

Wisconsin Outside: September 2025 Newsletter

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WISCONSIN OUTSIDE | September 2025

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

With a brisk coolness to the morning air, it seems fall is just around the corner. Yet it feels like just yesterday we were ushering in spring and welcoming more than 850 attendees from 17 different countries to Madison for the International Trails Conference. American Trails, co-organizers of the event, released their [recap and photos](#) of the three-and-a-half-day April summit, which included an estimate of its economic impact – just shy of \$1 million to the Madison area. While this injection into the local economy is impressive, we know the ripple effects from having this event in our backyard are still taking shape. Wisconsin attendees are working to put their learning into action and to cultivate new connections into partnerships, while attendees from around the country and globe are putting Wisconsin on their vacation bucket list.

The momentum continues as the [Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers](#) hosts its annual conference in Eau Claire later this month, and next year the [Outdoor Writers Association of America](#) will be in Madison August 22-24. We can't wait to help host these major outdoor industry events in Wisconsin and introduce journalists, editors and content creators to Wisconsin's thriving outdoor industry and adventure opportunities.

And for the travelers and residents looking to squeeze what is left out of summer — or to chase the fall color as it paints the landscape — an industry of outdoor professionals is working diligently and with passion to ensure opportunities exist, experiences are positive, and communities are strengthened. In the story below, we highlight the contributions of Wisconsin's outdoor recreation workforce.

To the 97,000 recreation workers in Wisconsin, thank you for making Wisconsin the best place to live, work and play.



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](#).

Wisconsin's Outdoor Workforce at the Foundation of Economic Success

For over a century, Americans have celebrated [Labor Day](#) on the first Monday in September. Peter J. McGuire, one of the first to propose such a holiday, wanted to honor those “who from rude nature have delved and carved all the grandeur we behold.” And in 1894, the federal holiday was established to recognize the important contributions of the workforce of the day, then nearly 24 million strong, and today topping 163 million.

The outdoor recreation industry supports 5 million workers, or 3% of the nation’s workforce. In Wisconsin, nearly 97,000 residents, or 3% of the state’s workforce, are employed in outdoor recreation. From park rangers and trail builders, to fishing guides and kayak outfitters, campground hosts, mechanics and manufacturers, gear designers and retail sales associates, the outdoor recreation workforce is critical to Wisconsin’s continued success on many fronts . Here’s a brief look at our thriving outdoor workforce and how they’re advancing Wisconsin.

Stewarding and Activating Outdoor Spaces

Wisconsin boasts rich natural resources and scenic landscapes. There is no shortage of amazing places to play outside. Maintaining these spaces, creating access and developing sustainable recreation opportunities are conservation biologists, landscape architects, engineers, planners, trailbuilders and park rangers.

Outdoor Workforce Profile: Trail Development



Mike Repyak

Position: Director of Development & Outdoor Recreation

Organization: Kocourek Trailhead Foundation

Education and Training: BS, Landscape Architecture and Land Planning

"While I'm very lucky to have a career that allows me to be outdoors while I'm working, I love seeing others enjoy the projects that I had a part of creating and watching communities grow and thrive because they have access to a range of outdoor recreation experiences. The outdoor industry is full of awesome people doing great work; it's a large industry that feels like a connected community of like-minded individuals."

Connecting People to the Outdoors

Educators teach outdoor skills, safety and responsible recreation. Guides, outfitters and ski instructors help facilitate outdoor experiences by providing expert advice and services. Parks and recreation coordinators plan and execute programs that introduce people to outdoor activities and spaces. GIS specialists and software developers design maps and digital tools that help people navigate wilderness, trails and parks. A myriad of professionals connect people to the outdoors to find joy.

Outdoor Workforce Profile: Education and Engagement



Miguel Santos

Position: Manager of Environmental Education, Menomonee Valley Branch
Organization: Urban Ecology Center
Education and Training: BA, English Literature and Linguistics; MA, Education; MA, Spanish Literature and Linguistics

"I have worked at the Urban Ecology Center as a bilingual Environmental Educator and Manager of Education for the past 12 years. This job has given me the chance to mentor thousands of students, interns and colleagues in environmental education and social justice. My current position has not only given me the opportunity to practice and model environmentally responsible behaviors, but also to promote community by offering resources that support learning, volunteerism, stewardship, recreation and camaraderie. "

Supporting Local Economies and Rural Resilience

More than merely a pastime, outdoor recreation drives economic activity and provides jobs. Bike shops, powersports dealerships and outdoor retailers are located in communities big and small and employ sales associates, managers and mechanics. Skilled laborers design and assemble outdoor gear and equipment for world-renowned outdoor brands in some of Wisconsin's smallest communities.

Outdoor Workforce Profile: Business and Manufacturing



Sawyer Briel



Position: Brand & Communications Manager

Organization: Vortex Optics

Education and Training: BA, Political Science and Communications; Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University

"It's a big industry, but also small at the same time – I've been lucky to meet some truly incredible people in my line of work. Seeing folks take our products out into the wild and hearing their stories is always incredible, whether it's a hunt or a hike."

Driving Economic Competitiveness

Communities known for their outdoor recreation amenities and culture attract visitors, new businesses and new residents. Economic development consultants and community planners integrate outdoor recreation infrastructure for these attractive quality-of-life benefits. Graphic designers and marketing specialists craft branding and advertising to promote a destination for tourism and talent attraction. Event and race organizers manage logistics and volunteers to execute outdoor events that introduce participants the community and add to its vibrancy.

Outdoor Workforce Profile: Economic Development



Renae Krings

Position: Senior Director

Organization: Greater Wausau Prosperity Partnership

Education and Training: BASc, Business Administration and Management; Economic Development Institute, University of Oklahoma

"I find it incredibly rewarding that my role has allowed me to work alongside a number of highly talented professionals to promote the many benefits of outdoor recreation. Collaborating on efforts to improve the quality of life and boost the local economy is a truly meaningful way to make a difference."

Making outdoor recreation accessible for all unlocks the physical and mental health benefits of time spent outside. Adaptive equipment makers and instructors design specialized gear and provide training assistance for new users. Researchers continue to study outdoor recreation and ways to measure the health outcomes for various activities. Nature therapists offer techniques from forest bathing to outdoor meditation. Even occupational therapists utilize gardening, walking on uneven, natural surfaces and other outdoor activities to help patients heal and recover.

Outdoor Workforce Profile: Health and Wellness



Ian Karl

Position: Experiential Program Coordinator

Organization: Northwest Passage

Education and Training: BS, Biology; M.Ed in Clinical Counseling; Wisconsin Master Naturalist; Wilderness First Responder

"I believe Wisconsin's greatest resources are its public lands and waterways. In my work, I have the privilege of connecting youth in mental health treatment with the wild areas of Northwest Wisconsin. Whether hiking, paddling, or exploring through underwater photography in the St. Croix watershed, these experiences help young people build resilience, spark curiosity, and discover new strengths—while deepening their connection to the natural world."

Wisconsin's diverse and skilled community of professionals cares for our outdoor spaces and connects people to them, enhancing our quality of life, fueling our local economies and strengthening Wisconsin's competitiveness.



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: [River Alliance of Wisconsin](#)

- For 30 years, the River Alliance of Wisconsin has harnessed grassroots action to inspire water stewardship across Wisconsin.



Guides, Tours, Rentals: [Hayward Fly Fishing Company](#)

- Serving fly anglers in the heart of Northwest Wisconsin since 2005, Hayward Fly Fishing Company provides guided trips and sells fly fishing gear.



Retailer: [Track Side](#)

- A full-service dealership in Eagle River, Track Side specializes in sales, service and rentals of snowmobiles, watercrafts and ATV/UTVs.



Nonprofit: [H3O Polarized](#)

- H3O Polarized Eyewear Systems are designed and manufactured by people with a passion for fishing and the outdoors. Featuring interchangeable, polarized lens colors, these eyewear systems fit each user's outdoor adventure.



Destinations: [Wausau Whitewater](#)

- Located in downtown Wausau, Wausau Whitewater features Class II to III+ rapids. Spectators and adventure seekers alike can enjoy the Wausau Whitewater course.

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.





LAST CHANCE: Help Shape Future Support for Outdoor Businesses

We're seeking insights from small outdoor business owners. Take this [short 5–7-minute survey](#) to help us better understand your business, your experience accessing support in Wisconsin, the challenges you're navigating, and the types of expertise or resources you'd like access to.

[Take the Survey](#)

INDUSTRY & COMMUNITY NEWS

Devil's Lake State Park Named Number 1 State Park in U.S. for Hiking

Travel + Leisure covered the new Google Maps ranking that shared the most popular state parks in the country this summer. Devil's Lake State Park topped the list of best parks for hiking. [Read the story.](#)

Wisconsin DNR to Host Universal Recreation Day Sept. 6

The event at the Pike Lake Unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest will highlight universally accessible outdoor recreation and offer visitors the chance to try out various adaptive equipment. [Read the story.](#)

RESOURCES

Registration Open for TrailNation Summit

The TrailNation Summit, hosted by Rails to Trails, is a one-of-a-kind gathering where attendees will gain skills and connections to accelerate the pace of trail network development. Held in Cleveland, Ohio, from Oct. 27 to 29, the Summit features mobile workshops and immersive learning opportunities. [Learn more.](#)

Hunter Recruitment Grant Program Applications due Sept. 15

The Hunter Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) grant program is a cost-sharing grant to ensure the education, training and development of safe and ethical hunters and mentors. This grant program is administered as a reimbursement program; all costs associated with the project must be incurred before seeking reimbursement from DNR. [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 off-highway vehicles (OHVs), educate the public on proper natural land use and wildlife conservation practices and protect appropriate and sustainable access to public lands. [Learn more.](#)

Trail Lab Foundations Workshop Oct. 1-2

Held for many years in Bentonville, Arkansas, the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) will host its Trail Labs in the Midwest. Learn how to create a model trail community in the two-day, hands-on workshop to be held in Duluth, Minnesota, this fall. [Learn more.](#)

Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Applications due Oct. 31

The 2026-2030 Program Cycle for TAP is open. 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.](#)

JOB LISTINGS

Assistant Operations Manager, Arians Nordic Center, Brillion. [Learn more.](#)

Philanthropic Coordinator, Ice Age Trail Alliance, Cross Plains. [Learn more.](#)

Operations Coordinator, Prairie Enthusiasts, Viroqua. [Learn more.](#)

Project Forester, Steigerwaldt Land Services, Hayward. [Learn more.](#)

Various positions, Duluth Trading Company, Mount Horeb. [Learn more.](#)

Various trail positions, International Mountain Bicycling Association, remote. [Learn more.](#)

Various positions, Mercury Marine, Fond du Lac. [Learn more.](#)

various positions, including Marine, and as a [Learn More](#).

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