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**WISCONSIN OUTSIDE** | February 2021

## A Note from the Director

We often talk about how outdoor recreation is a way of life in Wisconsin, that it has long been part of the story here. Just like you, I know it to be true. In winters, I grew up cross-country skiing and finding snow at local ski hills, and I spent my summers biking or paddling my way to a secret fishing hole. Any spare moment I could seize would be enjoyed outdoors. You and I live this way without thinking twice about it.

I was recently part of a national conversation that left out Wisconsin and positioned a few other states as exemplary role models because “outdoor recreation was part of their DNA.” Certainly, the states mentioned have great examples we can all learn from, and some have led the way to outdoor recreation being recognized as an industry of its own. But hearing that comment, at first, I was taken back. I thought to myself, “Outdoor recreation is part of Wisconsin’s DNA, too.” Then I had a

realization. The difference is that others who don't live here, don't necessarily see it that way.

In that moment, the work of this Office was yet again affirmed in my mind. Wisconsin has so much to offer outdoorists and so much to gain by harnessing the potential of the outdoor industry. We've got the goods to attract and retain businesses, employees, travelers, and residents. The foundation is right in front of us.

Bringing together the Nordic and downhill skiers, the snowmobilers, the hunters, the boaters, the paddlers, the anglers, the horseback riders, the campers, the hikers, the runners, the bikers, the ATVer, the birders, the beach-goers. Bringing together the businesses – retailers, outfitters, guides – the manufacturers, the nonprofits, the communities, the government agencies. There is power and possibility in uniting the diversity of stakeholders that make up Wisconsin's outdoor recreation industry, and the Office is here to finally bring us all together.



Mary Monroe Brown  
Director, Office of Outdoor Recreation

We're a growing Office that wants to engage all outdoor recreation-related businesses & organizations. Click [here](#) to update your information and help build Wisconsin's outdoor recreation directory.

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*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 by forwarding this email or [subscribing here](#). You may also update your subscription preferences [here](#).*

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## More Than a Fun Ride

Seen zooming across a snowy field, white dust trailing behind, snowmobiles crisscross the landscape on groomed trails that provide riders access and views of lands beyond the horizon. For many, exploring from the seat of the sled – the ride itself – is a joy. For others, the snowmobile is a tool, a fun one no less. Whether used to get one into (or out of) the backcountry or to get the job done, it fills a niche in ways other tools just can't.

Below, a few of the [Outdoor Recreation Committee](#) members share their perspectives on the snow machine.

### **Into the Backcountry for More Outdoor Recreation**

One can hike, snowshoe, or even ski into the backcountry, but getting there quickly isn't an option. Snowmobiles take people and gear to remote places where they can enjoy the wilderness.

*"The snowmobile outfitted with a ski rack and carrying capacity allows access much farther into the backcountry. From there I can ski, ice fish, bar-b-que, etc. When I am done, I can readily cart it all back out of the backcountry – leaving it the way I found it."*

*-Joe Vadeboncoeur, Founder, Goodheart Solutions*



*Snowmobiles access a remote cabin in northern Wisconsin. Photo courtesy of Brian Malloy.*

### **Take a Sled Instead of the Car**

In some communities, snowmobiles are a more efficient vehicle to get from point A to point B under snowy conditions.

*"In our community, we see snowmobiles being used in a myriad of ways. Most often, snowmobilers are seen flying across the lake to their favorite ice fishing spot. We also see snowmobilers pulling up at Minocqua Winter Park to do a bit of cross-country skiing, ice skating, or tubing as the trail leads right to the facility. Our area students also use their sleds to get to school in the morning! The snowmobile is a versatile vehicle and is beloved in the north!"*

*-Krystal Westfahl, Executive Director, Let's Minocqua*

### **Better Than a Tractor**

Commonly used for grooming trails of all kinds – cross-country, downhill, and even trails for its own use – snowmobiles are more effective in snow than a tractor. They are also essential tools for first aid responders should emergencies arise on the slopes or the trails.

*“The Birkie has four snowmobiles that are used for grooming parts of our cross-country trails, deployed during medical evacuations as well as transporting staff, supplies, and equipment. During events they are utilized to escort the lead skiers, provide a livestream production of the race and complete a sweep of the course to ensure all participants are home safe!”*

*-Ben Popp, Executive Director, American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation*

### **One More Way to Enjoy the Outdoors**

Beyond functional, snowmobiles are another way people to choose to experience the outdoors. Many trails traverse over farm fields barren in winter and other private lands. Thanks to partnerships between landowners, municipalities, and snowmobile clubs, riders can explore these places that are otherwise inaccessible to the public.

*“Snowmobiles are very versatile! You can hit the well-groomed trails of Wisconsin for an hour, a day, a weekend, or just ride out to your favorite fishing hole! Thanks to the many volunteers of Wisconsin snowmobile clubs, there are 25,000 miles of groomed trails for all to enjoy!”*

*-Sue Smedegard, Secretary, Association of Wisconsin Snowmobile Clubs*



International Snowmobile Safety Week provides an opportunity to raise awareness for safe and responsible riding. The dedicated week may have passed, but the message is always timely. Listen along with us and hear about the fun to be had and the safety tips to be remembered when snowmobiling.

### **60-second radio PSA**

In partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, Department of Natural Resources, and Travel Wisconsin, the Office aired this message as part of the “Get outside. Stay safe. Be well.” campaign encouraging safe and responsible outdoor recreation this winter. [Listen](#).

### **20-minute podcast**

The DNR’s Wild Wisconsin Off the Record podcast is back, and Episode 56 features the founders of Wisco Sled Divas on women riders and safety. [Listen](#).

For a quick read, [see these tips for snowmobile and ice safety](#) or [visit the DNR website for more resources](#).

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## Snow Much Money: The Impact of Snowmobiling in Wisconsin

*This is part of a series diving deep into the impact of Wisconsin's outdoor recreation economy and providing a closer look from our recent report [Outdoor Recreation: A Top Driver of Wisconsin's Economy](#).*

Wisconsin is often credited as the birthplace of the modern snowmobile, pointing to the invention by Carl Eliason of Sayner in the early 1920s. His prototype was much like a motorized toboggan, and it utilized a track to drive it over the snow. Ever since, popularity of the snow machine has continued to grow, accounting for [\\$26 billion in economic impact](#) nationwide, and nowhere is it more evident than in the place where it all started.

At an assembly plant in Osceola, over 500 employees work to build [Polaris](#) snowmobile engines. This facility, yet another cornerstone of Wisconsin's outdoor recreation manufacturing community (which ranks fifth in the nation), is responsible for manufacturing all of the engines for Polaris' line of snowmobiles, as well as a number of engines for their ATV and side by side products. They also produce all of the engines for Indian Motorcycle.

Just outside of Minocqua is [Yamaha's](#) global snowmobile testing facility. In 2001, company leadership made the strategic decision to relocate the test track to Wisconsin where the machines could be fine-tuned to meet the exact conditions users experience in their largest market.





*Riders compete in the World Championship Snowmobile Derby in Eagle River*

Eagle River, also known as “Snowmobile Capital of the World,” is home to the [World Championship Derby Complex](#) that hosts a series of top-tier races and shows. The series (see the upcoming February [events](#)) draws more than 40,000 spectators annually from across the U.S., Canada and beyond infusing dollars into local economies. The talented racers are honored in the halls of fame at not one, but two, museums in the area. Also honored are trail developers, volunteers, legislators, and others that have shown a deep dedication to the sport.

Across the state, over 219,000 snowmobiles were registered in Wisconsin in 2020, the most in any state or Canadian province. Each rider spends, on average, \$2,000 - \$3,000 per year on snowmobile related expenses, according to the [International Snowmobile Manufacturing Association](#).

In addition to rider spending, individuals and their local clubs are largely responsible for developing and maintaining Wisconsin’s 25,000-plus miles of snowmobile trails, saving private and public entities from incurring a larger share of these costs. They are also committed to giving back to their communities, beyond patronizing well-loved businesses along the trails. Most clubs host fundraisers to benefit charity organizations, and with over 600 clubs in the state, their generosity makes an impact.

## Industry & Community News

**Outdoor Boom Leaves Shelves Empty at Local Sports Stores** In spring and summer, demand for bikes, backpacking equipment, and water sports gear skyrocketed. This winter the demand has shifted to snow sports equipment. [Read the article.](#)

**Duluth Woman Aims to Complete Winter Thru-hike of Ice Age Trail** Emily Ford has been making headlines on her 1,200-mile trek and generating awareness for BIPOC communities outdoors. Upon completion, Ford will be only the second person and the first woman to thru-hike the Ice Age Trail in winter. [Read the article.](#)

## Events

*Note: In-person events may change due to precautions based on COVID-19 guidance. Please see each individual event for more information.*

**Winter Carnival | Madison | February 3 - 7** The Wisconsin Union hosts its annual event providing ample opportunity to experience the outdoors in winter including an educational ice-fishing derby, snowshoe rentals, Nordic ski lessons, an avalanche workshop and more. [View the program line-up.](#)

**Bald Eagle Watching Days | February 6 & 20** A premier event for viewing bald eagles as they gather along the Wisconsin River to feed in open waters and roost in sheltered valleys, it will be held virtually this year to limit the gathering of humans during the COVID-19 pandemic. [View the program line-up](#) or [take a self-guided tour.](#)

**North End Classic Ski Race | Cable | February 7** The 25K and 12.5K classic ski races are set to traverse the North End Ski Club's trails. Several changes have been implemented to ensure a safe race. [Learn more and register.](#)

**Trailtessa Intro to Winter Hiking + Snowshoe Hike | February 4 & 20-21** The Ice Age Trail Alliance and REI are hosting a virtual workshop on February 4<sup>th</sup> to cover equipment, gear, and trail questions in preparation for the February 20-21 on-your-own snowshoe hike event. [Learn more and register.](#)

## Resources

**New Winter Edition of the Outdoors COVID-19 Toolkit** In partnership with the Department of Health Services and the Department of Natural Resources, the Office launched an updated toolkit for winter activities. Download free posters and social media graphics to help encourage safe and responsible winter recreation. [Access the toolkit.](#)

**SCORP Community of Practice – Monthly Sessions** Hosted by the Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals, these monthly meetings are for anyone directly or indirectly involved in drafting Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation

Plans and are an opportunity to share best practices, network, and collaborate.  
[Learn more and register.](#)

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



**Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation | 201 W Washington Ave | Madison, WI 53703**

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