

Wisconsin
Department of Natural Resources
OUTDOOR REPORT

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Outdoor Report as of December 15, 2016

Temperatures dropped severely over the weekend and everything from a couple inches to almost a foot of powder fell across Wisconsin this week. More snow and cold weather is predicted for this coming weekend. In areas with more than 6 inches of snow, cross-country ski trails were being packed at many state park and forest properties, but so far there has not been enough snow in most locations to set tracks.

Snowmobile trails are opening in the far north and in the far south, where snow depths were greatest, but conditions are generally poor to fair, according to the Department of Tourism snow conditions report. Riders should check with their local clubs or county snowmobile coordinators before venturing out to ensure that trails in their specific area have opened. Snowshoe enthusiasts are also tightening bindings and preparing for some time on the frozen landscape when trails receive a few more inches of snow, which could happen later this week.

While there have now been multiple evenings and several days below freezing temperatures, ice on state water bodies still has a ways to go. While no ice should be assumed “safe,” the current layer remains especially thin and extreme caution is urged for those avid ice-anglers, itching to get out on top of the water. Use extreme caution when venturing out onto the ice for fishing. Have ice picks handy, wear a floatation or life jacket or and test the ice before walking farther.

Pheasant season remains open through December 31, and archery and crossbow, as well as several small game seasons will continue on to January 8. That’s good news for those willing to brave the weather, as the recent snowfall has improved tracking considerably.

Prints from everything from rabbit to elk are starting to appear and chart their journeys through the forests and prairies of the state. Bird feeders are logging visits from winter goldfinches, wood peckers and the brazen red and gray squirrels. A marten was seen on a trail camera in Iron County and the least weasel, the state’s smallest carnivore, has just finished its autumn molt and now blends impressively into the white landscape. It’s relative, the ermine, has yet to show its face, but can be distinguished by its larger size and black-tipped tail.

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Despite the wintry wallop, snowy owls remain relatively scarce, while short-eared owls, rough-legged hawks, and other winter raptors continue in open grasslands and wetlands rich with rodent prey. Waterbirds are on the move as ice takes over many of the state's water bodies. Tundra swans were most notable across the southern half of the state this week and may linger wherever open water remains. Small numbers of Bohemian waxwings, white-winged crossbills, and common redpolls have been found mostly in northern tier counties.

One positive note about the clear cold nights is they have made for wonderful star gazing and for viewing the aptly named full cold moon this past week.

Statewide Birding Report

The longest-running citizen science survey in the world, Audubon's 117th annual Christmas Bird Count is underway through January 5. Each count is held on a single day in an established 15-mile wide diameter circle, and Wisconsin is home to more than 100 circles across most counties in the state. Volunteer birders of all ages and skill levels are needed to help with the counts, contributing sightings from field or feeder in effort to help monitor early winter bird populations. Find a count circle near you at <http://wsobirds.org/christmas-bird-count>. Despite the wintry wallop, snowy owls remain relatively scarce, while short-eared owls, rough-legged hawks, and other winter raptors continue in open grasslands and wetlands rich with rodent prey. Waterbirds are on the move as ice takes over many of the state's water bodies. Tundra swans were most notable across the southern half of the state this week and may linger wherever open water remains. Now is also a good time to check seed-dominated fields and roadsides for snow buntings, horned larks, and Lapland longspurs. Winter finches often make news this time of year but alas they are few in numbers thus far even across the north woods. Small numbers of Bohemian waxwings, white-winged crossbills, and common redpolls have been found mostly in northern tier counties. American goldfinches are prevalent statewide, with purple finches lingering north to Lake Superior as well. Some of the rare birds spotted this week include black-legged kittiwake in Brown County, continuing Anna's hummingbird and western grebe in Milwaukee, eared grebe in Dane, Townsend's warbler in Kewaunee, Eurasian tree sparrow in Polk, varied thrushes in Chippewa and Juneau, and a Baltimore oriole in Richland. As always, find out what others are seeing and report your finds at www.ebird.org/wi. Good birding! - *Ryan Brady, Bureau of Wildlife Management research scientist, Ashland*

Upcoming State Natural Area Workday

December 19-22. Take part in the early stages of a volunteer group effort at [Oshkosh-Larsen Trail Prairies SNA](#) near Butte des Morts. Oshkosh-Larsen has several remnant prairies known for rare plants and its location on the northeastern edge of prairie-oak savanna region in Wisconsin. Unwanted brush is taking over much of the site and a new effort is underway to care for the plant community. Work during the week of Dec. 19-22 will be clearing unwanted brush and treating stems with herbicide. Check this site out and team up with DNR staff to make a difference. Staff will be onsite from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. each day. Help as little as or as much as you are available. Please contact Justin Nooker at Justin.nooker@wisconsin.gov for directions and if you plan to join. Check the [State Natural Areas Volunteer Program](http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/naturalareas/volunteer.html) <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/naturalareas/volunteer.html> page of the DNR website for details. - *Jared Urban, conservation biologist, Dane*

Northern Region

Superior DNR Service Center area

Brule River State Forest - After a long and mild autumn that had us used to warmer than usual temperatures, temperatures this week plummeted to well below normal. The forecast for the coming week has us in the deep freeze for a few more days, with the potential for some substantial snow over the weekend. The cold weather is not all bad--ice anglers are happy to see ice forming on the lakes and the new snow will make the skiers happy. Stay warm out there! With the cold temperatures and snow, forest staff has been out prepping the ski trails. The trail was rolled on Monday, Dec 12 and is in fair condition. We have about 5 inches of snow on the ground and about 1.5 inches of base. Grass and stubble is still poking through in quite a few spots but any rocks should be covered. We should be able to set tracks after our next snowfall. More snow is forecast for the weekend! Ski trail conditions are kept up-to-date at skinnyski.com and norwiski.com. If you would like to cut a Christmas tree from the Brule River State Forest, a permit can be obtained from the Brule DNR Headquarters. The cost for each permit is \$5. - *Diane Gobin, visitor services associate*

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Ashland DNR Service Center area

Iron County - A marten was caught on trail cam in Iron County on Friday, Dec. 9. As temperatures decrease, the chances of spotting a marten or their tracks lessen. This happened to be right before the “big freeze” that is currently taking place in northern Wisconsin. Fishermen have started testing the ice and have found a few places that freeze over has occurred in the county. After this week of below zero nights and frigid cold days, more ice fishing will become available to fishermen. Remember to always use caution while recreating on ice; each body of water has different characteristics that may affect ice depth. Snowmobile trails have opened in the county. There is currently 7-9 inches of snow to traverse through. - *Jenna Kosnicki, wildlife biologist, Mercer*

Spooner DNR Service Center area

Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area - Birds have become scarce in the meadows, but the warm weather throughout November has allowed some water birds to stick around. Now that cold weather is moving in, these birds will not stay much longer. Now that the flowages are beginning to freeze over, sandhill cranes have moved south for the winter. Some of the highlights that have been seen around the area are rough-legged hawks, snow buntings, tundra swans, sharp-shinned hawks, and red crossbills. Bald eagles are moving through, and sticking around finding food. A pair was observed refurbishing the nest on Phantom Lake Road. Northern harriers are still present.

Park Falls DNR Service Center area

Flambeau River State Forest - With subzero temperatures and the accumulation of inches of snow, winter is truly here. The Flambeau Hills Cross-country Ski Trail has been packed twice in preparation for setting track for skating and traditional skiing. The trail has been opened and there are some hardy folks out there using it in the subzero temps. Snowmobile trails will open when there is enough snow to groom the trails. There is a thin layer of ice forming on the lakes and the sides of the river. Be patient, soon you will be able to ice fish. Tracks from rabbits, squirrels, weasels, deer and elk are just a few of the animals roaming the Forest and it is amazing what you see and hear when you just watch and listen. The deer and elk are conserving their energy and aggressively browsing in logging areas. They really like the occasional clear cut aspen areas. Juncos, snow buntings, woodpeckers, blue jays, crows and eagles are eating seeds, insects under the tree bark or carrion along the roadsides. Archery and crossbow deer season is open till Jan. 8. Snow levels allow for very good tracking conditions. Small game season is open till the end of February and ruffed grouse is open till the end of January. There are quite a few logging operations on the Forest right now. We're hoping to get more frost in the ground with the colder temperatures. The weather forecast for this week is for cold temperatures and some snow over the weekend. - *Diane Stowell, forestry technician advanced and visitor services associate*

Woodruff DNR Service Center area

Northern Highland-American Legion State Forest – The January type temperatures and cold winds will certainly help ice development on area waters and freeze up the swamps to allow for safer winter activities outside. Snow depths vary greatly, but at this point snowshoes are not needed, at least on the southern end of the forest. The clear cold nights make for wonderful star gazing. Area bird feeders are seeing increased visits by winter goldfinches, as well as the chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers. Red and gray squirrels are carting away the seed, and the ermine has yet to make its first appearance at the suet feeder! Brisk and refreshing is anytime spent outside this week! - *Rosalie Richter, visitor services associate*

Northeast Region

Peshtigo DNR Service Center area

Governor Thompson State Park - The ski trails have been rolled flat but the trails are still open to hikers until we receive additional snow fall. It's a great time to see what the leaves were hiding! The park is open to gun hunting for any open season from Nov. 15 to Dec. 15, and for bow hunting from Nov. 15, 2016 to Jan. 8, 2017. Hunters should be aware that non-hunters are also using the state park during this time and that there are areas closed to hunting inside the park boundaries. The park hunting map is available online or at the park office. - *Maggie Kailhofer, park manager*

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Green Bay DNR Service Center area

Manitowoc County - With the cold weather upon us please use extreme caution when venturing out onto the ice for fishing. Have ice picks handy and test the ice before walking farther. No fish is worth risking one's life! The snowmobile trails are currently closed and are not open unless posted. Manitowoc County snowmobile trail information may also be obtained, 24 hours a day at 920-758-7669. Now is a good time to check your snowmobile over and ensure it is not only running properly but also registered. Make sure your sled has current registration and also when you do hit the open trail that you have a valid trail pass. (For more information on the nonresident or Wisconsin snowmobile trail passes sold by DNR, contact our Call Center staff at 1-888-936-7463, available 7 days per week, 7 a.m. – 10 p.m. For more information on the discounted club member snowmobile trail passes please visit www.awsc.org) Dress warm and enjoy the outdoors! - *Alyssa Gove, conservation warden, Manitowoc*

Sturgeon Bay DNR Service Center area

Whitefish Dunes State Park - About 6 inches of snow fell Sunday. Ski trails were rolled and packed Monday morning and are open to skiers. More snow is needed to put down a track which might be this weekend. Ski trails are Red, Yellow, and Green. Hiking with snowshoes or boots is allowed on the Black Trail and beach. There have been several sightings of eagles soaring along the beach. With fewer people on the beach, geese have been grouping up along the shoreline. This past weekend visitors spotted a porcupine, grouse and pileated woodpecker. Several deer have been spotted in the park. At this time, pets are allowed on the Black Trail and beach. Pets are not allowed on groomed ski trails. Some areas of the park are open to hunting and trapping from Nov. 15 to Dec. 15. Hunting with legal bow and crossbow methods is allowed in those same areas of the park Dec. 15 through Jan. 8, 2017. Hunting maps are posted and available at the office, kiosk and online. - *Jaclyn Moeri, visitor services associate*

Wautoma DNR Service Center area

Waupaca County - Winter has finally arrived in central Wisconsin. Bitter conditions make outdoor activities a challenge this week. There are about 5 inches of snow on the ground and snowmobile trails have not yet opened. Antlerless deer season did not receive much hunting pressure and those who go out reported deer were not moving much. All waterfowl except a few geese have departed. We are in the "tweener" stage for fishing – questionable ice conditions and low to no open water fishing opportunity. - *Karl Kramer, wildlife technician, Wautoma*

Hartman Creek State Park - Ice has started to form on the lakes, but areas of open water remain. The cross-country ski trails are yet to be groomed, more snow accumulation is needed. The park's annual candle light ski, hike, and snowshoe event is scheduled for Jan. 28, 2017 from 5 to 8 p.m. Any additional questions please call the park office at 715-258-2372. The parks single track bike trails remain open for fat tire biking. There currently is open hunting and trapping in the park until Dec. 15, with the exception of Archery season remaining open until Jan. 8. Please note the park will be closed to hunting for the upcoming Holiday Hunt from Dec. 24 through Jan. 1. The park's two campgrounds the family camp and the group camp closed Dec. 1, and will reopen in the spring. The horse trails closed on Nov. 15, and will also reopen in the spring. - *Jarrold Kehring, ranger*

Southeast Region

Milwaukee DNR Service Center area

Kettle Moraine State Forest, Lapham Peak Unit – The forest received approximately 6 inches of light fluffy snow Sunday. All the trails have been packed to a thin base. There was not enough snow to set a track or groom again Tuesday night but all trails remain snow covered and skiable in fair to good condition. Lights will be on until 9 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Hiking is not allowed on any of the groomed ski trails. Snowmaking will continue until Friday morning but plans may change. The trails where snowmaking is taking place are closed to skiing. - *Brett Johansen, ranger*

Kettle Moraine State Forest, Northern Unit - The forest received about 4 inches of light, fluffy snow over the weekend of Dec. 10, and groomers have been out packing the ski trails to get a base started. Currently the snow depth is too shallow to set track, and some rocks and sticks are showing through, but there is coverage throughout. Ski conditions are marginal, but should improve with the forecast for continued cold temperatures and fresh snow next weekend. Hikers and pets are now prohibited from the Greenbush and Zillmer ski trails. Early-season skiers are reminded that trail passes are required, and the 2017 passes are on sale now. All gun deer seasons have closed, and firearms will again be prohibited in Zillmer Trail area. Pheasant and turkey seasons close Dec. 31, squirrel closes Jan. 31, and rabbit season closes Feb. 28. Visitors might consider wearing brightly-colored clothing when venturing outside of the closed hunting areas. A limited number of blaze orange vests are available to borrow at the Ice Age Visitor Center. - *Deb Harder, visitor services associate*

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Kettle Moraine State Forest, Southern Unit – Scuppernong, Nordic and McMiller trails were packed Dec. 11. There is not enough snow to set a track. Definitely recommending rock skis at this time. Varying conditions from poor in areas with heavy tree cover to good in the more open areas, but still very skiable conditions throughout. - Anne Korman, superintendent

South Central Region

Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Report -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ek5Af1GbBUY&feature=youtu.be> Cold weather has ice forming on the river. You can hear ice flows crunching and bumping into one another. The river should freeze over soon. Snow is in the forecast Friday and Saturday followed by very cold temperatures. The river at Muscoda remains a little above normal for this time of year, but the trend upstream is at normal flow so by this weekend the river should be at normal flows. - *Mark Cupp, executive director Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board*

Dodgeville DNR Service Center area

Green County - The snowmobile trails opened in Green County on Dec. 11. Being as trail conditions, plus openings and closings can change daily, remember to check the Stateline Trail Blazers' website or Facebook page for updated information before hitting the trails. As always, please report any violations you observe and stay safe! Deer seasons are winding down; however, archery season is open until Jan. 8 for those that can stand the cold. Remember there is not a Holiday hunt in Green County this year. Another reminder is that Pheasant season closes on Dec. 31. Remember to schedule a time to get your bobcats, fishers, and otters registered. - *Ryan Caputo, conservation warden, New Glarus*

Lafayette County - Most of Yellowstone Lake iced up last weekend. The ice is extremely thin, as it continues to sag further each day under the weight of the 4 inches of snow atop. Of the archery hunters still out most are reporting seeing a decent number of deer and that the long and light rut has finally come to an end in the last week and a half. Some area snowmobile trails have opened but a lot remain closed. Make sure to check with each trail system prior to heading out. - *Nick Webster, conservation warden, Darlington*

Blue Mound State Park – Cross-county ski trails are open and in fair condition. For current up to date conditions, please call the park at 608-437-5711. A trail pass is required for skiing and can be purchased at the park office or trailhead kiosk. Please note pets, hiking, biking and snowshoeing is prohibited on groomed ski trails. Hikers and snowshoers are encouraged to use the mountain bike trails. The campground is open year-round. All sites are walk-in only during the winter - *Kevin Swenson, park manager*

Fitchburg DNR Service Center area

Jefferson County - Snow and colder conditions have not deterred small game hunters. Many people have been out pursuing pheasants remaining from this year's stocking efforts. Hunters report being able to follow pheasant tracks through the snow for success on public hunting grounds around Waterloo and Lake Mills. The marsh of Rock Lake and Hope Lake have both seen early ice anglers catching a few bluegills and bass. Extreme caution should be observed as the ice develops over the next few weeks; there is still open water on most lakes and rivers in Jefferson County. Area clubs have the snowmobile trails signed and have groomed the snow that fell last weekend. Currently **NO** trails are open in Jefferson County. Check the Jefferson County Trails hotline (920-699-7669) frequently for updates. - *Pearl Wallace, conservation warden, Jefferson County*

Mirror Lake State Park - With the arrival of snow we have started to groom the remaining trails for cross-country skiing only. Stop at the park office for up to date trail condition information. As of Dec. 12, we have received a few inches of dry fluffy snow. All ski trails are packed and most will have corduroy set by the end of the day. Due to the snow condition and inconsistent depth, the grooming is not setting well yet and we are unable to set track at this time. The Wild Rice and Sandstone hiking trails, which includes the Lakeview and Echo Rock trails, are open with winter hiking and snowshoeing. Utility work is still being performed on portions of the Ishnala Trail therefore it is temporarily closed through 12/16. Once the work is completed we will need some more snow before grooming will be able to begin. Bicycle trails, including fat tire bike use, are closed for the season. They will re-open May 1, weather and condition permitting. - *Becky Green, park manager*

Lake Kegonsa State Park - All cross-country ski trails were groomed and tracked on Monday, Dec. 12 and are in fair condition. The snow base is very thin in some areas, so please use caution. Hiking, pets and snowshoeing are prohibited on all designated cross-country ski trails. Please see the winter park map, for alternate locations for these activities. - *Sarah Bolser, park manager*

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West Central Region

Baldwin DNR Service Center area

Kinnickinnic State Park - All park trails are snow covered and have been packed. A limited amount of classic cross-country ski track has been set. Additional snow will improve the skiing conditions. After Dec. 15, all ski trails will be closed to walking and pets. The red, blue, and hidden falls trails are multi-use trails and are open for snowshoeing, hiking, walking pets or skiing. The Park is closed to all Firearms Hunting and Trapping after Dec. 15. Archery Hunting is open through Jan. 8. For more information, see hunting in Wisconsin State Parks. Early catch and release trout season begins on Saturday Jan. 7. Annual stickers are available for purchase. A vehicle admission sticker is required year-round. When the park office is closed, use the self-registration pay kiosk to buy admission stickers. Please note that one-hour stickers are no longer accepted at Kinnickinnic State Park. – *Eric Klumb, assistant property manager*

La Crosse DNR Service Center area

Vernon County - Least weasels have completed their annual autumn molt in which their pelage color changes from brown to all white. This diminutive, hotdog-sized weasel is the world's smallest carnivore and undergoes 2 molts each year. The autumn molt is usually completed by early December and is triggered by the photoperiod. The autumn molt begins on the animal's posterior and progresses toward the head. The white winter coat provides camouflage color to match the winter snowy surroundings usually encountered during this time of year. The long-tailed weasel and ermine, both larger cousins of the least weasel and found in Wisconsin, also turn white for winter but have black-tipped tails. Least weasels prey mainly upon mice and voles and kill them with a series of rapid bites to the neck and base of the skull. Because of their small size and active lifestyle, these bundles of energy need to consume 40-60 percent of their own body weight daily, which is equivalent to 1 or 2 mice per day. Least weasels inhabit grassy fields, brushy areas, and marsh and woodland edges and are found primarily in the southern half of Wisconsin. The least weasel is a Special Concern species in Wisconsin, meaning there is a suspected problem of abundance or distribution but not yet proved. The main purpose of this category is to focus attention on certain species before they become threatened or endangered. - *Dave Matheys, wildlife biologist, Viroqua*

Perrot State Park – The park received about 5-6 inches of light fluffy snow. A section of the Trempealeau River remains open so you may still see some migrating tundra swans, trumpeter swans and other waterfowl. Some eagles do stay in the area and can also be seen near open water. The skate lane in the campground is packed and in fair condition. Wilbur Trail is packed but only has a 2-inch base with a few bare spots. We will need additional snow before packing the upper trails. Put on your winter boot, strap on your snowshoes or rent a pair from us. Trails open for hiking and snowshoeing include the Riverview trail, Black Walnut, West Brady's, East Brady's, and Perrot Ridge. Maps are available at the park office. If you are interested in renting snowshoes, please call ahead to make arrangements at 608-534-6409. The campground is now closed to vehicle traffic. - *Lois Larson, park manager*

Black River Falls DNR Service Center area

Black River State Forest - Friday and Saturday temperatures should be slightly warmer with highs in the mid-teens while Sunday temps are expected to drop below zero. 3-8 inches of snow are expected over the coming weekend. Winter ATV and UTV trails will reopen December 15, they are listed in fair condition. Snowmobile trails on the east side of Jackson County will also be opening. Jackson County Forestry and Parks maintains and grooms all of the state forest's snowmobile and winter ATV trails. Grooming updates are posted on the Jackson County [exit DNR] website. - *Emily Alf, visitor services associate*

Eau Claire DNR Service Center area

Chippewa River State Trail - Snowmobile trails remained closed around Dunn and Eau Claire counties. - *Calvin Kunkel, ranger*

Red Cedar State Trail - The ski trail has been packed but we're waiting for a little more snow to groom and track. - *Calvin Kunkel, ranger*

Hoffman Hills State Recreation Area -

Most of the trails have been packed but we're waiting for a little more snow to groom and track. - *Calvin Kunkel, ranger*

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Lake Wissota State Park - Ice anglers should be thinking about 'gearing up' as first ice has formed in the bays adjacent to the park. Cross-country skiers are anxiously waiting additional snowfall as there has not been enough to groom the trails yet. Call the park office for ski trail updates. The campground is closed during the winter season. - *Dave Hladilek, park manager*

Wisconsin Rapids DNR Service Center area

Buckhorn State Park - When we have at least 6 inches of snow, trails will be groomed. Snowshoes will also be available at the park office to check out. Pets are not allowed on the groomed ski trails. Dog walkers can park at the boat launch or parking lot for sites 26-29 and walk the campground road as the gate is now closed. Ice has started forming on the lake. Remember, park staff do not monitor ice conditions. Mark your calendars for the First Day Hike on January 1, 2017. Meet at the south picnic shelter to hike or snowshoe the central sands nature trail at 1 p.m. Snacks, hot chocolate and coffee available at the shelter after to warm up. - *Heather Wolf, park manager*

Roche-A-Cri State Park - Hunting and trapping ended Dec. 15. Bow hunting for deer continues to Jan. 8. Hunting maps to check out areas open and closed to hunting can be found online or at the park office. - *Heather Wolf, park manager*

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