. Sessions will dive into five focus areas, including:

- Advocating for Outdoor Recreation Projects and Programs
- Driving Tourism and Economic Impact through Outdoor Recreation
- Emerging Themes and Innovation Surrounding Human, Economic and Environmental Health
- Planning, Building and Funding Trail Networks
- Safety for All: Best Practices for Creating Safe Routes for Kids and Families

Interested in presenting at the Summit? Submit your proposal today! All submissions are due by November 10 at 5 p.m.

Submit a Proposal

MEET YOUR WISCONSIN OUTDOOR INDUSTRY

Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry is an impressive combination of businesses, manufacturers, outfitters, guides, destinations and nonprofits. Each month, we'll share with you information about the industry so you can get to know your peers across the state and see how each contributes to the collective success and diversity of the valued outdoor recreation industry in Wisconsin. Here are this month's industry highlights:



Nonprofit: [Woodland Dunes Nature Center](#)

- Covering over 1,500 acres in Two Rivers, the Woodland Dunes Nature Center is home to more than 600 species of plants, 250 species of birds, 42 species of mammals, 10 species of amphibians and thousands of invertebrates. Visitors can explore the preserve and attend education programs and events each year.



Guides, Tours, Rentals: [Dewey Catchem & How](#)

- Based in Minocqua, you'll find experienced guides at Dewey, Catchem & How. Their guides take visitors out year-round for open water fishing or ice fishing.



Retailer: [Machinery Row Bicycles](#)

- A locally owned bike shop in Madison, Machinery Row Bicycles helps all cyclists find the gear and bikes they need to enjoy a ride.



Manufacturer: [Snowtrekker Tents](#)

- A family legacy based out of Virqua, Snowtrekker Tents provides heatable canvas tents, or “hot tents,” for adventurers to enjoy camping, even in the winter!



Destinations: [Kinni Creek Lodge and Outfitters Resort](#)

- A quiet and secluded lodge that caters to vacationers interested in relaxing or adventuring outdoors. They feature guided trips for fly fishing, kayak tours and overnight paddling trips

Interested in being featured? To be considered, make sure your business or organization is listed in our [Outdoor Business Directory](#). There, you can submit a request to be added or to update your information. If you are already listed, feel free to send us an [email](#) with your interest to be featured in the newsletter.

INDUSTRY & COMMUNITY NEWS

Ice Age Trail Mammoth Hike Challenge Begins Oct. 1

Since its launch in 2020, the [Mammoth Hike Challenge](#) participation has surged, reaching 9,180 hikers in 2024 and generating more than \$2.2 million in local economic impact over five years. This year participants are challenged to hike 45

miles and visit three trail communities. [Read the story.](#)

Registration Closes October 10 for TrailNation Summit

The TrailNation Summit, hosted by Rails to Trails, is a one-of-a-kind gathering where attendees will gain skills and connections to accelerate the pace of trail network development. Held in Cleveland, Ohio, from Oct. 27 to 29, the Summit features mobile workshops and immersive learning opportunities. [Learn more.](#)

National Outdoor Recreation Conference (NORC) Call for Proposals

NORC will be held May 11-14, 2026, in Duluth, Minnesota. This year's theme explores how recreation drives healthier communities, resilient places and innovative systems. Proposals are due October 20, 2025. [Learn more.](#)

RESOURCES

Travel Wisconsin Marketing and Public Relations Co-op Opens October 2

The popular Co-op program offers strategic and cost-effective marketing and public relations opportunities to promote your destination. Interested partners should review the sell sheet and register in the partner portal in advance of the program opening on Thursday, October 2 at 10 a.m. for the best opportunity to snag your choice programs and dates. [Learn more.](#)

Webinar Series on Recreation Data Tools and Approaches

The Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals is hosting a four-part webinar series on Wednesdays beginning October 15 that will cover estimating recreational visitation, using data to improve access, visitor surveys and management actions, as well as specific examples from the Superior Hiking Trail. [Learn more and register.](#)

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Applications due October 31

The 2026-2030 Program Cycle for TAP is open. Projects that are eligible for the Safe Routes to School Program, Transportation Enhancements or the Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Program are eligible TAP projects. Applications are due Friday, Oct. 31. [Learn more.](#)

Non-State Capital Grant Applications due October 31

Governor Evers announced another round of the Non-State Grant Program. This \$50 million program funds capital infrastructure projects that support economic and community development. To be eligible for a grant, organizations must have funding in hand from nonstate revenue sources covering at least half of the total project cost at the time of the application. [Learn more.](#)

Recreational Boating Facilities Grants due November 1

Funding is available to counties, local governments, sanitary districts, public inland lake protection and rehabilitation districts and qualified lake associations for recreational boating facility projects including ramps and service docks, weed harvesting, dredging and navigational aids. [Learn more](#).

Knowles-Nelson Stewardship – Grants to Friends Groups Applications due November 15

The Stewardship grant supports projects that improve facilities, build new recreation projects and restore habitat on state properties. Grants are awarded for up to 50% of project costs. [Learn more](#).

State Park and Forest Heritage Trust Fund Applications due November 15

Administered by the Department of Natural Resources, this grant is available to Friends Groups with an established endowment fund to benefit the State Park Property. Funds can support programming, restoration and more. [Learn more](#).

JOB LISTINGS

[Associate Director of Development](#), The Nature Conservancy, Milwaukee.

[Clinic Manager](#), Raptor Education Group, Inc., Antigo.

[Inventory Forester](#), Lumberjack RCD Council, Inc., Northern Wisconsin.

[Marketing & Communications Manager](#), Lands' End Outfitters, Dodgeville.

[Online Sales Support Specialist – Angler Guide](#), St. Croix Rod, Park Falls.

[Recreation Coordinator](#), Village of Mount Horeb, Mount Horeb.

The Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation is part of
the Wisconsin Department of Tourism

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