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WISCONSIN

— OFFICE OF OUTDOOR RECREATION —



WISCONSIN OUTSIDE | May 2023

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Water. It's a basic human need, and for Wisconsin, it's also a huge asset that helps drive our economy. We're home to the largest paddle company in the world, the largest fishing rod company in the country, and makers of boats, motors, lures, docks and more. No doubt these companies planted their roots in Wisconsin out of the inspiration provided by our beautiful rivers and lakes. In fact, Loon Paddle Company of Appleton brands itself as "born on the deep, cool lakes of northern Wisconsin" pointing out its credibility and uniqueness as a company that "crafts flat-water stand up paddle boards" in a growing market. (Learn more about them in the Meet Your Industry section below.)

Wisconsin's two Great Lakes, 15,000 inland lakes, 84,000 miles of rivers and streams offer nearly endless access to pristine fresh water. It's almost hard to imagine what an impactful benefit all of this water is to local communities and the state. That's why in this issue of *Wisconsin Outside*, we're connecting the dots of water quality and access to illustrate the economic impact of this natural asset.

We're also connecting you with several funding opportunities from federal grants that have opened or will open soon. Please review the Resources section below to learn more and take advantage of these opportunities.

This weekend and next week, the Office will be on the road to continue sharing the importance of Wisconsin's outdoor industry during National Travel and Tourism Week. This includes stops at the Governor's Fishing Opener, Visit Wausau's annual State of Tourism luncheon to discuss the effects of outdoor recreation, and a speaking engagement at the St. Croix Valley Tourism Summit to present the important economic impact of the outdoor recreation industry and our partners.

We hope to see you outside as we kick off fishing season, as trails dry out (check the [Wisconsin Trail Report](#) for conditions or [become a volunteer trail reporter](#)) or at events, races and festivals that will undoubtedly celebrate Wisconsin's remarkable outdoors.

Happy Trails,



Mary Monroe Brown
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](#).*

Healthy Rivers, Healthy Economy

For boating, cruising, fishing, paddling or camping, Wisconsin's 84,000 miles of rivers and streams offer a plethora of outdoor recreation opportunities, and travelers flock to these watery destinations. The state's rivers are also harnessed for their fierce energy to run mills and factories or to transport goods. For both reasons, Wisconsin's rivers are an important natural asset the state's economy relies on.

The Native Americans and First Nations used waterways for transportation and trade, as well as to harvest wild rice and fish to feed their families. As Wisconsin became more populated with European settlers, cities often developed central hubs around rivers as they were extremely important for powering industry and acting as the main transportation routes for large amounts of goods.

Recreation on rivers was popular, but as time passed, trains and automobiles took over as the main means of transport. And soon, commerce and recreation turned its attention

from rivers to the cities' streets. As a result, river health declined and recreation on the river nearly disappeared for many decades.

While our rivers remain important transit routes, today, however, we also see boaters out for a leisurely ride, canoes and kayaks dotting a river's edge, anglers casting a line, and even people swimming, floating or splashing in the river. As water quality and ecosystem health returned to the rivers, so has recreation.



In the Wisconsin Dells, visitors explore the Wisconsin River, its rock formations and sandbars, aboard one of the popular amphibious trucks, known as "Ducks." Several [tour operators](#) provide services in the area.

Organizations like [River Alliance of Wisconsin](#) and [Milwaukee Riverkeeper](#) have spent decades working for clean water. This year, River Alliance of Wisconsin celebrates 30 years of supporting local, grassroots organizations and their efforts to clean and protect rivers across the state. The organization has been a partner in a number of large-scale efforts including the removal of defunct and abandoned dams [on the Baraboo River](#) in the late '90s and early 2000s, a project still pointed to as an example of river restoration. Now one of the longest unobstructed stretches of restored river in the U.S., the project brought back fish species, water quality, increased recreation and contributed to downtown revitalization with the addition of a riverwalk in Baraboo and new businesses like Driftless Glen Distillery.

A similar story of revival is the one of the Milwaukee River. Milwaukee Riverkeeper engages volunteers and citizen scientists for river clean-ups, water quality monitoring and other restoration projects. In celebration of the success of these efforts reaching a water quality safe for swimming, in 2018, the Milwaukee Riverkeeper co-hosted the

[Cream City Classic Open Water Swim](#). [More than 70 people participated in a one-and-a-half mile swim](#) in the Milwaukee River. Other evidence of success are the five different vendors renting paddling equipment that now call the Milwaukee River home, in addition to vendors who offer boat rentals and tours. Many piers and a riverwalk line the banks and draw visitors and residents to the water to enjoy the city and its local flavors from another perspective.



The Namekagon River is a tributary of the St. Croix River and is included as part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers designation as part of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. [Jack's Canoe Rental](#), a family-owned business has operated on the river for more than 50 years.

Wisconsin has been at the forefront of recognizing the importance of its rivers. In 1968, at the signing of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, two Wisconsin rivers were among the first group (there were eight total) designated. Today, one of the two, the [St. Croix National Scenic Riverway](#), is managed by the National Park Service and draws paddlers to experience the river's natural state. Just outside this flowing park's boundaries, the river's banks are home to the world's largest paddling manufacturer, [Bending Branches](#). The 24-mile stretch of the wild and scenic Wolf River travels through the Menominee Reservation to Keshena Falls. Outfitters like [Shotgun Eddy](#) and [BearPaw Outdoor Center](#) offer rentals and guided trips through the exciting whitewater sections of the river.



The many sandbars that dot the Lower Wisconsin River are popular for camping. Many businesses offer paddling equipment for rental, suggested overnight itineraries and/or lodging, food and beverage amenities including [Bender's Bluff View Canoe Rentals](#), [WI River Outings](#), [Wisconsin Canoe Company](#), [Wisconsin Riverside Resort](#) and [Trader's Bar & Grill](#).

The 92 miles of the [Lower Wisconsin State Riverway](#), designated in 1989, is the longest free-flowing stretch of river in the Midwest and has been recognized as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. It is a haven for paddlers and anglers all summer, and it also supports a number of outfitters located from Prairie du Sac to Prairie du Chien and is the natural feature of Wisconsin's 100-mile Scenic Byway 60.

Wisconsin's healthy rivers are teeming with fish, too, luring anglers from across the country who spend \$1.2 billion in our state each year. With such a spectacular resource in our backyard, these waters support several businesses and manufacturers that make and sell fishing, boating and paddling gear – [Mepps Lures](#), [St. Croix Rod](#), [MirroCraft](#) aluminum boats, [Loon Paddle Company](#), and the list goes on. Thriving rivers – a key resource of Wisconsin's large outdoor industry – have benefits that support a healthy, thriving economy.



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 your May industry highlights:



Nonprofit: [Clean Lakes Alliance](#)

- Clean Lakes Alliance is devoted to improving the water quality of the lakes, streams and wetlands of the Yahara River Watershed and produces the Lake Forecast which provides real-time water quality conditions of the lakes during monitoring season.



Manufacturer: [Loon Paddle Company](#)

- Born on the deep, cool lakes of northern Wisconsin and based out of Appleton, Loon Paddle Company crafts flat-water stand up paddle boards specially engineered for accelerated tracking, agility and balance, with an aesthetic inspired by lake life.



Guides & Tours: [WI River Outings](#)

- For over 20 years, WI River Outings, based in Boscobel, has been outfitting paddlers to experience the wilderness of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway on their single-day and overnight camping trips.



Rental & Retailer: [Coontail](#)

- With locations in Boulder Junction and Arbor Vitae, Coontail has been serving the Northwoods for more than 30 years as a retailer of outdoor gear and clothing and as provider of bike, watersport and winter sport equipment rentals.



Destinations: [St. Croix Valley Regional Tourism Alliance](#)

- St. Croix Valley Regional Tourism Alliance collaborates with 19 community partners along the St. Croix River, from St. Croix Falls in the north to Prescott in the south, to promote the area as a wild and scenic destination to explore.

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

"Check Out Wisconsin State Parks at Your Library" Program Expands

The program piloted last year with 20 libraries has expanded to 160 libraries that will offer nearly 6,000 single-day vehicle admissions to any state park, forest or recreation area. To learn more about the program and a list of participating libraries, [read the release](#).

RESOURCES

Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Grant Open

The SS4A program supports the National Roadway Safety Strategy to achieve zero deaths and injuries on roadways and funds the development of action plans, the design and development activities for projects, as well as implementation of projects in an action plan. Deadline to apply is July 10. [Learn more](#).

Thriving Communities Program Opening Soon

In 2022, the Thriving Communities Program awarded funding to coalitions of organizations and nonprofits as “capacity builders” to provide technical assistance to 64 under-resourced communities to advance transformative infrastructure projects. [Learn more](#) to prepare for the 2023 opportunity.

Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) Program Opening Soon

The RCP program will provide \$1 billion in funding over the next five years to support planning, capital construction and technical assistance to restore community connectivity equitably and safely. [Learn more](#).

Neighborhood Access and Equity (NAE) Program Opening Soon

The NAE will provide \$3 billion over the next 5 years to improve connectivity in communities affected by divisive infrastructure and will prioritize active transportation projects in economically disadvantaged areas. [Learn more](#).

Rural Surface Transportation Grant (RSTG) Program Opening Soon

The RSTG program provides \$2 billion over five fiscal years to support projects that will improve and expand surface transportation infrastructure in rural areas—with the goal of increasing connectivity. [Learn more](#).

Boating Infrastructure Grant (BIG) Deadline June 1

Funding to construct, renovate and maintain boating infrastructure facilities for transient recreational vessels at least 26 feet long. Program administered by Wisconsin DNR. [Learn more.](#)

Recreational Boating Facilities Grant Deadline June 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.](#)

Using Labor Market Information to Address Rural Workforce Challenges

Hosted by the University of Wisconsin Division of Extension's Community Economic Development, the free webinar on May 11 will highlight several rural workforce challenges and provide insights and resources for workforce development planning. [Learn more and register.](#)

EVENTS

Tues May 2	Discovery Bird Walk @ Kohler-Andrae	Sheboygan
Fri-Sat May 5-6	Wisconsin Governor's Fishing Opener	Phillips
Fri-Sun May 5-7	La Crosse Omnium	La Crosse
Sat May 6	WI Ledge Niagara Escarpment Tour	Waukesha
Sat May 6	Rails-to-Trails Celebration & Bike Expo	Sparta
Sat May 6	Dutch Oven Cooking @ Sandhill	Babcock
Sat May 6	Forest Bathing @ Interstate	St. Croix Falls
Sat-Sun May 6-7	WORS Iola Bump & Jump	Iola
Sat May 6	Teaching Safe Bicycling	Eau Claire
Sun May 7	Smart Cycling for Women	Milwaukee
Mon May 8	Teaching Safe Bicycling	Whitefish Bay
Fri-Sun May 12-14	Horicon Marsh Bird Festival	Horicon
Sat May 13	OutWiGo Green @ Kettle Moraine South	Dousman
Tues May 16	Tuesdays @ Washington Park Velodrome	Kenosha
Thurs-Sat May 18-20	Chequamegon Birding & Nature Festival	Ashland
Fri May 19	Teaching Safe Bicycling	Menasha
Sat May 20	WORS Englewood Open	Fall River
Sat May 20	Pancake Time Trial	Merrill
Sat May 20	Orienteering & Emergency Gear	Hartford
Thurs May 25	Winnebago Walleye Series	Malone

Sat May 27	<u>Rib Mountain Adventure Challenge</u>	Wausau
Sat May 27	<u>Fishing Clinic @ Lakeshore State Park</u>	Milwaukee
Sat May 27	<u>1st Aquanut Water Ski Show</u>	Twin Lakes

Add your events to TravelWisconsin.com to increase your reach. Events should be marketed to a statewide audience or beyond. Read the full criteria [here](#). Login to the Travel Wisconsin database to submit a listing or fill out the [event form](#) [here](#). Please also keep the Office up to date on the events, projects and news in your area by adding orec@travelwisconsin.com to your email distribution lists. A few selected events are highlighted here each month.

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



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