



WISCONSIN OUTSIDE | July 2025

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

As we approach the height of summer, it's my favorite time to start strolling the prairie regularly. Just weeks ago, ankle-high plants were emerging. Now they're taller than me (it doesn't take much), and soon, their colorful blooms will paint the

landscape. What fascinates me is that this happens no matter the weather conditions – soggy or drought – the prairie is resilient.

I can't help but see that same kind of resiliency in our industry professionals, no matter what obstacles we face. At the inaugural [Wisconsin Governor's Outdoor Industry Awards](#), we recognized nominees for their accomplishments and announced the winners. Always innovating, collaborating, overcoming – you all are driven, and Wisconsin is lucky to have you leading with passion and purpose. Read about the winners below!

With strong industry leadership, Wisconsin is well-positioned to continue growing the outdoor economy. Recent data from the [Outdoor Foundation](#) shows that participation in outdoor recreation increased by 3% in 2024, with a record 181 million people spending time outside. Other key insights included record high participation by all Americans (58.6%) and households with children (66%), and the number of core participants (those participating most frequently) increased for the first time in a decade, representing about one-third of all participants, meaning more people are getting out to recreate more frequently. These trends are encouraging and suggest more opportunities on the horizon.

In fact, accessible outdoor recreation initiatives are creating opportunities for all and helping grow the participant base from this segment. July is Disability Pride Month, celebrating the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was signed into law 35 years ago. Several efforts from [Moss Universal Park](#) in Wauwatosa to recent facility and equipment upgrades at several [state parks](#) and Destination Door County's [free accessibility assessment](#) are making Wisconsin's outdoors more accessible.

July is also the 40th anniversary of National Park and Recreation Month, celebrating parks and recreation professionals, the outdoor spaces they develop and steward and the programming they manage, which enrich communities across the country. Professionals can access a [Build Together, Play Together toolkit](#) from National Recreation and Parks Association.

With so much to celebrate this month, don't forget to take your favorite stroll outside and enjoy it!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cassie". The script is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized 'C' at the beginning.

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](#).

Raise a Paddle to the Winners!

Nominees and Winners of the Inaugural Wisconsin Governor's Outdoor Industry Awards Recognized at June Event

Ending Great Outdoors Month on a high note, the Wisconsin Governor's Office and the Office of Outdoor Recreation celebrated the first group of Wisconsin Governor's Outdoor Industry Award nominees and winners! In recognition of exceptional achievement, seven individuals and organizations received the inaugural awards for their contributions to Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry.

Launched earlier this year, the Governor's Outdoor Industry Awards honor the outstanding accomplishments that drive economic impact and elevate the profile of Wisconsin's thriving outdoor industry and of the state as a top outdoor recreation destination. Across seven categories, 75 nominations were received for individuals, businesses, organizations and destinations. Find a full list of nominees and photos from the event on the [Office's website](#).

Winners were announced and nominees were recognized at a special celebration on June 26. Here's a look at the 2025 Wisconsin Governor's Outdoor Industry Award winners.

Destination of the Year – [Wisconsin State Park System](#)

Some of Wisconsin's most incredible outdoor recreation assets and natural features are found in one of Wisconsin's many state parks, forests, trails and recreation areas.

To celebrate its 125th anniversary, the park system is hosting events, celebrations and opportunities to get more people outside this year. Learn more about the Wisconsin State Park System in our feature article from the [June 2025 Wisconsin Outside](#).



Congratulations to staff of the Wisconsin State Park System on its Destination of the Year award. Awards were handed out with Governor Tony Evers, Tourism Secretary Anne Sayers, Office of Outdoor Recreation Director Cassie Mordini and Outdoor Recreation Committee Chair Ben Popp. Photo credit: Sharon Vanorny Photography

Outdoor Business of the Year – [Adventure Outfitters, LLC](#).

The philosophy of Adventure Outfitters, LLC has always been to help people access the outdoors with confidence and comfort. It is a place where staff act not just as sales associates, but as trusted guides, consultants and educators. Whether someone stops in to ask about trail conditions or needs help fitting a helmet, staff treat every interaction as a chance to get someone out on a bike, board or boat. They also consistently invest in community-scale improvements that extend far beyond their own footprint, strengthening the accessibility of outdoor recreation for everyone. And, Adventure Outfitters provides ongoing service to local tourism and recreation boards in the Waupaca area, speaking to a long-standing and genuine commitment to the region's well-being—economically, environmentally and culturally.

Trailblazer - Bill Menke, retired, volunteer

Bill Menke came to Wisconsin in 1991 to serve as the National Park Service manager for the 4,800-mile [North Country National Scenic Trail](#). Upon retirement in 2020, Bill went to work part-time for the [North Country Trail Association](#) as a Regional Trail Coordinator while continuing to volunteer with the group that became the Wisconsin Roving Trail Crew. Bill's dedication to the North Country Trail in Wisconsin has resulted in 82 miles of quality hiking trail built since 1996, and over 6,300 volunteer hours logged. Bill has also trained and mentored staff and volunteers over the years. Bill's leadership has set Wisconsin up as a model for trail development, partnerships and promotion of sustainable trail use. As a resident of Dodgeville, Bill also volunteers with the Driftless Area Land Conservancy. Bill's visionary leadership has blazed literal and figurative trails for Wisconsin over the past 30 years.

Big Tent - Bill Bertram, Marathon County Outdoor Recreation Advocate

Bill Bertram's passionate leadership has created a welcoming outdoor recreation environment in Greater Wausau and beyond. He has been instrumental in elevating outdoor recreation as more than a pastime and utilizing it as a community-building endeavor with opportunities for all. Bill is a key organizer of events in Marathon County and several land and water trail projects, including the Great Pinery Heritage Waterway, which just received the National Recreation Trail designation. Bill approaches every event and initiative with a focus on community, personal encouragement and removing barriers to participation – truly creating a bigger tent for all.

First Ascent for Innovation — [Boulder Junction Parks and Recreation Board: The Glide](#)

With the installation of Wisconsin's first outdoor skating ribbon, the Boulder Junction Parks and Recreation Board's The Glide was a true innovation for Wisconsin's winter economy! The Glide is completely free and maintained by volunteers.



A Zamboni clears the path of The Glide. Photo credit: Boulder Junction Parks and Recreation Board

Rising Star - Kennedy Domerchie, Outdoors Development Manager, [Visit Eau Claire](#)

In her three years working for Visit Eau Claire, Kennedy Domerchie has built partnerships across the state to elevate the outdoor opportunities in Eau Claire. She's helped rally an eight-county network around a shared mission to strengthen outdoor infrastructure and build a more inclusive, accessible outdoor economy. Using outdoor recreation as a vehicle, she works hard to create the vibrant community and thriving economy she knows is possible.

Tandem Award for Collaboration - [The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin's Field Trip Program](#)

The Field Trip Program, organized by Christine Tanzer and Kim Kreitingner, is all about partnerships. The program reaches over 5,000 people annually, offering 250+ trips connecting people to Wisconsin's outdoors. More than 125 partners from across the state lead nature-based outings, which encompass all types of environmental, nature and outdoor-related topics, from paddling and birdwatching to forest bathing, rock climbing and much more.



Extensive collaboration across the state make the Field Trips Program an exemplary project. Photo credit: The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin

Wisconsin's \$11.2 billion outdoor economy thrives because of the people who work in this industry. This year's slate of nominees and winners is a testament to the extraordinary passion, dedication and creativity that flow like a strong current through this industry. Congratulations, and thank you, to all the innovators, collaborators, trailblazers and rising stars who work every day to elevate Wisconsin's outdoors.



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: [Metro Mountain Bikers](#)

- Metro Mountain Bikers is a nonprofit organization dedicated to sustainable trail riding in the greater Milwaukee area. The all-volunteer team maintains over 30 miles of trails, building new trails and maintaining trails for new and seasoned riders.



Professional Services: [The Nxrth](#)

- The Nxrth is an online basecamp for all things gravel, fat tire and bikepacking in the Northwoods of Wisconsin. The website and e-newsletter provide event coverage, ride reports, awards and stories of the creative and adventurous cyclists from the northern part of the Midwest.



Guides, Tours, Rentals: [Apostle Islands Charters](#)

- Captained charters or bareboating options are available from Apostle Islands Charters. Cruise Lake Superior

out of Pikes Bay Marina south of Bayfield. Overnighting at the marina or anchoring are also available.



Retailer: [Bring's Cycling and Fitness](#)

- Bring's Cycling and Fitness is a family-owned bike and repair shop in Wisconsin Rapids, offering a variety of bikes, accessories, nutrition products and fitness equipment.



Destinations: [Hunt Hill Nature Center](#)

- Hunt Hill Nature Center in Sarona is a four-season destination managed for conservation, recreation and education. The property includes hiking trails, adult and youth programs and a sanctuary.

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.

RECREATION READS

Wisconsin Outdoors by the Book

Summer can be a great time for indulging in reading material, whether you're relaxing by a campfire, on the beach or in a hammock. To inspire visitors and residents to explore Wisconsin or to learn about the state's outdoor recreation history and scene, here are 10 nonfiction reads (in no particular order) by Wisconsin authors who capture the state's outdoor recreation culture.

1. [Wisconsin Bird Hunting Tales](#) by Ken Blomberg
 2. [Wisconsin State Parks, Forests and Recreation Areas: A Ranger's Guide](#) by Jim Buchholz
 3. [The Chippewa: Biography of a Wisconsin Waterway](#) by Richard D. Cornell
 4. [Wheel Fever: How Wisconsin Became a Great Bicycling State](#) by Jesse Gant and Nicholas J. Hoffman
 5. [Time, Beauty, and Grief: A Hike Through Wisconsin's 50 State Parks](#) by Betsy Korbinyr
 6. [Thousand-Miler: Adventures Hiking the Ice Age Trail](#), by Melanie McManus
 7. [The Lake Michigan Triangle: Mysterious Disappearances and Haunting Tales](#) by Gayle Soucek
 8. [Wisconsin State Parks: Extraordinary Stories of Geology and Natural History](#) Scott Spoolman
 9. [A Dog Lover's Guide to Hiking Wisconsin State Parks](#) Danielle St. Louis
 10. [On the Hunt: The History of Deer Hunting in WI](#) by Robert Willging
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INDUSTRY & COMMUNITY NEWS

Wisconsin Tourism Sets Record-Breaking \$25.8 Billion Year

In June, the Department of Tourism released 2024 economic impact data showing an all-time high of 114.4 million visits, eclipsing the record from 2019, which drove the record-breaking \$25.8 billion in total economic impact. [See the numbers.](#)

Great Pinery Heritage Waterway Receives National Designation

The Department of the Interior recently named 20.8 miles of the [Great Pinery Heritage Waterway](#) from Riverside Park in Merrill to RiverLife Park in Wausau as a National Recreation Trail. The overarching water trail encompasses 108 miles of the historic Wisconsin River. [Learn more](#) and [watch the news story](#).

Destination Door County Announces Free Accessibility Assessment

The new county-wide accessibility assessment is part of Destination Door County's commitment to creating a more inclusive and visitor-friendly destination. Door County businesses, nonprofits and government entities can apply for the free assessment conducted by Wheel the World. [Learn more.](#)

Paddle Palooza in Twin Rivers Seeking Vendors

Twin Rivers is hosting its second Paddle Palooza, a free, family-friendly celebration of paddling, nature and outdoor adventure on Saturday, Sept. 13. Organizers are seeking exhibitors who can provide hands-on activities and educational displays related to a wide variety of outdoor pursuits. For more information, contact [Mike Mathis](#) at the City of Two Rivers.

2025 Guides Released

The 2025 Rustic Roads Guide was released, celebrating 50 years of Rustic Roads in Wisconsin. The latest edition features backroad trips on 126 Rustic Roads. [Read the press release.](#) Additionally, the Wisconsin ATV/UTV Map/Guide is available. The new guide is available through Travel Wisconsin. [Learn more.](#)

RESOURCES

Trail Reports Help Visitors Get Outside

Help folks plan biking and hiking adventures! The Biking and Hiking Trail Reports from Travel Wisconsin offer the most up-to-date conditions on hiking and biking trail networks across Wisconsin. Volunteer trail reporters share regular updates about on-the-ground conditions to help visitors prepare for their trail trips. The report also

includes trail descriptions, surfaces and for bike trails, whether it offers single track or double track opportunities. Widgets are available to embed the Trail Report directly into your business or organization's website. [Learn more.](#)

Yamaha Outdoor Access Initiative Applications due Sept. 30

Supporting outdoor enthusiasts, the Yamaha Outdoor Access Initiative's mission is to provide practical support for efforts that promote safe, responsible use of OHVs, educate the public on proper recreational land use and wildlife conservation practices and protect appropriate and sustainable access to public lands. The next quarter funding cycle is open July 1 – Sept. 30. [Learn more.](#)

Applications Open for Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)

Application materials for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) 2026-2030 Program Cycle are now available. Projects that are eligible for the Safe Routes to School Program, Transportation Enhancements or the Bicycle and Pedestrian Facility Program are eligible TAP projects. Applications are due Friday, Oct. 31. [Learn more.](#)

Mountain Biking Resources Available

The [International Mountain Biking Association](#) (IMBA) has several resources available to grow the quantity and quality of mountain biking trails. A recent report looks at the economics of mountain biking, [Economic Benefits of Mountain Biking in the U.S.](#) For land managers and professionals looking for a comprehensive reference, [Mountain Bike Trail Development](#) is a book that details the entire process. [Six Tips for Community Engagement](#) is a brief primer that gives volunteer and professional advocates tools to gain support and involve community members and stakeholders. [Funding for Natural Surface Trails](#) helps clarify potential national, regional and private sources of funding that can support trail projects and related initiatives.

JOB LISTINGS

Director of Development, Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance, Madison. [Learn more.](#)

Marine Service Technician, Bass Pro Shops, Green Bay. [Learn more.](#)

Wilderness Trip Leader and other positions, Birch Trail Camp for Girls, Minong. [Learn more.](#)

Several positions, Hunt Hill Nature Center, Sarona. [Learn more.](#)

Multiple positions, Brunswick Corporation, Fond du Lac. [Learn more.](#)

Multiple positions, Johnson Outdoors, Racine. [Learn more.](#)

Header image credit: Wisconsin DNR

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



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