



WISCONSIN OUTSIDE | February 2026

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Just a few weeks into the new year, and we're off to the races! Anticipation builds as [athletes with ties to Wisconsin](#) are preparing for the Winter Olympics. Whether you're following the stories of these local celebrities or just the excitement of the games, the attention fosters newfound interest and a deeper appreciation of winter sports.

Wisconsin offers a playground for winter enthusiasts, and this year's snowfall has ushered in the return of many favorite events like the [Hodag Challenge](#). The

Northwoods Nordic Ski Club welcomed around 250 high school and middle school skiers and their families from across Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula to the CAVOC trails in Rhinelander for the races, unable to be held the past two years. The same weekend, snowmobile riders descended on the Northwoods for the [63rd Annual World Championship Snowmobile Derby](#). Leading up to the event, riders joining the two-day [Ride with the Cup](#) enjoyed the route from Wausau to Eagle River on their sleds this year, on what was described as "a snow-globe kind of day."

Other big events are on the horizon, too, which are expected to draw participants and fill communities with travelers. [Ariens Nordic Center](#) is set to host the U.S. Fat Bike Open and the Biathlon Festival, featuring the U.S. Masters Nationals and Olympics watch parties this month. Next weekend kicks off the [sturgeon spearing season](#) on Lake Winnebago with the [Sturgeon Spectacular](#) set to offer a variety of activities for winter enthusiasts. And, of course, [Birkie Week](#) kicks off on February 18, continuing its 50-plus year tradition of drawing participants and spectators from across the country and the world to Wisconsin's Northwoods for North America's largest cross-country ski race.

Outdoor recreation infrastructure and committed leaders and volunteers who activate it are the foundation for these events. The findings detailed in the recently released economic impact reports from the 2025 Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact Program, a partnership between the Office and local stakeholders, demonstrate how outdoor recreation boosts local economies. Read more about the reports below, and if you're looking to identify how much value outdoor recreation brings to your community, register to join us at the [DIY Workshop](#) this month. To explore ways to build up the presence of outdoor recreation and community engagement around it, be sure to join us at the [Wisconsin Healthy Communities Summit](#) in April. Keynote speakers and insightful breakout sessions are sure to inspire and provide tangible action steps. [Register today](#).

Onward, outdoors –



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](#).

Upcoming Workshop: Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact Program

Learn how to get the answer to the seemingly elusive question:

***“What’s the economic impact of
(insert your outdoor recreation activity or facility here)
to our community?”***

Join the Office of Outdoor Recreation and The Harbinger Consultancy for the 2026 Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact Program. In two 90-minute virtual sessions, you'll learn the fundamentals of an economic impact analysis, how to use A Do-It-Yourself Guide: Conducting and Using Visitor and Recreational User Research to Tell an Economic Story to navigate the process independently and interact with other participants to discuss real-life scenarios.

Register and plan to attend both sessions, as the content in Session 2 builds on learnings from the first session.

Session 1: Visitor Research

Tuesday, February 10
12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

[Register to Attend](#)

Session 2: Data Analysis

Tuesday, February 17
12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.

[Register to Attend](#)

Following the workshop, participants ready to conduct their own economic impact analysis will be invited to apply to the practicum, which provides one-on-one coaching and technical assistance for up to five teams, culminating in a final report. Review the reports from the 2025 practicum cohort in the story below, and learn more about the full program on [the website](#).

Outdoor Recreation Boosts Local Economies

In January, five outdoor destinations released the findings from their economic impact studies as part of the Office's [Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact Program](#). Learn about each of the destinations, what they set out to learn and read their final reports.

Heart of Vilas Trail System



Photo courtesy of Manitowish Waters Visitor Bureau

Known for its scenic views through the Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest, the 52-mile paved Heart of Vilas Bike Trail System connects five communities with one common goal: to enhance the region's plethora of outdoor recreation

opportunities and grow the area as a cycling destination.

From May to September 2025, data collected from trail counters allowed the team to estimate that over 160,000 people used the trail across the system. Additionally, surveys collected from those users helped the team calculate that an estimated \$25.7 million in economic activity was generated, 42 jobs supported and \$1.7 million in state and local tax revenue generated to benefit the five connected communities. (Read the full report [here](#).)

Oconto County



Photo courtesy of [TEDCOR](#).

Oconto County in Northeastern Wisconsin offers a rare combination of water access and trail networks that attract outdoor enthusiasts across all seasons.

To better understand how outdoor recreation visitors contribute to the local economy, the team deployed a visitor survey. The findings revealed important patterns about the area's outdoor recreation economy, suggesting that the county's greatest asset may not be first-time visitors discovering the region, but rather, the deeply loyal base of repeat guests. It also showed that anglers and trail riders spend the most, with the average angler group spending over \$2,000 per group per trip.

(Read the full report [here](#).)

Olbrich Botanical Gardens



Olbrich Botanical Gardens, one of nearly 300 facilities in the City of Madison’s parks department, sought to understand its value as a community resource and as a unique destination that attracts nearly 400,000 visitors as it approaches a master planning process in the near future.

A survey conducted in the summer of 2025 revealed that nearly half of all visitors identified the Gardens as their primary reason for visiting the area, underscoring its role as a tourist attraction. The survey also revealed 45% of visitors stayed one or more nights in the area. In total, visitors to Olbrich generated an estimated \$20.1 million in economic activity for Dane County. (Read the full report [here](#).)

Peninsula State Park – New Mountain Bike Trails



Photo courtesy of Dan Eggert Photography.

With the first phase of a purpose-built mountain bike trail system completed, the Friends of Peninsula State Park were eager to understand how the trails were attracting locals and visitors and how their visitation impacted the larger community. The timing also presented an opportunity to collect baseline data before the project was completely finished.

The Friends of Peninsula State Park partnered with park administration and Destination Door County to collect data from May to October 2025, using trail counters and a rider survey, and compared the results against geo-location data from Destination Door County's provider, Azira. Preliminary data revealed that the new mountain bike trails drew not only locals, but also more than half of the riders were from outside the area. Non-local visitor spending averaged \$487 per trip per person, generating \$1.3 million for Door County businesses. (Read the full report [here](#).)

Three Eagle Trail



Photo courtesy of Oneida County Tourism Council.

The small communities of Three Lakes and Eagle River are popular Northwoods destinations connected by the world's largest chain of lakes, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and the 12.7-mile Three Eagle Trail. The region has long drawn visitors attracted by its outdoor recreation opportunities.

In the summer of 2025, the Three Eagle Trail Foundation, Three Lakes Visitors Bureau and the Great Headwaters Trail Foundation collaborated, sharing organizational capacity and resources, to study the impact of the Three Eagle Trail on the two communities. Using automatic trail counters accompanied by an online survey for users, the group collected data necessary to calculate the economic impact of the trail, determining that users of the trail contributed an impressive \$2 million to the local economies of Three Lakes and Eagle River. (Read the full report [here](#).)



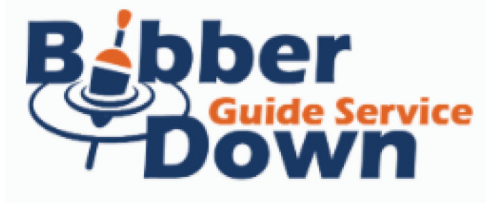
Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry is an impressive network of businesses,

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 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: [Brillion Nature Center](#)

- Featuring nearly 7 miles of hiking trails through prairie, marsh and woodland habitats, the Brillion Nature Center provides environmental education opportunities and outdoor experiences for area schools and the public.



Guides and Tours: [Bobber Down Guide Service](#)

- Based in Mercer, Bobber Down Guide Service provides fishing experiences on the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage.



Retailer: [P-Dog Snowmobile Rental and Repair, Inc.](#)

- P-Dog Snowmobile Rental and Repair provides services in Vilas County to get people out on the trails.



Manufacturer: [DSG Outerwear](#)

- Founded by Wendy Gavinski in her Wisconsin basement in 2010, DSG Outerwear is committed to Doing Something Great for women by reshaping the narrative of outdoor clothing.



Destinations: [Rhineland Area Chamber of Commerce](#)

- A year-round outdoor destination, Rhineland offers a balance between nature and creature comforts. The Chamber of Commerce provides information on a variety of activities to enjoy.

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

[Regional outdoor recreation plan aims to drive economic development as it awaits USDA approval](#)

A regional outdoor recreation plan for eight Western Wisconsin counties aims to boost economic development and is awaiting USDA approval later this month.
WQOW.com

[Lake Geneva's Gage Marine named dealer of the year by Boating Industry](#)

Gage Marine was named 2025 Dealer of the Year at the 2026 Boating Industry Top 100 Awards Gala in Orlando, celebrating its long-standing excellence and growth.
Boating Industry

[Taliesin named best wellness experience in the world for 2026 in National Geographic](#)

National Geographic's 2026 Best of the World Wellness list highlights immersive, culture-rooted experiences including mindful workshops at Wisconsin's Taliesin Preservation.

National Geographic

DIY ECONOMIC IMPACT PROGRAM NEWS

[Economic Reports: Bike trails help boost local economies, connected trails even more so](#)

WXPR.com

[6 Wisconsin counties experience \\$49 million in economic activity through outdoor recreation](#)

InBusiness Madison

[Gov. Evers, Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation Highlight More Than \\$49 Million Economic Impact of Five Outdoor Recreation Destinations in Wisconsin](#)

Urban Milwaukee

[Gov. Evers, Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation: Highlight more than \\$49 million economic impact of five outdoor recreation destinations in Wisconsin](#)

WisPolitics

[Olbrich Botanical Gardens contribute \\$20 million annually to local economy](#)

WKOW.com

[Study Shows Economic Impact of Heart of Vilas Bike Trail System](#)

WJJQ.com

[6 Wisconsin counties experience \\$49 million in economic activity through outdoor recreation](#)

Insight on Business

RESOURCES

Wisconsin Fast Forward Grants – Grant Applications due February 15

This program offered by the Department of Workforce Development awards funds to businesses in any Wisconsin industry sector to reimburse the costs of customized training for unemployed, underemployed and incumbent workers.

Recreational Trails Program – NEW DEADLINE: March 1

Administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the Recreational Trails Program supports municipal governments and incorporated organizations with reimbursements for the development, rehabilitation and maintenance of recreational trails and trail-related facilities.

The Norma and Stanley DeBoer Quiet Trails Fund – Applications due March 1

This fund, administered by the Natural Resources Foundation, provides support for the creation and maintenance of quiet trails (e.g., walking, hiking or skiing) in Wisconsin.

AARP Community Challenge – Grant Applications due March 4

This AARP program funds shovel-ready programs across three distinct areas, including flagship grants, capacity-building microgrants and demonstration grants. Projects may focus on transportation, local improvement projects and more.

IMBA's Trail Accelerator Grants – Applications due March and April

The IMBA Trail Accelerator grant program offers awardees professional trail planning and consultation services to launch trail development efforts. The Planning & Design Services application is due March 15 and the Education Programs Grant opens April 1 and closes April 30.

Trail Towns 101 Course – Discount for Wisconsinites

Wisconsin trail and community leaders are invited to attend this course at a discounted rate. Learn how to harness the power of local trails and build a collaborative network transforming communities into thriving trail towns. Offered by The Harbinger Consultancy, this 101 course starts in April. Wisconsinites can register for \$300 per person (a \$225 savings) or \$600 for a group of three. [Register here](#).

Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance (RTCA) program – Accepting Projects

The National Park Service RTCA program supports locally-led conservation and outdoor recreation projects across the United States by assisting communities and public land managers in developing or restoring parks, conservation areas, rivers, and wildlife habitats, as well as creating outdoor recreation opportunities and programs that engage future generations in the outdoors. The RTCA program welcomes interest from community groups, nonprofit organizations, tribal governments, national parks and local, state and federal agencies. Please reach out

to the RTCA Midwest Region at MWR_RTCA@nps.gov to discuss your potential project in Wisconsin.

JOB LISTINGS

[Diversity in Conservation Internship](#), Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, various locations

[Assistant Professor of Fisheries](#), UW-Stevens Point, Stevens Point

[Hunting Guide](#), Kohler Co., Kohler

[Senior Crew Leader](#), Wisconsin Conservation Corps, La Crosse

[Wild Rehabilitation Intern](#), Wild Instincts, Rhinelander

[Natural Resource Management Assistant \(12 Weeks\)](#), AmeriCorps, Cross Plains

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Hiring for Various LTE Positions:
[Mirror Lake and Rocky Arbor State Parks Seasonal Roles](#), Wisconsin Dells and Baraboo

[Black River State Forest Seasonal Roles](#), Black River Falls

[Lakeshore and Havenwoods State Parks Seasonal Roles](#), Milwaukee

[High Cliff State Park Seasonal Roles](#), Sherwood

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

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