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WISCONSIN OUTSIDE | May 2025

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Just as the spring ephemerals bloom, catching the eyes of hikers as they pass by, Wisconsin is getting a second look from visitors and outdoor professionals. Last month, nearly 900 passionate trail professionals and advocates from across the world along with the [Confluence of States](#) gathered in Madison for the [International Trails Summit](#). It was a true honor and pleasure to welcome this group to Wisconsin. Throughout the week, we heard over and over that folks appreciated our Wisconsin hospitality. No big surprise there! But we also heard comments like, “Wow, I never knew Wisconsin...” or “I can’t believe all the cool things happening here...” or “I’ll have to come back!”

Amplifying Wisconsin’s outdoor recreation offerings, industry and professionals is one of the Office’s strategic imperatives. Getting this done at the Summit was a true team effort from the very beginning, from [Destination Madison](#) who worked to secure the event, to [Dane County Parks](#) who hosted and coordinated the off-site demonstration day, to the [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#) (DNR) who provided support and volunteers, plus the local trailbuilders and global companies that provided knowledge and equipment for attendees to test out. Even [Wisconsin’s NICA League](#) brought a contingent of athletes who were able to learn about trail building and try out equipment, cultivating the next generation of trail professionals – a first for the Summit.

Wisconsin really shined throughout the Summit, and we are grateful to all those who helped to plan the event, present at a session, volunteer to help things run smoothly and attend to build knowledge and make new connections. Thank you!

Blooming spring ephemerals are also catching the eyes of eager anglers. With melting snow and ice, budding plants and soon, buzzing insects, the waters will be open for fishing. This weekend marks the [opening of fishing season](#) for most species. A new tool from the DNR helps make finding your fishing spot even easier. Check out the new [Wisconsin Fishing Finder](#) or read this [Field & Stream article](#) about the making of a [Mepps](#) Aglia lure to get you ready for the season.



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](#).

Families Know How to Wisconsin Outdoors

Wisconsinites know we have something special for outdoor lovers. The abundant options available in Wisconsin make it a perfect natural playground for families with kids of all ages, from toddlers to teens. With a record [175.8 million people participating in outdoor recreation](#) across the country, Wisconsin has a lot to offer this growing market and an opportunity to capture a larger share of spending.

Data from Kampgrounds of America (KOA) can provide insight into Wisconsin's outdoor recreation travel industry for marketing to family travelers. According to a 2024 [KOA Report](#), the number of families camping increased 30% from 2020 to 2023. This trend holds true at home: at the campgrounds within the popular Wisconsin camping location [Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest](#), [campsite nights increased 31% from 2019 to 2023](#). (Pro tip: even more family fun is happening at the [Centennial Celebration](#) for the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest this year!)

In the KOA survey, almost half (47%) of all camping households surveyed said they included multiple generations in their camping trips. The report found that the most mentioned barrier to camping is keeping children entertained. The KOA report also shed light on another trend that emerged in 2023: campers participate in "blended travel" by integrating camping with other types of travel. A takeaway from this research is that campgrounds with or near amenities,

services and diverse activities are more attractive and hospitable to multi-generational family travelers.

Whether you're a destination marketing organization, a campground, an outdoor business or a recreational user group, you can utilize trend reports to help you target families who like the outdoors and make destinations appealing to families. More reports and research are available through the [OOR's Research Library](#).



"Teens who have multiple camping experiences become some of the most avid adult campers. They not only camp more often, but are likely to continue camping," a 2023 KOA survey found.

Wisconsin Outranks Its Competitors

In a recent Longwoods International study conducted for Travel Wisconsin, Wisconsin ranked #1 in family atmosphere against its closest competitors. This summer, expect to see [Travel Wisconsin](#) content lean into the fun and family-friendly things to do outdoors. The Travel Wisconsin [summer campaign](#) highlights [water-based outdoor recreation](#) and [family travel](#), among other Wisconsin favorites.

One of the reasons we believe Wisconsin ranks high in family atmosphere is that new and improved offerings are continually added to the outdoor recreation inventory. This summer, there's even more to love and explore with new trails, amenities and activities for families.

[Standing Rocks County Park](#) in Stevens Point just completed renovations to the mountain biking trails, adding mileage to single-track trails at this 524-acre park. For paddling families, in [Portage](#), a new accessible canoe and kayak launch takes paddlers to a section of the Fox River for a historic route. The family-friendly water trail is flush with wildlife, vegetation and historic railroad abutments.

Hikers have several new options this summer, like at Mt. Horeb's [Cave of the Mounds](#), which opened a new free public hiking trail that takes visitors through a prairie restoration and includes stops with information on the Driftless Area, the historic Brigham Farm and more. The new trail also connects Cave of the Mounds to the "Green Corridor," with access to the [Military Ridge State Trail](#), [Brigham County Park](#) and [Blue Mound State Park](#). The 3.2-mile [Van Kuren Trail](#) in Monroe was recently renovated and provides a viewing tower over Petenwell Lake. In Door County, [Potawatomi State Park](#) welcomes visitors to experience the renovated observation tower, closed since 2017 for repairs and opening this spring.

And in Milwaukee, construction is progressing on the [South Shore Beach Rehabilitation Project](#), which includes trail-widening for beach access, accessible paths and other improvements to help with water quality issues.



Visiting nature centers, environmental education facilities and organizations with outdoor skills programming provides critical introductions to the outdoors while offering unique and memorable learning experiences for the whole family. Learn more in the [Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan](#).

Preparing for Outdoorists and Outdoor Kids

An [American Express 2025 Global Travel Trends Survey](#) recently found that "58% of Millennials and Gen Z parents plan to bring their extended family on vacation in 2025, as opposed to 31% of their Gen X and Baby Boomer counterparts. And not just for the free babysitting - 89% of these Millennial and Gen Z-aged parents cited "quality time" as the reason for bringing along extended family."

Providing all-age-family activities isn't just to meet a travel trend or boost community revenue. Making trails and outdoor recreation activities suitable for all abilities ensures access is available for everyone, from parents with strollers to people with permanent or temporary physical, mental or emotional disabilities. As trail planners and recreation planners are designing facilities for accessibility, they're also designing for all-age access. View past webinars on creating accessible outdoor spaces from the [Office of Outdoor Recreation](#).

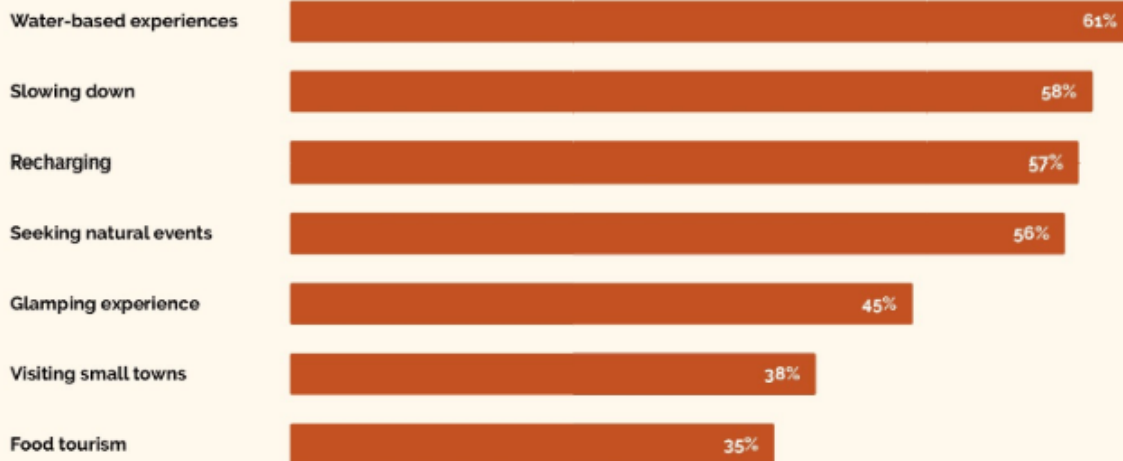
Communities across Wisconsin are working together to create an ecosystem for outdoor travelers. Building infrastructure that connects communities, businesses and amenities that welcome outdoorists to explore results in higher spending. When local tourism and business organizations partner with nonprofits, their ability to promote outdoor recreation is stronger, like the [Heart of Vilas County Bike Trail System](#). This 52-mile National Recreation Trail winds through the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest, along clear lakes and rivers and connects [St. Germain](#), [Sayner](#), [Boulder Junction](#), [Manitowish Waters](#) and [Mercer](#). The multi-use, paved trail passes through several downtowns, so the partnership with the chambers of commerce is vital to ensure visitors know what services are available while bolstering business engagement and services for all age riders.

In La Crosse, the destination marketing organization (DMO) [Explore La Crosse](#), bike shop [Smith's Bikes](#) and outdoor nonprofit [ORA Trails](#) work together to promote the [Jakroo La Crosse Omnium](#), a three-day bike race featuring both professionals and amateurs. The 12th year of this race is May 2-4, bringing hundreds of recreationists to the "NASCAR on bikes." The race includes a climb up Grandad Bluff but starts and ends in downtown La Crosse. Keeping the event family-friendly, race categories include juniors, adults and a 50+ grouping.

In Baraboo, [Devil's Lake State Park](#) may be the most visited state park in Wisconsin but it still takes coordination and collaboration among partners to ensure a diversity of activities and opportunities are supported and promoted. State park staff, the nonprofits [Friends of Devil's Lake State Park](#) and [Little Eagle Arts Foundation](#), retailers like [Wild Side Action Sports](#), the local brewery [Tumbled Rocks Brewery](#) and economic organizations like the [Chamber of Commerce](#) and [Downtown Baraboo Inc.](#) all work together to support the park. Music in the park, educational and cultural programs, guided hikes and paddle trips and other park programming all benefit from having more partners on board.

Heading into this summer, whether you're a DMO, a business or a recreation group, consider where your visitors fit on the KOA families' desirable types of family trips and experiences. If you're looking for water, slowing down or checking out small towns, Wisconsin's summer destinations have it all.

Types of Family Trips and Experiences in 2024



Source: KOA 2024 Camping & Outdoor Hospitality Report: Families and Kids

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: [Southern Kettle Off Road Riders \(SKORR\)](#)

- Southern Kettle Off Road Riders (SKORR) is a nonprofit, volunteer organization dedicated to sustainable mountain bike riding within the Southern Unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest.



Professional Services: [Silent Sports Magazine](#)

- Silent Sports*, based in Waupaca, reports on events, gear, people, destinations and other stories for nonmotorized activities across Wisconsin and the upper Midwest.



Guides, Tours, Rentals: [Chequamegon Bay Boats](#)

- Boston Whalers, deck boats, cruisers, fishing boats and jet boats are available for rent from Chequamegon Bay Boat Rentals in Washburn for exploring Lake Superior.



Retailer: [Michael's Cycles](#)

- Michael's Cycles in Janesville sells bikes, accessories, components, helmets, clothing, car racks and more for cycling. The store won the 2023 Bicycle Retailer Excellence Award.



Destinations: [Tigerton OHV Park & Campground](#)

- Maintained by the village, the Tigerton OHV Park & Campground is over 500 acres of off-road activities with a 70-site campground for tents and RVs in Shawano County. Trails are open to ATVs, Side by Sides, dirt bikes and 4x4s.

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

Wisconsin Bike Week June 1-8

Get ready to celebrate Wisconsin Bike Week! This year, the Wisconsin Bike Fed offers a lineup of events and programs designed to inspire and empower cyclists of all ages and skill levels. These events will take place around the state. If your organization is interested in hosting or sharing an event, contact the Bike Fed. [Learn more.](#)

USA Cycling National Road Championships Come to Wisconsin

During this year's annual Tour of America's Dairyland competition, USA Cycling will host its Juniors and Masters National Road Championships. This is the first time they will be hosted in Wisconsin, and the events will tack onto the 11-day Tour of America's Dairyland series from June 28 - July 2. [Learn more.](#)

ICYMI: Uniquely Wisconsin Highlights Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Stories

Discover Wisconsin's sub-series, Uniquely Wisconsin, spotlights stories of Wisconsinites and the communities where they live. Ariens Nordic Center, Lincoln County mushing, Trek Bicycles, Northport Marine and more stories are told in these short videos. [Learn more.](#)

RESOURCES

Discover and Celebrate Motorized Recreation at Let's Ride Expo May 2-4

The inaugural event at the Sunnyview Expo Center in Oshkosh is a collaboration between [Wisconsin ATV/UTV Association](#), [Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs](#), [Wisconsin Coalition of Four Wheel Drives](#) and [Wisconsin Off-Highway Motorcycle Association](#). Vendors, activities and entertainment and local club representatives will provide opportunities for everyone to learn and enjoy. [Learn more.](#)

Lt. Governor's Small Business Academy is May 6-9

Registration is free and in-person and virtual options are available for the Lieutenant Governor's Small Business Academy. Workshops offer practical advice from business owners who have successfully made it through the initial stages of starting and growing their companies, featuring workshops that cover topics like financing, legal concerns, regulation, information technology, certifications, market identification and more. [Learn more.](#)

Learn How to Maximize Your Online Presence with a Google Lunch + Learn

Travel Wisconsin is hosting a free Lunch + Learn on Wednesday, May 14 from 12–1 p.m. Hear directly from Google on how to maximize your online presence with their free business tools. Attendees will also learn how to use free and low-cost Travel Wisconsin resources. [Learn more and register.](#)

Outdoor Retailer Hosted Buyer Program Applications Due

Outdoor Retailer, June 18-20 in Salt Lake City, is one of the country's premier outdoor industry events. This is not just a tradeshow but includes education and networking for outdoor brands and retailers. The Hosted Buyer Program travel subsidies can include hotel and airfare costs. [Learn more.](#)

Safe Streets and Roads for All (SS4A) Applications due June 26

The U.S. Department of Transportation opened a new application period for the SS4A program, making \$982 million available, with 40% set aside for planning and demonstration projects. The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) specifically mentions bicyclists and bicycle infrastructure, but prioritizes "low cost, high impact" projects. [Learn more.](#)

New Adaptive Hiking 101 Guide

Download a free new resource, *Adaptive Hiking 101: The Ultimate Guide to Operating an Adaptive Hiking Program*, to learn more about all-terrain mobility equipment, funding, liability, marketing and more. [Learn more.](#)

Outdoor Retail Trends Reports Released

The Outdoor Industry Association recently released its 2025 Outdoor Retail Sales Trends Report, breaking down the numbers behind 2024 outdoor retail sales. The report shows the market rebounded in 2024 to \$28 billion, driven by casual consumers. The report and insights offer expert intelligence to guide outdoor retail sales strategy this year. [Learn more.](#)

Call for Volunteers: Wisconsin Trail Reporter

Reporters are needed for the [Wisconsin Trail Report](#) this summer. Serving as a source of inspiration for over 651,000 visitors in 2024, the Trail Report is an essential tool on TravelWisconsin.com for outdoor enthusiasts seeking information on hiking and biking trail conditions. If you belong to a chamber of commerce, visitor bureau, tourism council or outdoor recreation group, please consider providing quick weekly updates as a trail reporter. Contact [Courtney Rinka](#) for information.

JOB LISTINGS

Sewing / Production Assistant, Carron Net Company, Inc., Two Rivers. [Learn more.](#)

General Interest, Urban Ecology Center, Milwaukee. [Learn more.](#)

Environmental Educator & Program Assistant, Aldo Leopold Nature Center, Monona. [Learn more.](#)

Several positions, Kafka Granite, Mosinee. [Learn more.](#)

Canoe assistant, Wisconsin Canoe Company, Spring Green. [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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