



## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

This year has already delivered a powerful reminder of why Wisconsin's outdoors continue to inspire awe and collaboration. A little luck from Mother Nature led to the [rare reopening of the Apostle Islands Ice Caves](#). Access lasted only briefly, but the moment highlighted what strong coordination and preparation can accomplish when conditions align. Read more below about the partnership that made it possible.

We are thrilled to [welcome Derrick Zimmerman](#) as our Senior Marketing Communications Specialist. A lifelong Wisconsinite with a deep-rooted passion for

the outdoors, Derrick brings extensive experience in branding, marketing strategy, communications and public relations. His expertise will strengthen how we tell the story of Wisconsin outdoor recreation and elevate the work happening in communities across the state. We are lucky to have him on board.

This spring also marks the start of a busy and energizing event season. This month, we look forward to connecting with many of you at the [Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism \(WIGCOT\)](#) in Milwaukee. In April, we gather in Wausau for the [Wisconsin Healthy Communities Summit](#) to explore how outdoor recreation strengthens health and local economies. See the growing lineup of speakers and field trips, and be sure to register early to secure your spot! Then in May, we will join partners from across the country in Duluth for the [National Outdoor Recreation Conference](#), an opportunity to learn, share and build national connections that benefit Wisconsin communities. As a sponsor, the Office has secured a discounted rate for Wisconsinites to attend. To receive the \$575 discounted rate for the full conference, please [email Rebecca Maguire](#) at The Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals, who will prepare your individual registration link.

Finally, a sincere thank you to the many local leaders and partners who joined us for our recent [Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact Workshops](#). The strong attendance signals real momentum among communities that are eager to better understand and quantify the value of outdoor recreation. For those who participated, this is a reminder that the practicum application deadline is March 3. [Connect with our team](#) if you have any questions or would like to discuss your research plan.

With winter's magic coming to a close and a full calendar ahead, the energy around Wisconsin outdoor recreation continues to build.

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](#).

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## **A Rare Return to Wonder: The Apostle Islands Ice Caves**

In February, for the first time in more than a decade, conditions aligned to allow public access to the breathtaking Apostle Islands Ice Caves.

Sustained cold temperatures created a rare window for visitors to safely cross more than a mile of frozen Lake Superior and reach the mainland sea caves near Bayfield. There, sandstone cliffs were transformed into towering walls of ice with icicles stretched from ceiling to floor.

The National Park Service, which carefully monitors ice thickness and conditions, described the caves as a “fairytale of needle-like icicles.” Each day of winter brought subtle changes to formations shaped by wind, waves and temperature. Access was announced only after rigorous review, and visitors were reminded that conditions can shift quickly.

That reality became clear almost immediately. Just one day after opening to the public, a winter storm system moved across the region and broke up the ice, forcing the caves to close as quickly as they had opened.

Even within that narrow window, the coordinated response was remarkable. Planning for the potential of an ice caves event begins every year in January with a few key partners and continues only if conditions look favorable. As the conditions became more likely for an event to occur this year, more partners were brought into the conversation, and preparations began. Weeks later, when access was confirmed, communication across the region began immediately, made possible by the relationships and communications established well before the opportunity arose.

Stakeholder calls identified immediate roles and responsibilities, prioritized safety considerations, assigned tasks and aligned on a unified messaging strategy. A communications toolkit was shared with partners and local businesses to ensure consistent information.

Bayfield County and local partners identified and plowed parking areas, while transit resources were adapted to operate as shuttles to manage traffic and increase safety.

The Bayfield Chamber and Visitor Bureau, Bayfield County, the National Park Service and regional partners coordinated real-time updates and route information to ensure a safe and positive visitor experience.

At the state level, Travel Wisconsin mobilized its team to update [website articles](#) and FAQs in real time while dispatching a photographer and videographer to capture the fleeting spectacle. Travel Wisconsin also reactivated a name, image, likeness (NIL) partnership with UW Athletics, coordinating travel to send a student athlete to [experience and document the caves](#), helping amplify the message across social media platforms. Media outlets across the nation picked up the story, too, thanks to the PR team's quick action in pitching the unexpected event to daily news outlets and regional freelancers. The story earned national coverage from [The Weather Channel](#), [Travel + Leisure](#) and [Outside](#), garnering more than a billion total impressions from earned and organic coverage and putting the Apostle Islands and Bayfield on the minds of travelers as they plan for future vacations.

As part of our commitment to strengthening Wisconsin's outdoor recreation economy, the Office of Outdoor Recreation provided the [Do-It-Yourself Economic Impact Analysis Guide](#) and additional resources to help estimate the economic impact of the 2026 ice cave opening.

The reopening of the Apostle Islands Ice Caves lasted only a single day, yet the coordination behind it was nothing short of extraordinary. Federal, state, county and local partners worked together to support safe access, strengthen community readiness and showcase one of Wisconsin's rarest winter experiences while boosting awareness of the region as a top outdoor destination any time of year. For communities across the state, the takeaway is clear: when strong partnerships are built before opportunity strikes, coordinated action can turn even the briefest moment into lasting impact.



*Visitors explore the Apostle Islands Ice Caves*

## 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'll share with you 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: [International Crane Foundation](#)**

- The International Crane Foundation leads global efforts to conserve all 15 crane species through research, habitat restoration and international partnerships, with its



headquarters based in Baraboo.

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**Guides, Tours, Rentals: [Wildman Adventure Resort](#)**



- Wildman Adventure Resort offers guided whitewater, trail and seasonal outdoor adventures from its Peshtigo and Menominee River locations, supported by on-site lodging and trained safety-certified staff.
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**Retailer: [Chequamegon Adventure Company](#)**



- Chequamegon Adventure Company is an Ashland-based outdoor retailer specializing in paddlesports, cycling and Nordic ski equipment, apparel and professional service for year-round recreation.
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**Manufacturer: [Saris](#)**

- Saris manufactures bicycle racks and cycling infrastructure products in Madison, with design, fabrication and assembly conducted locally to maintain direct oversight of quality and production.



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### Destinations: [Travel Calumet](#)



- Travel Calumet promotes experiences shaped by Lake Winnebago and the Niagara Escarpment, highlighting boating, fishing, parks and scenic landscapes while connecting visitors with local communities and businesses through Calumet County.

*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.*

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## WELCOME TO THE TEAM



### **DERRICK ZIMMERMAN**

**Sr. Marketing Communications Specialist**

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The Office welcomes Derrick Zimmerman as the Senior Marketing Communications Specialist. Derrick will be integral to executing the Office's [strategic imperative](#) to amplify outdoor recreation. Derrick coordinates efforts with Travel Wisconsin's communications team, marketing team and agencies of record to elevate outdoor recreation narratives in consumer-facing media. He is also responsible for keeping the outdoor industry connected, informed and inspired through the Office's website, email, social media and printed materials.

Derrick returns to the Department of Tourism (He started the Travel Wisconsin Instagram account back in 2015!) after an eight-year tenure in marketing, progressing into a leadership role as director of marketing. As a passionate storyteller, he also cohosts a popular podcast showcasing Wisconsin's brewing culture. Derrick earned his Bachelor of Arts in Communication and Public Relations from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. He spends his free time exploring the outdoors with his family and dog, especially birding and hiking, and enjoys disc golf, as well as occasional hunting and fishing trips.

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## INDUSTRY & COMMUNITY NEWS

### **Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism (March 15-17)**

The Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism brings industry leaders together in Milwaukee to spark ideas, strengthen connections and build Wisconsin tourism Brick by Brick for communities, travelers and the state's economy.

[Register Now.](#)

### **Wisconsin Healthy Communities Summit (April 23-24)**

This two-day summit in Wausau explores how outdoor recreation supports healthier, more resilient communities through interactive sessions, peer learning and hands-on field trip experiences.

[Register Now.](#)

### **Trek Celebrates 50th Anniversary**

Trek Bicycle Corporation kicked off its 50th anniversary with a limited-edition Project One ICON series. The collection honors the brand's heritage, craftsmanship and defining moments.

[Learn More.](#)

## **Ariens Nordic Center to Open New Disc Golf Course, Host 2028 U.S. Women's Championship**

The Professional Disc Golf Association has selected Ariens Nordic Center in Brillion to host the 2028 U.S. Women's Disc Golf Championship. The event is expected to draw hundreds of competitors and thousands of spectators, spotlighting Calumet County and boosting regional tourism and economic impact.

[Learn More.](#)

## **Public Surveys on Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest**

Visitors to the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest may see staff conducting the National Visitor Use Monitoring survey through Sept. 30. Led by the United States Forest Service, the voluntary survey measures visitation, recreation activity and visitor satisfaction.

[Learn More.](#)

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# RESOURCES

## **Economic Impact of Rock Climbing at Devil's Lake State Park, 2025**

Data examining rock climbing use, spending patterns and visitor characteristics at Devil's Lake State Park during the 2025 climbing season estimated the associated economic impacts to Sauk County and the State of Wisconsin.

[Read More.](#)

## **Strava Year in Sport: The Trend Report**

New global data shows how Gen Z is prioritizing fitness, connection and community.

[Read More.](#)

## **2025 Garmin Connect Data Report**

Garmin's 2025 data from millions of users shows people are becoming more active, especially in strength training and racket sports.

[Read More.](#)

## **Opportunity Attraction Fund**

The grant program, administered by the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, provides grants for organizations and destinations to bring significant opportunities to Wisconsin.

[Learn More.](#)

## **Ready, Set, Go! Grant Program**

Assists destinations in securing competitive sporting events that are not regularly

held in Wisconsin and require an upfront financial commitment. The RSG fund has \$110,000 per fiscal year available for matching grants. The next grant application deadline is April 1.

[Learn More.](#)

### **Meetings Mean Business Grant Program**

Helps destinations by providing financial assistance for facility costs or host destination expenses as you bid for regional and national meetings or conventions. The next grant application deadline is April 1.

[Learn More.](#)

### **Land and Water Conservation Fund Program**

A federal program administered in all states that encourages the creation and interpretation of high-quality outdoor recreational opportunities. Grants cover 50% of eligible project costs. Applications are due by May 1 each year.

[Learn More.](#)

## **JOB LISTINGS**

**Social Media Coordinator** at Brunswick/Mercury Marine, Fond du Lac

**Executive Director** at Ironbull, Wausau

**Race Director** at Ironbull, Wausau

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

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