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A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

It may be April 1, but we are not fooling around with this announcement.

We are launching the inaugural **Wisconsin Governor's Outdoor Industry Awards** to recognize the hard-working, innovative and passionate professionals of our industry. As a driver of our state's economy and the foundation of the quality of life we enjoy, our \$11.2 billion outdoor recreation industry is key to a thriving Wisconsin. We are excited to celebrate and honor the people whose contributions and accomplishments drive economic impact and amplify the profile of outdoor recreation in Wisconsin. Nominations for several award categories are now open! See more details below or on the website [here](#).

We can't wait to learn about the nominees you submit and share the countless stories of the good work happening in Wisconsin's outdoor industry. Be sure to submit your nominations by April 27.

We're still beaming from last month's Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism. At the three-day conference, we showcased how outdoor recreation supports Wisconsin tourism. By all measures, it was a success. We toured places to adventure in La Crosse, ran (or walked) for sunrise views and learned about local collaboration that brings outdoor events to life, outdoor brands that make the gear we use to get outside and how to put an economic impact number on outdoor activity. Special thanks to our keynote speaker, Chris Perkins, Senior Vice President of Programs at [Outdoor Recreation Roundtable](#), and the folks from [Explore La](#)

[Crosse](#), [ORA Trails](#), [Smith's Bikes](#), [Rivoli Theater](#), [Duluth Trading Company](#), [Mercury Marine](#), [St. Croix Rods](#), [Bending Branches](#), [DSG Outerwear](#), [Great River Harley-Davidson](#), [Redfeather Outdoors](#), [Rome Industries](#), [SnowTrekker Tents](#) and the [Wisconsin State Park System](#) for elevating the outdoor theme as hosts, program participants, exhibitors or prize sponsors.

It's a joy to lift and amplify this diverse and dedicated industry. With every collaboration, our network gets stronger. Thank you for all you do.



Cassie Mordini
Director, Office of Outdoor Recreation

P.S. Have you considered how you might celebrate Earth Day this year? Will your business promote outdoor opportunities? Host a class? Volunteer for a stewardship or clean-up event? Take the [Travel Green](#) pledge? Or maybe you'll join us at the [International Trails Summit](#) and learn about sustainable trail design? However you plan to celebrate, we're grateful for Wisconsin's special connection to Earth Day and the many natural resources we enjoy every day.

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](#).*

Wisconsin Governor's Outdoor Industry Awards

We are thrilled to announce the inaugural Wisconsin Governor's Outdoor Industry Awards. This slate of awards recognizes the people, businesses, organizations and places leading Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry. Help recognize the movers and shakers of Wisconsin's outdoor economy and culture!

Submit a Nomination Today

The categories are:

- **Destination of the Year:** This award recognizes an outdoor recreation destination that went above and beyond to enhance outdoor activity, the tourism experience and a community's economic well-being.
- **Outdoor Business of the Year:** Like a compass rose leading the way, this award recognizes an outdoor business that stands out as an exemplary model for the industry

achieving success or growth in the prior year. It recognizes customer service excellence and enthusiastic promotion of outdoor recreation to customers and the local community.

- **Tandem Award for Collaboration:** This award recognizes the collaborative spirit among partnerships. It recognizes organizations and/or businesses that have demonstrated exemplary teamwork by working together to advance outdoor recreation in the past year.
- **Big Tent Award:** This award recognizes a person, destination, organization, business or project that reaches new and diverse audiences to create “a bigger tent” by cultivating participation or fostering welcoming environments for outdoor recreation in Wisconsin.
- **First Ascent Award for Innovation:** This award recognizes an organization or business that implemented an innovative approach to outdoor recreation through a new strategy, technique, project, program or product.
- **Rising Star Award:** This award recognizes an individual new to the outdoor recreation industry — within the last five years — and has shown leadership, commitment and passion for Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry.
- **Trailblazer of the Year:** This award will be presented to an individual who went above and beyond to raise the profile of Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry.

Nominations will be accepted through April 27. All nominees and award winners will be recognized at a special event in June. Learn more about the categories and eligibility and nominate your peers [here](#).

Last Chance for the International Trails Summit

The [International Trails Summit](#) is just a few short weeks away! Registration is filling up quickly, so if you're planning to attend, register today and join the Office of Outdoor Recreation in Madison for a special week of connecting with trail professionals and enthusiasts from around the world for learning, networking, demos and more.

As a conference sponsor, the Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation wants to help you take advantage of this international conference in our backyard. Receive a special discounted rate for Wisconsin residents, a savings of 20% or more (discounted rates are \$500 for the full conference or \$200 for a single day). [Register today!](#) Volunteers are also needed. [Sign up to volunteer](#) and attend a day for free!

Join us on Monday, April 14, before the core summit kicks off, for free gatherings and a Wisconsin Welcome Reception. Network with recreation leaders from across the state and the nation and learn about what's happening close to home and around the country. See the schedule below and [RSVP!](#)

1-2:30 p.m. Sessions

Snow Matters On Your Trail: A Discussion About Winter Trail Systems in a Changing Climate

What is the future of Nordic skiing? If snow is crucial to your cross-country skiing operation, this session is for you.

Facilitated by the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation

Hiking Trails: Best Practices for Engaging Volunteers

Share tips and resources for engaging a limited pool of volunteers in a changing world of trail maintenance.

Facilitated by the Ice Age Trail Alliance

Maintaining 25,000 Miles: Learn About Wisconsin's Association of Snowmobile Clubs

How does a mostly volunteer-led group maintain 25,000 miles of snowmobile trail? Learn what Wisconsin's snowmobile association does and how.

Facilitated by AWSC - Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs

3-5 p.m. Sessions

Developing Wisconsin's Trail Network: Lessons from the Route of the Badger

Explore opportunities for developing a statewide multi-use trail network based on lessons learned from the Route of the Badger in southeastern Wisconsin.

Facilitated by Rails to Trails Conservancy

National Scenic Trails Allied Meeting

If you're involved in a National Scenic Trail, this meeting is for you!

Facilitated by the Ice Age Trail Alliance and North Country Trail Association

Also, from 3-5 p.m., attendees are invited to join one of the national trail caucuses on water trails, motorized trails or equestrian trails for additional networking and learning.

4:30-5:30 p.m.

Wisconsin Mountain Bike Enthusiasts and Professionals Meet and Greet

Discuss statewide opportunities and constraints related to mountain biking in Wisconsin and gauge interest in creating a statewide mountain biking organization.

Facilitated by Mike Repyak, KayperWorks Outdoor Recreation Consulting

5-6:30 p.m.

Wisconsin Welcome Reception

Short program from recreation leaders plus hors d'oeuvres and cash bar.

Hosted by the Office of Outdoor Recreation

Not Horsing Around: The Dollars and Cents of Wisconsin's Equestrian Community

Equestrian sports have roots that predate modern technology. They allow people to connect with animals and nature. These activities quietly thrum through Wisconsin's economy, resulting in a \$134 million industry in 2023, up from \$87 million in 2012. Nationally, Wisconsin ranked 19th for growth in equestrian recreation activities; across the country, equestrian activities accounted for \$7.2 billion of the nation's gross domestic product.

In Wisconsin, the equine industry encompasses manufacturers, retailers, guides, lodging, education, stables and much more – including events like the [Midwest Horse Fair](#).

Since 1979, the Wisconsin Horse Council has welcomed thousands of equestrian aficionados from across the country to Madison for the annual Midwest Horse Fair, held this year from April 11-13. Owned by the Wisconsin Horse Council, the Fair promotes Wisconsin's equine industry through leadership, education, service, communication and future growth and development.

The Fair has a little bit of everything for its 62,000 attendees: 400-plus exhibitors, a rodeo, clinics, demonstrations, shopping and networking. It even includes career exploration components, including the Wisconsin FFA State Horse Evaluation Career Development Event, a competition to advance to the National FFA Convention. In 2024, the Fair broke its Friday attendance record, welcoming an Alliant Energy Center record 23,000 visitors to its first day. [See the Fair in action.](#)

With an estimated \$11 million in economic impact on the Madison area in 2023, event organizers say, "The Midwest Horse Fair may be Madison's best-kept secret, but we are the horse world's best destination." But the Fair isn't the only way the equine industry contributes to Wisconsin's economy and culture.



Whether by two wheels or four legs, there are lots of ways to explore Wisconsin! Dan Wegmueller offers visitors guided trail rides and lessons at [Wegmueller Farm](#) in Monroe - and helps orient gravel cyclists to the countryside.

Equine Businesses Make Hay for Wisconsin

From products to services, businesses catering to horse lovers can be found across Wisconsin. [Evolutionary Saddles](#) specializes in custom-built saddles designed to fit the rider and the horses they ride. Today, Evolutionary Saddles is located in Stratford, but Lara Kronberger moved the business from Minnesota when she bought it. Kronberger and her apprentice make

12 models of Western and English saddles for a variety of disciplines, each designed for rider and horse. Bridles, cinches and other accessories are also handmade by Evolutionary Saddles.

Opened in 2002, [Impact Gel](#) saddle pads are fun, functional and handcrafted equipment for equestrians. The office, product development and manufacturing facility for Impact Gel are all located in Trempealeau County. Impact Gel pads use a patented material made of interconnected, energy-dissipating molecules that absorb and disperse the force of impact from horse saddles. Products are available for sale online, through authorized dealers and now available for shipping to Canada.

The [Elkhorn Equestrian Event Center](#) is one of a handful of private nonprofit fairgrounds in the country. Located on 90 acres, it is part of the Walworth County Fairgrounds. Its five horse arenas, permanent stalls, horse track and 500 campsites (with hookups) have made it one of the largest equestrian event centers in the Midwest!

Equestrian Tourism

From north to south and all points in between, stables dot Wisconsin's landscape, offering boarding, lessons, guided tours and other ways to experience horseback riding.

The English style of horseback riding has led to an increase in the "[riding tourism market size](#)," valued at \$1.8 billion globally in 2024 and projected to reach \$3.5 billion by 2033. The same report cited U.S. Forest Service statistics that approximated 3.8 million individuals participated in equestrian tourism in 2023. Global trends see adventure travel as a driver for the increase in equestrian tourism.

Also contributing to the growth in riding tourism is endurance riding, a specific type of competitive riding where riders and horses travel 50-100 miles a day in a long-distance race. In 2025, almost [20 endurance rides](#) are already planned across Wisconsin on public and private lands. These rides bring out support crews and spectators for two or three days of riding.



Visitors can experience the joy of horse riding at Holiday Acres in Minocqua.

As travelers are looking for experiential activities in nature, Wisconsin's rural communities and existing infrastructure provide growth opportunities for equestrian tourism.

For the traveling equestrian, Wisconsin is home to several facilities offering horseback riding opportunities for visitors of all riding levels. [Spur of the Moment Ranch](#), in Mountain, allows visitors to bring their horses with them or to experience horseback riding with trained staff. [Woodside Ranch Resort and Conference Center](#) offers horseback riding and wagon ride experiences for guests. Located in rural Mauston, the ranch sits on 1,000 acres with optional guided and private horseback rides available.

Many of Wisconsin's state parks are open to horseback riding. In fact, the Wisconsin state park system offers over 700 miles of equestrian trails, with 175 campsites where visitors can camp with their horses.

Development Efforts, Resources and Opportunities

To support and enhance equestrian facilities at state parks and forests, the [Equestrian Friends of Governor Knowles State Forest](#), [Friends of Governor Dodge State Park Equestrians](#), [Northern Kettle Moraine Horse Trail Association](#) and [Southern Kettle Moraine Horse Trail Association](#) raise funds, undertake projects, provide community and learning opportunities and support equestrian facilities at state properties. These groups help ensure equestrian campgrounds and trails have appropriate facilities and infrastructure for horse riders and their horses. The fundraising provided by these groups contributes hundreds of thousands of dollars in improvements to expand recreational access while providing community and fellowship for participants.

Working alongside friends groups, and in addition to organizing the Midwest Horse Fair, the [Wisconsin Horse Council](#) awards sponsorships and trail grants to help equine charity events and clubs, mentors young horse people, initiates new programs, provides leadership and promotion of horses, conducts educational seminars and clinics and sponsors an annual four-day Trail Design School focused on designing and building recreational trails for horseback riding.

Horse trails and campgrounds are not built the same as hiking trails or for tent campsites and should be developed sensitive to the needs of riders and horses. The [U.S. Forest Service Equestrian Design Guidebook](#) offers instructions, steps, funding sources and examples for trail planners, architects, engineers, land managers and developers focused on recreational horseback riding. The guidebook shares important tips and reminders about the needs of horses and the required infrastructure for overnight horse comfort and safety, including corrals, trailer-sized parking areas, tether poles, box stalls, drinking water and more.

While the percentage of Wisconsinites who participate in horseback riding may be small (5%), the opportunity for growth is large. The [2025-2030 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#) received recommendations for more horseback riding opportunities, and with the industry growing, events like the Midwest Horse Fair and endurance races can introduce the activity to new participants and draw visitors from afar to enjoy Wisconsin's equine offerings.

If you know of horseback riding stables or horseback guides in your area, please direct them towards submitting their listing to the Outdoor Business Directory!



Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry is an impressive combination of businesses, manufacturers, outfitters, guides, destinations and nonprofits. Each month, we share information about the industry so you can get to know your peers across the state and learn 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: [Wisconsin Climbers Association](#)

- The Wisconsin Climbers Association serves as a voice for Wisconsin rock climbers, fostering connections within the community and addressing access issues while promoting stewardship of climbing areas.



Professional Services: [Presto Geosystems](#)

- Presto Geosystems, located in Appleton with a worldwide distribution network, provides innovative solutions for designing and building trails, including trail surface stabilization, vegetated retaining walls, slope stabilization, drainage ditches and other greenway applications.



Guides, Tours, Rentals: [Lake Geneva Cruise Line](#)

- Founded in 1873 and offering a wide variety of cruises, Lake Geneva Cruise Line allows visitors to curate a cruise for any occasion, including corporate outings, weddings and other special events, history tours, narrated tours and more on Lake Geneva.



Retailer: [Solstice Outdoors](#)

- Solstice Outdoors is a locally owned outdoor gear store in Ashland, with clothing, gear and accessories for camping, water recreation, winter sports and other activities.



Destinations: [Dyracuse Off-Road Recreational Park](#)

- Dyracuse is a 700-acre recreational park with over 11 miles of track for motocross, ATV/UTV, supercross, motorcycle and other sports. The facilities include a mud play area, a sand bowl, a challenge course and more amenities for motorized sporting activities.

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

Outdoor Rec Award Winners at WIGCOT

At the Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism in March, three outdoor recreation organizations were recognized with [Governor's Tourism Award](#) wins, the [Friends of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore](#) (Bright IDEA Award), Skelly's Farm Market (Innovation Award) and Will Jeffrey at American Pond Hockey (Service Excellence Award). Congratulations!

Five Wisconsin Businesses Listed as Bicycle Friendly Businesses

Five organizations in Fitchburg were added to the League of American Bicyclists' list of Bicycle Friendly Communities this spring. Fitchburg is tied for sixth in the nation for the number of Bicycle Friendly Businesses and has the most in Wisconsin. [Learn more.](#)

Henry Repeating Arms Transfers All Manufacturing to Wisconsin

Henry Repeating Arms, maker of action rifles since 1996, is moving all manufacturing from New Jersey to its Rice Lake and Ladysmith facilities, bringing the total number of jobs in the area to 685. [Read more.](#)

Connecting Entrepreneurial Communities Conference Registration Open

Early bird registration for the 2nd CEC Conference in Wisconsin Rapids is now open. The conference, "about small towns, for small towns," is aimed at economic developers, local government leaders and community champions. The conference is June 16-18. [Learn more.](#)

Wisconsin Bike Federation Wins National Award

The Wisconsin Bike Federation won the [National Award for Advocacy](#) at the League of American Bicyclists' National Bike Summit. One way that the Bike Fed elevates bike tourism is through the annual Ride Across Wisconsin, which will celebrate 10 years in 2025 with new routes in the Eau Claire area. [Learn more.](#)

RESOURCES

Sustainable Funding for Outdoor Recreation Webinar Series

The Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals is offering a free webinar series every Monday in April that brings together experts in economic and community development, conservation finances and recreation management to share practical tools and successful case studies for creating lasting financial solutions in the outdoor recreation sector. [Learn more.](#)

Snowmobile and ATV/UTV Trail Grant Applications Due April 15

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is accepting grant applications for [ATV/UTV Trail Aid projects](#) and [Snowmobile Trail Aid projects](#). Maintenance applications must be resubmitted annually. Applications that were not funded in 2024 can be re-submitted. Deadline to apply is April 15.

IMBA Trail Accelerator Grants Now Accepted

International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) Trail Accelerator Grant applications are accepted now through April 30 specifically for mountain biking planning and design services. [Learn more.](#)

Registration Open for Mountain Biking Foundations Course

Hosted by IMBA, the Foundations two-day intensive workshop teaches attendees how to build an intentional community trail system from planning to maintenance and promotion. Workshop dates are May 7-8 (in Winona, MN) and Oct. 1-2 (in Duluth, MN). [Learn more.](#)

Webinar on Best Practices for Collaborative Art Programming on Trails

This free “Trail Talk” webinar from Rails to Trails Conservancy’s Bay Area Trails Collaborative featured a panel of experts who discussed placemaking on trails through art and best practices for arts/trails programming. [View the webinar.](#)

Pedestrian Safety in Tribal Areas Report Available

A new study from the Federal Highway Administration, *A Systemic Safety Study of Pedestrians in Tribal Areas*, explores effective ways to enhance pedestrian safety in Tribal communities. This study offers a suite of tools and resources designed to assist in identifying high-risk areas, selecting appropriate countermeasures and prioritizing improvements to reduce pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries in Tribal areas. [Read the report.](#)

JOB LISTINGS

Several positions, Gage Marine Corporation, Lake Geneva. [Learn more.](#)

Seasonal opportunities, Wisconsin State Park System, statewide. [Learn more.](#)

Several positions, Harley-Davidson, Menomonee Falls, Wauwatosa, Milwaukee and Tomahawk. [Learn more.](#)

Service department positions, Wheel and Sprocket, across Wisconsin. [Learn more.](#)

If you have an outdoor recreation job posting you'd like us to include, please send a link to the posting to orec@travelwisconsin.com.

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



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