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A Note from the Director

As we approach spring and prepare for another busy summer outdoors, we're reminded of the work we've accomplished in the last year even as we had to pivot during the height of the pandemic. Like many of you, the Office of Outdoor Recreation shifted and adapted while remaining focused on our mission.

The Office has been working hard to meet with stakeholders, provide resources, and draw attention for Wisconsin's outdoor industry. Acting on the feedback received, the Office produced resources like the first-of-its-kind economic impact report on the outdoor economy for Wisconsin highlighting the \$7.8 billion dollar industry, a free communications toolkit to promote safe and responsible recreation,

and developed a popular educational webinar series and provided access to state agency leadership.

As a member of the Outdoor Recreation Learning Network of the National Governor's Association, the Office is engaged with a growing list of state directors working to leverage the outdoor industry. In addition to participating in the exchange of ideas and best practices, the Office also highlights the work of Wisconsin's outdoor stakeholders.

The Office is fortunate to be within the Department of Tourism whose resources help raise the profile of Wisconsin as an outdoor recreation destination, and it helps us deliver media results for the state. The hard work by our partners to obtain national designations of Recreational Trails, Water Trails, and Scenic Byways (which you can read about below), are yet another way to showcase and promote Wisconsin.

In the coming months, we're excited to launch several more projects as we develop an industry hub for outdoor recreation for the first time in Wisconsin. Thank you for your ongoing and enthusiastic support.

For more reflections on the early efforts the Office of Outdoor Recreation and our vision for how we will continue this work, join us at the [Wisconsin Governor's Conference on Tourism](#) on March 16 as industry leaders share their thoughts in a panel discussion.



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.

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](#).

Wisconsin Spotlight on the National Stage

Due to the hard work of area partners, Wisconsin received five new national designations for trails and scenic roads. Achieving such recognition builds credibility for what Wisconsinite's know to be true: Wisconsin's outdoors are beautiful and perfect for adventure of all kinds.

From National Scenic Trails (Wisconsin has two of the nation's eleven) to Scenic Coastal Byways (along Wisconsin's fresh coast), there is no shortage in the way of options to match your interest or pace for exploring.



Kayaking along the Chippewa River National Water Trail near the Pablo Center in downtown Eau Claire.

The National Trails System Act of 1968 authorized the creation of National Scenic Trails, National Historic Trails, and National Recreation Trails. The first two are designations bestowed by Congress and the latter by the Secretary of the Interior. Last fall, Wisconsin added a paved bike trail system and a water trail to the growing list of nationally designated trails.

Heart of Vilas County National Recreation Trail

The 52-mile paved trail system connects the five communities of Boulder Junction, Manitowish Waters, Mercer, Sayner and St. Germain and travels among lakes and through a state forest.

Chippewa River National Water Trail

The 4.2-mile water trail courses through a mostly urban landscape along the former logging path, now a strong fishery with geologic formations amid the historic downtown of Eau Claire.

In addition to these national trail designations, three Wisconsin highways received designations from the Federal Highway Administration just last month for their

unique and distinct abilities to tell the national story, highlighting natural, historic, cultural, or recreational features along their routes.

Wisconsin Lake Superior National Scenic Byway

The 70-mile route follows the southern shore of Lake Superior along the Bayfield Peninsula providing views across the Apostle Islands National Scenic Lakeshore.

Door County Coastal National Scenic Byway

The 66-mile route takes Highway 57 from Sturgeon Bay north along the bay side to the tip of Door Peninsula. The route continues south on Highway 42 following the Lake Michigan shoreline back to the start in Sturgeon Bay.

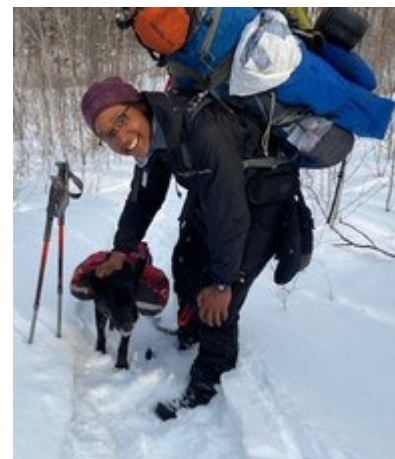
Great River Road National Scenic Byway & All-American Road

Following the Mississippi River from Minnesota to the Gulf of Mexico, it totals over 3,000 miles. Wisconsin's portion received an elevated designation of All-American Road in recognition of its intrinsic qualities of national significance and its draw as a travel destination unto itself.

Communities located along these trails and byways reap the benefits of the recognition, whether it be in visitor spending or resident participation. Shining a spotlight on the greatness of our state's outdoors reminds us how lucky we are to be Wisconsinites.

“ What We're Hearing ”

Director of the Office, Mary Monroe Brown, had the opportunity to join Emily Ford and her dog Diggins for a portion of her hike on the Ice Age Trail near Abbotsford. Ford set out from the trail's Eastern Terminus in Sturgeon Bay on December 28 and is closing in on the trail's end in Interstate State Park, its Western Terminus. She will be the first woman, first Black person, and just the second person ever to complete a solo thru-hike of the 1,200-mile trail in winter. Mary had the chance to ask her about the experience.



What is the most surprising thing since you've been on the trail?

I did not think so many people would follow this. Early on I was hiking on a stretch of road, and it must have been after an article was published, a man stopped his truck and leaned out his window, “Hey, you’re Emily Ford!”

Emily also expressed how the kindness she has been bestowed has been far beyond anything she would have imagined. From encouraging notes at trail markers to hot meals at trailheads and even indoor accommodations on some of the coldest nights, she says she has really felt the power of what Midwesterners can do when they rally behind a cause. In this case, the cause being her journey.

You’ve hiked other notable trails, what are your impressions of the Ice Age Trail?

I don’t think you understand. Having this trail across your state – in the longest possible route [She said chuckling, during the chat at about 950 miles into her hike] it’s beautiful. I was explaining it to friends before I left because nobody knew what it was, and they were like, ‘It’s probably flat. Take a sled.’ It’s definitely not flat, and I ditched the sled early on. It goes through some amazing, beautiful places. You’ve got hemlocks and oak savannas, and it’s in your backyard.”

Emily’s adventure has inspired many, including the Office. Mary asked Emily about the hard work that needs to be done for a more inclusive outdoors, and Emily had impactful ideas to share that we hope to work with her once she’s back home, rested, and recovered. Cheers, Emily!

Outdoor Recreation Gives Rural Communities a Competitive Advantage

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](#).

Rural communities with strong outdoor recreation elements have a competitive advantage for attracting entrepreneurs and businesses. Studies have shown that access to the outdoors is consistently a quality-of-life consideration that decision-makers rank highly.

“As we continue to grow our healthcare community in northern Wisconsin, attracting excellent clinicians has been critical to our success,” explains Luke Beirl, CEO of Hayward Area Memorial Hospital. “The access to trails right on the property is something that very few organizations can offer their employees. It is difficult to imagine a better scenario for those who love outdoor recreation.”

In fact, many of Wisconsin’s outdoor recreation-related manufacturing facilities are located in rural communities. Bending Branches and Polaris in Osceola, Mathews Archery in Sparta, Vortex Optics in Barneveld, MirroCraft Boats in Gillett, and the list goes on. The industry supports over 93,000 jobs, over 8,000 jobs in

manufacturing alone, and Wisconsin's outdoors provide a constant source of inspiration and personal renewal that keep these companies competitive for the long-term.



Cyclists enjoy the Hospital Trails in Hayward. Photo courtesy of Joe Vadeboncouer.

Beyond workforce attraction and jobs, outdoor recreation amenities are a draw for visitors to experience a slice of life residents enjoy on the daily. Cindy Burzinski of Vilas County Tourism & Publicity acknowledges their economy thrives because of outdoor recreation, but so do residents who have access to activities that contribute to an active, healthy lifestyle. “Our world class hiking and biking trails offer such wonderful outdoor experiences that contribute to our health and connection to the beauty of our region.”

Wisconsin's Northwoods has been known for its legendary rustic outdoor experiences, and recent reports show the impact of the outdoor economy – about \$14.7 million per year in spending by participants of non-motorized activities in Ashland, Bayfield, and Sawyer Counties. In the Driftless Area, visitors to the Kickapoo Water Trail generate nearly \$1.2 million annually and ATV/UTV riders along the Cheese Country Trail spend even more, nearly \$15 million.

The benefits of outdoor recreation to communities, even those located in rural parts of the country, range from attracting businesses with well-paying jobs, workforce recruitment and retention, visitor attraction and spending, and quality of life for

residents. The list is long, and the story convincing when the return on investment is just so great.

Industry & Community News

Call for Shovel-Ready Projects In order to provide input to the Department of Interior for Great American Outdoors Act and Land & Water Conservation funding, a coalition of organizations is gathering a list of projects to quantify the capacity of the trails community to build, maintain, and develop trails now. [Read the article](#) and [take the survey](#).

American Birkebeiner Partners with DNR to Expand Virtual Race Options To make the race even more accessible in the virtual format, Birkie and the Department of Natural Resources through the OutWiGo program partnered to showcase state parks offering groomed Nordic trails to complete the races. [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.

Wisconsin Water Week | March 8 - 12 The annual Lakes & Rivers Convention is now Wisconsin Water Week with three days of inspiring content, one day of regional topics, and a day of action. A majority of the program will be held virtually. [Learn more and register](#).

Canoecopia | March 12 - 14 The largest paddlesports expo in the world is back after having to cancel last year as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in Wisconsin. This year the expo will be held virtually with no shortage of programming. [Learn more and register](#).

Governor's Council on Tourism Conference | March 16, April 1 & 20, May 6 Reimagined as a virtual conference spanning four half-day programs with insightful keynote presentations, panels, and breakout sessions, the conference will focus on "the path forward" for tourism. [Learn more and register](#).

Ram Trucks Snowcross National | Eagle River | March 19 & 20 The two-day racing event is part of the national AMSOIL Championship Snowcross series. Previously hosted in Lake Geneva, the event will be held at the World Championship Derby Complex with in-person spectators. [Learn more](#).

Resources

Winter Edition of the Outdoors COVID-19 Toolkit In partnership with the Department of Health Services and the Department of Natural Resources the Office of Outdoor Recreation launched an updated toolkit for winter activities. Free downloadable posters and social media graphics encourage safe and responsible winter recreation. [Access the toolkit.](#)

Rural Economic Development Toolkit for Outdoor Recreation The Outdoor Recreation Roundtable launched its online toolkit as a road map full of resources for rural communities interested in pursuing outdoor recreation projects for economic development. [View the toolkit.](#)

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



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