

[Having trouble viewing this email? View it as a web page.](#)

# WISCONSIN

— OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION —



## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Before every race, athletes warm up, do their final stretches to stay loose and run the course through their minds. They may recite their favorite motivational mantras as they visualize the perfect race as they intend to perform it. From skiers at the Birkie to cyclists at the U.S. Fat Bike Open to racers at the Manawa Snodeo, competitors of all types found themselves behind the starting line this winter, ready to seize their moment.

Over the past several months, we've been building our strategy. The time involved in planning feels a little bit like the months of practice working up to race day, and here we are behind the starting line visualizing the year ahead, race jitters and all. It's so exciting to share our [2025-2030 Strategic Plan](#) with you. Plus, we have so much programming lined up this spring – we really are off to the races!

In our new strategic plan, we've identified four imperatives that will guide our efforts and focus our resources where they can have the most impact.

- **Amplify Outdoor Recreation** – championing outdoor recreation as a valued element of our economy and culture and ensuring it is widely and positively known beyond our borders.

- **Fuel Development and Innovation** – providing resources, materials and support to continue providing world-class outdoor recreation products and experiences.
- **Strengthen the Network** – supporting outdoor businesses and connecting partners for economic success and engendering industry pride.
- **Uphold Organizational Success** – expanding our impact with ambition and purpose.

As we share this new plan, we have program announcements and updates, too! From the “Boundless” outdoor recreation content and fun at the [Wisconsin Governor’s Conference on Tourism](#) in just a few days (read more below) to the International Trails Summit (ITS) in April (get the details on the special Wisconsin-specific events and discounts [here](#)), we are excited to amplify outdoor recreation among tourism colleagues and industry professionals from around the country. We’re also thrilled to provide space at ITS for Wisconsin leaders to gather and connect to strengthen the network.

And, hot off the press – we are launching a second round of the Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact program. See the details below and mark your calendars for the two workshops – open to anyone who registers – on March 25 and April 8.

The adrenaline rush is real! We look forward to seeing you “out on the course.” We’ll be cheering you on with even more cowbell!



Cassie Mordini  
Director, Office of Outdoor Recreation

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](#).*

---

## Join Us for “Boundless” Outdoor Fun at WIGCOT 2025

Backpacking on the “Boundless” theme of this year’s Wisconsin Governor’s Conference on Tourism (WIGCOT), the Office of Outdoor Recreation is working with partners in La Crosse to

host several additional outdoor activities for the conference. You can find them in the [agenda](#) with a green “Outdoor Recreation (Optional Activity)” tag.

It’s not just fun and adventure. The Office is arranging several not-to-miss outdoor-focused sessions. We are excited to welcome Chris Perkins, Senior Vice President of [Outdoor Recreation Roundtable](#), to the main stage on Tuesday, to talk about the opportunity in outdoor recreation and how destinations can leverage this massive industry. The Office is also hosting a campfire chat with Perkins, leading two outdoor recreation-focused breakout sessions and arranging a main stage Boundless Brands panel with experts from Wisconsin’s iconic outdoor companies. We’re also looking forward to co-hosting the Seasonal Reporter Happy Hour to celebrate the [2024 ESTO Mercury Award](#) and share our appreciation for the many volunteers who update reports on the Wisconsin Snow, Trail and Fall Color Reports.

Here are the outdoor recreation highlights for this year’s WIGCOT to add to your personal agenda for the conference:

### **Sunday, March 9**

- 12 - 2 p.m.                      **Destination ORA Trails Field Trip**  
*Hop on the bus to experience some of La Crosse’s best outdoor destinations. This activity requires additional registration as capacity is limited. See the [agenda](#) for more details.*
- 6 - 9 p.m.                        **Opening Reception: The WIGCOT Starting Line**  
*Kick off the conference with an outdoor-themed and interactive experience featuring Wisconsin’s outdoors.*

### **Monday, March 10**

- 6:30 - 7:30 a.m.                **Sunrise Run/Walk**  
*Start your day with some fresh air! Hosted by the Office.*
- 11 - 12 p.m.                    **Put a Number on It: Measuring the Impact of Outdoor Enthusiasts**  
*Learn how communities used the “do-it-yourself” process to understand the value of outdoor recreation users.*
- 2 - 3:15 p.m.                    **Boundless Brands**  
*Hear how some of America’s most iconic outdoor brands have achieved success from their home base in Wisconsin. Featuring Duluth Trading Co., Mercury Marine and St. Croix Rod.*
- 5:45 - 7:15 p.m.                **Pizza and a Premiere**  
*Join Smith’s Bikes and ORA Trails at the historic Rivoli Theatre for pizza, drinks and viewing of the short documentary “Wired to Inspire: Riding the La Crosse Omnium.” Tickets required. See [agenda](#) to purchase.*

### **Tuesday, March 11**

- 10 - 10:45 a.m.      **A Summit of Opportunity: How Outdoor Recreation Builds Communities, Economies and Tourism**  
*Chris Perkins of Outdoor Recreation Roundtable will share the national outlook on outdoor recreation, how Wisconsin stacks up and how tourism can harness the momentum.*
- 11 a.m. - 12 p.m.      **Leveraging Your Community Assets to Cultivate a Thriving Destination**  
*Join WEDC's Downtown Development Manager for a conversation with panelists leveraging their outdoors, arts, unique culture and spirit to attract visitors.*
- 3:30 - 4:30 p.m.      **Campfire Chat: Stories of Rising Outdoor Recreation Communities**  
*Hear how communities are diversifying their economies by branding their destination with outdoor recreation at the center.*

Registration rates increase March 4 for the March 9-11 conference in La Crosse. Don't wait another day to secure your spot.

[REGISTER NOW](#)

---

## Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact Workshop Returns This Spring

Save the dates for the 2025 DIY Economic Impact Workshop Series:

**Tuesday, March 25, 12:00-1:00 p.m.**

**Tuesday, April 8, 12:00-1:00 p.m.**

Back by popular demand, this year's DIY program includes two online workshops open to anyone who registers. Following the workshops, participants can apply for one-on-one coaching to discover the economic value of your outdoor recreation infrastructure and create a designed report. Participation in the one-on-one coaching and report production will be limited to six teams and is anticipated to occur May – November 2025.

[Learn More](#)

[Register Today](#)

---

## Breaking Trail: Women Entrepreneurs in Wisconsin's Outdoor Recreation Industry

Across the country, women own 39% of all U.S. firms employing millions of people and generating \$2.7 trillion annually. The [same study](#) listed the Wisconsin-Indiana-Chicago-Naperville metro area as one of the best for women-owned businesses in 2023. Across Wisconsin, women are movers and shakers in the outdoor recreation industry, in visible and behind-the-scenes roles.

A 2023 report from the [Extension Community Economic Development](#) program stated:

While the retail trade sector claims the third-largest share of women-owned businesses, it boasts the highest number of such enterprises, totaling nearly 25,000 across the state. These women-led retail businesses contribute significantly to the local economy and are instrumental in providing diverse products and services to Wisconsin's consumers.

In Wisconsin, women hold key positions at many outdoor recreation businesses, both retail and non-retail. For example, Elizabeth Ganser is at the helm of her family's [Fontana Sports](#) business. The multigenerational retail and gear shop was founded in 1949 by Ganser's grandparents and continues to be a fixture in downtown Madison along State Street. A recent addition in downtown Eau Claire is Kate Felton's [Eau Claire Outdoors](#), retailer and outfitter. Felton received a 2023 Red Letter Grant to help start up her business. (More about the Red Letter Grant and other resources is included below.)

Randi Pueschner and Breanna VanDeHey each run bike shops, Pueschner in La Crosse at [Smith's Bike Shop](#) and VanDeHey in Stevens Point at [Hostel Shoppe](#). Smith's Bikes is celebrating 130 years this year and part of its staying power is its commitment to community. VanDeHey loves helping people find their perfect bike and offers a wide variety of cycles for all abilities, like recumbent bicycles and tricycles, which open up cycling access for people with a wide range of physical abilities.

Frustrated with the limited selection of women's snowmobiling gear, Wendy Gavinski founded [DSG Outerwear](#) in 2010 out of her basement in Wisconsin. Today, she has a storefront in Madison and an exclusive deal with a Canadian distributor. In 2024, [Field & Stream](#) magazine selected the DSG Outerwear Kylie 3-in-1 Camouflage Jacket as one of the 7 Best Women's Hunting Jackets, ranking it as the "Most Versatile."

It's not just retail where women are leading the way. Beth Handle owns and operates [Milwaukee Kayak Company](#), providing kayak, canoe and paddleboard rentals, as well as weekly guided tours. Her own adventures on Milwaukee's rivers led her to open her business, which also allows her a way to promote the city, a healthy lifestyle and outdoor recreation.



*Tina Murray owns Shenanigans, a fly fishing guide and trip service. Murray and Meyer were featured in a [2023 Midwest Living profile](#) of female fly fishers. Photo credit: Kathryn Gamble*

[The Driftless Angler](#) in downtown Viroqua is nestled in a world-class spot for spring-creek fishing. Geri Meyer not only started the store in 2006 but is also one of the shop's guides. She continues to be a leader in engaging women to experience – and stick with – fly fishing.

Adventure travel consultant, author, inspirational speaker, paddling and wilderness camping guide and “Soul Proprietor” are just a few of the ways that Paige Olson describes herself. Olson established [Kinni Creek Lodge & Outfitters](#) in 2000 in River Falls with three guest rooms and two canoe rentals. Over the last 25 years, she has expanded the lodging to include a bed and breakfast and vacation cabin rental with 250 kayaks available for rent. She also added a fly shop, fly fishing guides and fly fishing schools to meet the demand of her location along a Class 1 trout stream.

In northern Wisconsin, Suzann Mouw and Ronda Tworek are responding to visitor needs for the Sawyer County biking and skiing scene. Mouw runs [ROAM Adventure Base Camp](#) and Tworek operates [Home Base at Mt. Telemark Village](#); both offer non-traditional lodging for outdoor recreationists looking for atmosphere, affordability and accommodation.

[Johnson Outdoors](#) is a publicly traded, national company that owns several well-known outdoor recreation brands, such as Jetboil backpacking stoves, Old Town boats, SCUBAPRO diving gear and Humminbird fishing equipment. At its Racine headquarters, Helen Johnson-Leipold serves as chair and CEO.

These are just a few women behind the businesses that make up Wisconsin's \$11.2 billion outdoor recreation industry.

### **Resources for Women Business Owners and Aspiring Entrepreneurs**

In a [report to the U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship](#) in 2023, women face unique barriers to starting their own businesses compared to their male counterparts, such as obstacles to securing capital and venture capital, childcare access and affordability and gaps in mentoring opportunities to start their entrepreneurship journeys. To help counter those unique barriers, several programs and resources in Wisconsin are designed specifically to support women.

The [Wisconsin Women's Business Conference](#), held this year on November 12 in Eau Claire, is an annual event hosted by the [Western Wisconsin Women's Business Center](#). The conference is an opportunity to hear speakers and visionaries, connect with other women leaders and gain access to resources, sessions and services. The Women's Business Center can help clients with business plan development, financial projections, group training and more.

Also in western Wisconsin, the [Red Letter Grant](#) is a nonprofit organization that offers start-up capital grants to women, curates small business workshops and cultivates a mentor/peer

network for women entrepreneurs. Women in 18 Wisconsin counties are eligible to apply. The Indigenous Women's Grant is open to Indigenous women from any Wisconsin county. Applications for 2025 are accepted from March 3 to April 7. [Learn more.](#)

The [Wisconsin Woman-Owned Business Certification Program](#) promotes certified companies to corporations and government agencies that are actively seeking to conduct business with women-owned businesses. The certification is for businesses that are 51% owned, controlled, operated or managed by women and opens access to technical and marketing assistance.

The [Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation](#) (WWBIC), founded in 1987, hosts six regional Women's Business Centers of the U.S. Small Business Administration across Wisconsin. The WWBIC provides access to capital and funding, financial wellness programs, classes, training, coaching and more for new entrepreneurs and seasoned business owners. Interested clients can reach out to the WWBIC in person or online.



*Beth Handle utilized business planning classes at WWBIC to help her get Milwaukee Kayak Company afloat. Photo credit: Milwaukee Independent.*

The [Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation](#) can help small businesses get off the ground. Their collection of resources, training, programs and coaching can help aspiring and struggling entrepreneurs access resources and expertise.

Similar to the U.S. Senate Committee report, the [Universities of Wisconsin Office of Business & Entrepreneurship](#) notes that historically, fewer women entrepreneurs get capital and overall receive smaller amounts compared to men. The OBE's innovative curriculum through the [Capital Readiness Program](#), powered by the Minority Business Development Agency, helps women entrepreneurs get more capital. The next cohort runs in fall 2025.

For the first time ever, in 2023, the rate of females participating in outdoor recreation reached 51.9%, up from 50% in 2022, according to the Outdoor Industry Association Outdoor Participation Report. And, more women (55%) participated in the outdoors than men. [National data](#) find that women-owned business earnings increased 27% from 2021 to 2022. Women have been gaining a foothold in owning and profiting from businesses. Like running up that hill, the rate of women owning outdoor recreation businesses in Wisconsin is making steady progress.

*We want to hear from you! If you're a woman-owned business, please [reach out to us](#) so we can add you to the Wisconsin Outdoor Business Directory and contact you for future profiles.*



## 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 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 River Trail Organization](#)**

- Wisconsin River Trail Organization is a community-driven nonprofit organization creating a hiking/biking trail in the Southwest Driftless Area of Wisconsin.



**Professional Services: [Wickcraft Boardwalks](#)**

- Wickcraft Boardwalks uses HSS structural steel to build decking and handrail components for boardwalk design and improvement. Located in Madison, Wickcraft builds boardwalk components using certified welders and fabricators.



**Guides, Tours, Rentals: [Brule River Canoe Rental](#)**

- Brule River Canoe Rental offers canoe, sea kayak, whitewater kayak and recreational kayaks for rent and use along the Brule River out of Brule. Beginner, intermediate, advanced and overnight trips and shuttle service are also available.





Retailer: [Emery's Cycling, Triathlon and Fitness](#)

- Located in Milwaukee and Menomonee Falls, Emery's offers equipment for biking and triathlons, including adaptive, electric, mountain and hybrid bikes and triathlon gear.



Destinations: [Treehaven](#)

- Treehaven, at UW-Stevens Point, is an integrated natural resources education, management, research and recreation center with public programs and hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country ski trails.

*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

### Ask A Trail Builder

Do you have a question about mountain biking trails? Pose your question to the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) and you may receive a video response from IMBA's team of professional trail planners, designers and builders. [Learn more and view the series.](#)

### Run for the Trees this April

Sign up by April 1 for the Run for the Trees: Happy Little (Virtual) 5K, happening April 19-27. When you register, select Wisconsin to help raise awareness of and money for tree planting during the week of Earth Day to Arbor Day. As a participant, you'll pick the pace and place to do your outdoor run, plus receive a commemorative T-shirt and medal. Sign up as a group or an individual. [Learn more.](#)

### Let's Ride Expo Looking for Sponsors and Exhibitors

The Wisconsin ATV and UTV Association, along with other motorized recreation user groups, are hosting the first-ever Let's Ride Expo, a celebration of off and on-road motorized recreation opportunities in Wisconsin. The expo is May 2-4 at the Sunnyview Expo Center in Oshkosh. Organizers are seeking exhibitors, sponsors and vendors. [Learn more.](#)

## RESOURCES

Rural and Tribal Community Technical Assistance Grants Open March 4

The U.S. Department of Transportation's Rural and Tribal Assistance Pilot Program is offering \$27 million in technical assistance grants to rural and tribal communities for the planning and design phases of development for transportation projects. Applications will be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. [Learn more here.](#)

### **Apply By March 11 for Fast Forward Program**

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development is now accepting applications for Wisconsin Fast Forward industry sector worker training grants. This grant helps fund innovative and collaborative customized worker training programs, with grants available to companies of any size in all industry sectors. [Learn more.](#)

### ***Making the Case for Tourism-Oriented Mountain Bike and Adaptive Recreation Webinar***

This upcoming webinar on March 13 provides an overview of an economic impact analysis for an accessible tourism-oriented mountain bike trail network. American Trails is sponsoring this free webinar. [Register here.](#)

### **Local Data for Equitable Communities Program Deadline March 18**

The Urban Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation will select 30 nonprofits to each receive a \$50,000 grant to use data to improve local conditions and help residents live their healthiest lives. The program helps nonprofits use data to catalyze local action and address inequities in the physical, economic and social conditions of a place. [Learn more.](#)

### **T-Mobile Hometown Grants Due March 31**

Main Street America is partnering with T-Mobile to provide grants of up to \$50,000 to communities with populations of 50,000 or less to build stronger, more prosperous small towns and rural communities. [Learn more.](#)

---

## **JOB LISTINGS**

**Executive Director**, Friends of Wisconsin State Parks, statewide. [Email to learn more.](#)

**Kayak Guides**, Cave Point Paddle & Pedal, Jacksonport. [Learn more.](#)

**Bicycle mechanics, assemblers and sales associates**, Emery's, Milwaukee and Menomonee Falls. [Learn more.](#)

**Several positions**, Kampgrounds of America, Hayward and Oakdale. [Learn more.](#)

**Seasonal staff positions**, Wisconsin State Park System, statewide. [Learn more.](#)

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

**Several positions**, Mercury Marine, Fond du Lac or Menomonee Falls. [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](mailto:orec@travelwisconsin.com).*

---

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

**Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation | 3319 West Beltline Highway | Madison, WI 53713**

**Website | 1-800-432-8747 | [LinkedIn](#) | [Unsubscribe](#)**