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A Note from the Director

Previously we've shared how increasing participation in outdoor activities is a sign of hope and encouragement during these difficult and unprecedented times. More people are taking advantage and realizing the physical and mental health benefits of our natural places. As a result, more people are connecting with nature and developing an appreciation and care for it. We all have an opportunity to cultivate a new group of life-long outdoorists.

If we look closely, however, disparities still exist in the outdoors. Communities traditionally left out or lacking access are not flocking to parks and trails like the numbers might suggest. We recognize there is work to do to create inviting and accessible outdoor spaces for all.

The Office of Outdoor Recreation operates under four tenets: Invite, Connect, Thrive and Protect. As our [Connect tenet](#) explains, part of the mission of the Office is to connect people to Wisconsin's natural places and outdoor recreation opportunities through access and education with a focus on inclusion.

With opportunities on the horizon from the Great American Outdoors Act and the now fully funded Land and Water Conservation Fund, new projects can address these disparities head on. As we navigate ways to implement our goals supporting access and inclusion, the Office looks forward to connecting partners and aligning priorities to build on and improve these opportunities for all.



Mary Monroe Brown
Director, Office of Outdoor Recreation

Wisconsin Outside is a monthly newsletter from Wisconsin's Office of Outdoor Recreation. Please share it with friends or colleagues with a vested interest in Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry and partners by forwarding this email or [subscribing here](#). You may also update your subscription preferences [here](#).

Partnership Brings Forth Change and Increased Accessibility

The experience of riding in a track chair and strolling along the trails was life-changing for Monica Spaeni. She was able to connect with nature, feel independent, and enjoy venturing out with her dog and family rather than staying behind or feeling dependent on others once again.

Many people with disabilities also fight depression brought on from feelings of isolation, dependency, and sadness. Studies continue to show time outside improves mental health but access to the outdoors can be exponentially difficult for people with disabilities. Monica's experience in the track chair drove away the "gray clouds" as she says, and it led her to create the organization: [Access Ability Wisconsin](#). The nonprofit offers use of the track chairs for free with a small deposit to make Wisconsin's outdoors accessible for all.

A partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources promotes the all-terrain wheelchair offered by Access Ability Wisconsin as one of the many adaptive resources offered through their [Open the Outdoors](#) program, which also includes adaptive recreational equipment, accessible campsites and cabins. The chairs can be reserved on the Access Ability Wisconsin website for use at one of

several host sites or it can be transported with the provided trailer anywhere in the state.



An accessible cabin at Kohler-Andrae State Park has a deck overlooking the wetland. It is one of ten accessible cabins throughout the state park system. Photo courtesy of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Another exciting outcome of the partnership was the recent elimination of the need for a permit to operate a power-driven mobility device on state lands, eliminating a barrier to entry. In other words, a permit is no longer needed for track chairs and similar devices that make enjoying the outdoors more accessible.

Getting Everybody Down to the Beach: Creating Universally Inclusive Recreation

The Ability Center is on a mission to provide a better quality of life for everyBODY, emphasizing that everyone at some point in their life will experience some form of disability whether permanent or temporary, such as a leg surgery where you require crutches, a wheelchair and support getting around. Opportunities for people impacted by disability to enjoy recreation activities together with family and friends seems like a simple concept, but in reality, many programs are reserved for only the person experiencing a disability. [The Ability Center](#) is working to create universally inclusive and accessible recreational opportunities across Milwaukee, most recently

adding infrastructure and equipment making Bradford Beach the [most accessible beach in the country](#).

The goals are big for the Ability Center. From providing adaptive equipment that is free to check out (for ice skating at Red Arrow Park or rolling along Bradford Beach and into Lake Michigan) to organizing awareness events in schools where entire classes experience wheelchair basketball, The Ability Center is addressing accessibility in several ways. In bringing these opportunities to life, The Ability Center partnered with the Milwaukee County Parks Department and the Office for Persons with Disabilities to install three innovative mats to Bradford Beach creating pathways from the street to the concessions and the lake. Special wheelchairs are also available for check out that easily navigate the sandy terrain and can go into the water.



An example of what the proposed Wisconsin Avenue Park may look like with its design to create a space where people of all abilities can enjoy and play together with family and friends. Courtesy of The Ability Center.

Other projects on the horizon for The Ability Center include a masterplan for a new playground and sports fields and a health and fitness facility. Both aim to be the country's most inclusive or universally accessible. Founder [Damian Buchman](#) is passionate about creating opportunities not just for people with disabilities but also the people they spend time with and turns the idea of making accommodations for disabilities on its head, "If it is accessible to someone with a disABILITY, it is accessible for everyBODY. Universally inclusive. That is our goal."

Industry & Community News

USBR 30/230 is Wisconsin's First Nationally Designated Bicycle Route The American Association of Highway and Transportation Officials approved the 269-mile route that crosses the state from east to west as Wisconsin's first national bike route. More than half of the route is comprised of state trails, and it also includes county trails, local roads and bike paths, and state and county highways. [Read the article.](#)

Chippewa Valley Trail System Now Complete With the recent completion of the two segments in Chippewa Falls and Lake Hallie, there are now 72 continuous miles of trails from Durand to Menomonie. [View the maps.](#) [Read the article.](#)

DNR Seeks Input on Issues As part of the planning process, a public comment period provides an opportunity for communities and users to weigh in. The following projects are currently seeking input. Deadlines for comment included.

[ATV/UTV & Snowmobile Corridors](#) | Willow Flowage | Sept. 9

[ATV/UTV Connections](#) | Northern Highland-American Legion Forest | Sept. 11

[Triennial Water Quality Standards Review](#) | Statewide | Sept. 14

[New Water Quality Reports](#) | Numerous Watersheds | Sept. 15

Connect 2050 Survey by Wisconsin DOT The Department of Transportation is seeking input on how to prioritize transportation planning for the next 30 years. This simply survey allows public to weigh in on what matters to them. [Take the survey.](#)

Events

Note: In-person events have made changes and are taking precautions based on COVID-19 guidance. Please see each individual event for more information.

Flambeau 40 | Park Falls | September 5 The annual cycling road race that features gently rolling hills in the Northwoods has a 35-mile route, 6-mile junior route, or a 12-mile time trial on Sunday. [Learn more and register.](#)

Wisconsin Bike Week | September 12 – 20 Coordinated with communities across the state, the Wisconsin Bike Fed hosts Bike Week each year to celebrate biking. [Find events and learn more here.](#)

Mammoth Hike Challenge | October 1 – 31 Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, the Mammoth Hike Challenge encourages hikers to log 40 miles or more on the trail and visit three trail communities in October. [Learn more.](#)

Ironbull Ultra Marathon | Wausau | October 3 With twists and climbs under forest cover, Rib Mountain plays host to the 15K and 50K distance events. [Learn more and register.](#)

Resources

Surface Water Grant Pre-applications Due Sept. 2 The Wisconsin DNR's Surface Water Grant Program offers various categories of funding for planning, projects, and more. Read more [here](#). To see past projects view the 2020 grants story map [here](#).

USFS Seeking Project Proposals: Secure Rural Schools Title II Funding Funds must be used on federal lands or lands adjacent if the project demonstrates direct benefit to public resources. Projects vary in scope from infrastructure to ecosystem health. Interested parties are encouraged to contact Chequamegon – Nicolet National Forest resource specialists to discuss. [Learn more here.](#)

Header image courtesy of Monica Spaeni.

The [Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation](#) is housed within the Wisconsin Department of Tourism.



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