

Wisconsin State Park System



2015-2020 Strategic Directions

March 2015

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Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Acknowledgements

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...And the Employees of the Wisconsin State Parks System

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Executive Summary

Included in the 2015-2020 Strategic Directions is a breakdown of the Wisconsin State Park System core directions and goals that will help guide key policy decisions. These directions are consistent with the department's One DNR mission, vision and core values

Direction:

Provide Quality Outdoor Recreation Opportunities and Settings

Direction:

Conserve, Manage, and Interpret Natural, Cultural, and Scenic Resources

Direction:

Actively Promote Excellence in Our Workforce

Direction:

Strengthen the Wisconsin State Park System Financial Condition

Direction:

Build and Strengthen Outreach and Partnerships

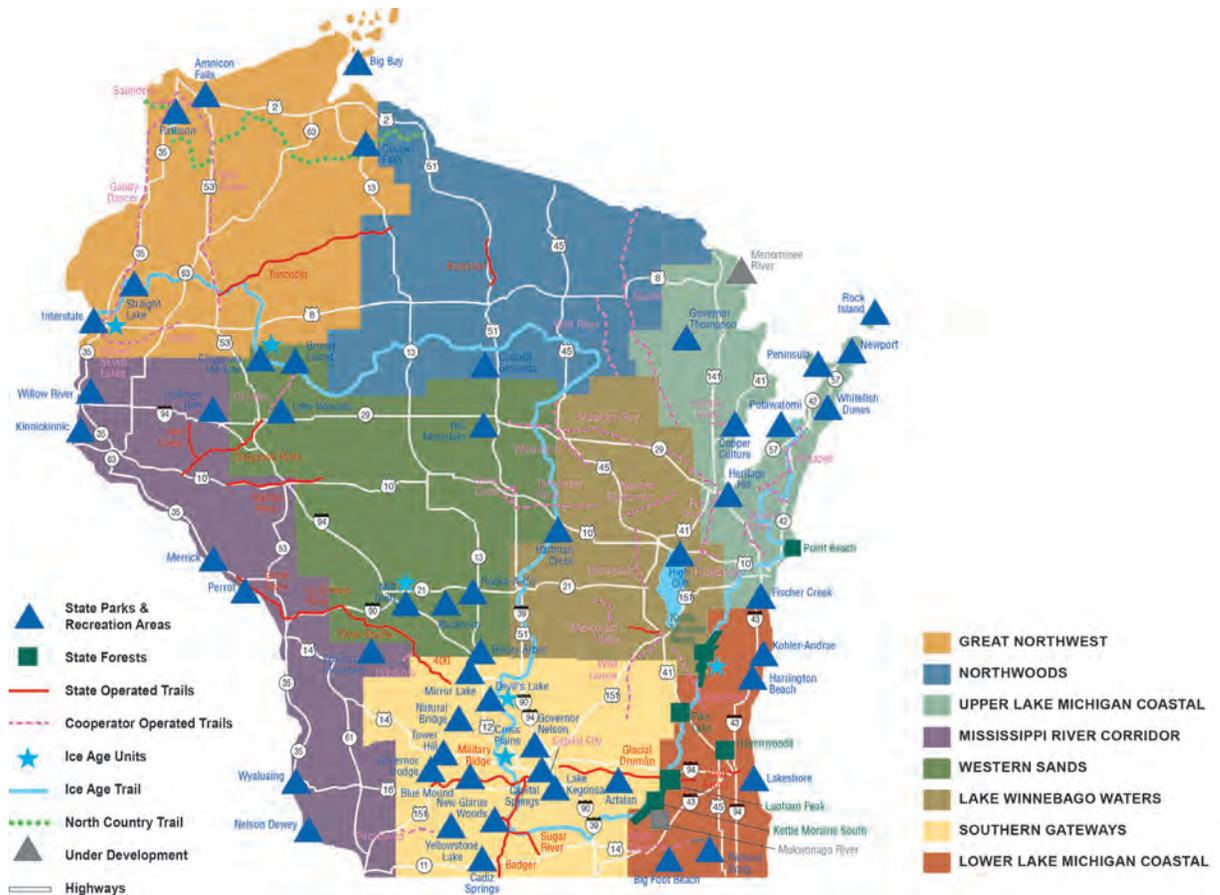




Wisconsin State Parks at a Glance

The Wisconsin State Park System is comprised of 110 parks, recreation areas, southern forests and state trails that encompass more than 150,000 acres. Each year, these properties offer the 14 million visitors diverse opportunities for recreation, education and rejuvenation. With over 5,000 campsites, numerous lakes, rivers and recreation trails it enables the public to access Wisconsin's natural and cultural wonders.

The public recognizes the Wisconsin State Park System as a place to enjoy sustainable outdoor recreation in secure surroundings. Its services and amenities enhance visitors' experiences of the unique destinations that are key components of the multi-billion dollar state tourism economy.



Purpose of this Document

The Wisconsin State Park System updates its strategic directions about every five years to identify system-wide needs and develop a framework to guide state park projects and programs. This process includes gauging public opinion on key issues along with staff engagement.

Strategic directions establishes a shared vision across all levels of the organization, and are relevant to internal (e.g., core administrative functions) and external (e.g., providing leadership on statewide outdoor recreation

issues). Strategic Directions also clarify the Wisconsin State Park System's purpose through key goals and actions.

This document is not intended to list all activities that will be undertaken by the Wisconsin State Park System in the next five years. Instead, it focuses on broad goals and strategies that will position the system to best meet public needs and desires while protecting natural and cultural resources. This document also addresses current challenges and issues.

A strategic direction sets a course of action that leads to measurable accomplishments.

Key Steps to Developing Strategic Directions

In developing strategic directions, several factors are considered but are not limited to: response to public needs and desires, outdoor recreation that is compatible with resource protection, legal mandates, budget limitations, and demographic trends.

The update process included:

- Analyzing data from relevant public surveys and other documents highlighting outdoor recreation trends,
- Gathering public input via public meetings and outreach through the Wisconsin State Park System website,
- Surveying Wisconsin State Park System staff,
- Engagement of Wisconsin State Park System major stakeholders



Relevant Research and Studies

This report estimated that visitors to the Wisconsin State Park System have annual expenditure patterns that, in total, sum to more than \$1 billion dollars per year.

Wisconsin State Park Economic Impact Study

The University of Wisconsin – Madison and the department developed activity-based expenditure patterns of visitors for the Wisconsin State Park System properties using meta-analysis and a Delphi process. The estimates were then annualized and applied to input-output models. This report estimated that visitors to the Wisconsin State Park System have annual expenditure patterns that, in total, sum to more than \$1 billion dollars per year.

2011 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

The 2011 SCORP identified statewide outdoor recreation trends, needs, and issues, and a plan to address statewide priorities. In addition, the SCORP evaluated the demand for and supply of outdoor recreation resources and facilities throughout Wisconsin. The SCORP is an assessment of recreation and tourism trends in Wisconsin, as well as the primary tool for determining priorities for federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grants to the Wisconsin State Park System and local governments.

Wisconsin State Park System Staff Input

In 2013, Wisconsin State Park System full-time staff participated in a multiple day session that defined future action items relevant to strategic directions. Over these three days state park staff were part of this process that asked what defines the best state park system. Outcomes of this session included:

- Identifying draft goal categories
- Identifying perceived needs within the system
- A shared outlook, determined by staff, for the future
- Awareness of important “internal” considerations, such as staff morale



In addition to this multi-day session, state park system staff took part in district listening sessions on the draft document. A number of important themes were identified that are reflected in this document.

Wisconsin State Park System Strategic Directions – District Meeting Summaries October and November, 2014

Major common themes from all meetings:

- Changing camper demographics and needs
- Designated use area vegetation management
- Infrastructure upkeep and repairs
- Law enforcement recruitment and retention
- School connections to state park system properties
- Special events policy
- Staffing shortages and compensation
- State park camping electrical cap
- Technology based improvements

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Denison Survey

A Department wide survey was conducted that reviewed the culture and leadership strengths and opportunities. The Department Leadership Team has taken these survey results and targeted a number of core business functions for improved alignment and leadership development.



External Trends Influencing Strategic Directions

Population and Demographic Shifts

Demographic trends impact outdoor recreation and nature-based education. Together with changing technology, demographics influence participation in both traditional and emerging outdoor experiences. According to the 2010 US Census, Wisconsin's population is increasing at a slower rate than the rest of the country. From the years 2000 to 2010, Wisconsin's population grew 6%, well below the national average of 9.7%. Of the nineteen counties in which populations decreased, most were rural and in the northern half of the state. Ongoing retirement of the large "boomer" cohort is impacting the rate at which the Wisconsin population is aging and how it is aging. In general, this generation of retired people is healthier, more active, and living longer. The Wisconsin State Park System is experiencing changing expectations regarding recreational choices and amenities, as well as educational experiences. Finally, racial/ethnic diversity change is measurable, with Latinos increasing in number at a faster rate than any other group.

Health and Wellness

Wisconsin is now the 15th most obese state in the nation. After three decades of increases, adult obesity rates remained level in every state except for Arkansas. However, rates remain high—Wisconsin's adult obesity rate is 29.7 percent, up from 20.9 percent in 2003 and from 11.8 percent in 1990. The Wisconsin State Park System continues to play a role in combating this issue by providing a variety of outdoor recreation settings for physical activity.



Environmental Change

Changes in climate, forest health, fire mitigation, and invasive animal and plant species (e.g., zebra mussels, etc.) pose increasing challenges to outdoor recreation activities across the state. An example of these impacts include the emerald ash borer and beech bark disease infestations that are currently impacting accessibility to a number of Wisconsin's most popular trails.

Connecting Families to the Outdoors

The Wisconsin State Park System is at the forefront of connecting Wisconsinites of all ages to the outdoors. Being outdoors can enhance a family's mental, physical, and social well-being, which is especially timely, considering rising obesity rates and the economic downturn.



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Mission:

To protect and enhance our natural resources: our air, land and water; our wildlife, fish and forests and the ecosystems that sustain all life.

To provide a healthy, sustainable environment and a full range of outdoor opportunities.

To ensure the right of all people to use and enjoy these resources in their work and leisure.

To work with people to understand each other's views and to carry out the public will. And in this partnership consider the future and generations to follow.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Vision:

We excel at protecting and managing natural resources while supporting the economy and the well-being of our citizenry.

“Nature-based outdoor recreation means activities where the primary focus or purpose is the appreciation or enjoyment of nature. These activities may include but are not limited to hiking, bicycling, wildlife or nature observation, camping...with signs, interpretive items, and other features that enhance nature-based outdoor recreation or improved disabled accessibility...”

— Natural Resources Administrative Code 51.002(19),
Administration of Stewardship Grants

Wisconsin State Park Purpose Statement:

To protect and enhance the natural and cultural resources of our Wisconsin State Park System properties while providing high quality recreational and educational opportunities and programs.

Wisconsin State Park Direction:

The Wisconsin State Park System is a leader in protecting ecological landscapes and providing nature based outdoor recreation. We provide opportunities for current and future generations to explore, enjoy, and learn about Wisconsin's natural and cultural resources. Wisconsin State Park System employees and partners deliver to our customers a high standard of recreational services, education and natural resource stewardship. We have a broad, fair, flexible, and adequate base of financial support.



The five strategic directions and associated goals in this section will serve as the template for the Wisconsin State Park System to the year 2020.

Direction:

Provide Quality Outdoor Recreation Opportunities and Settings

Direction:

Conserve, Manage, and Interpret Natural, Cultural, and Scenic Resources

Direction:

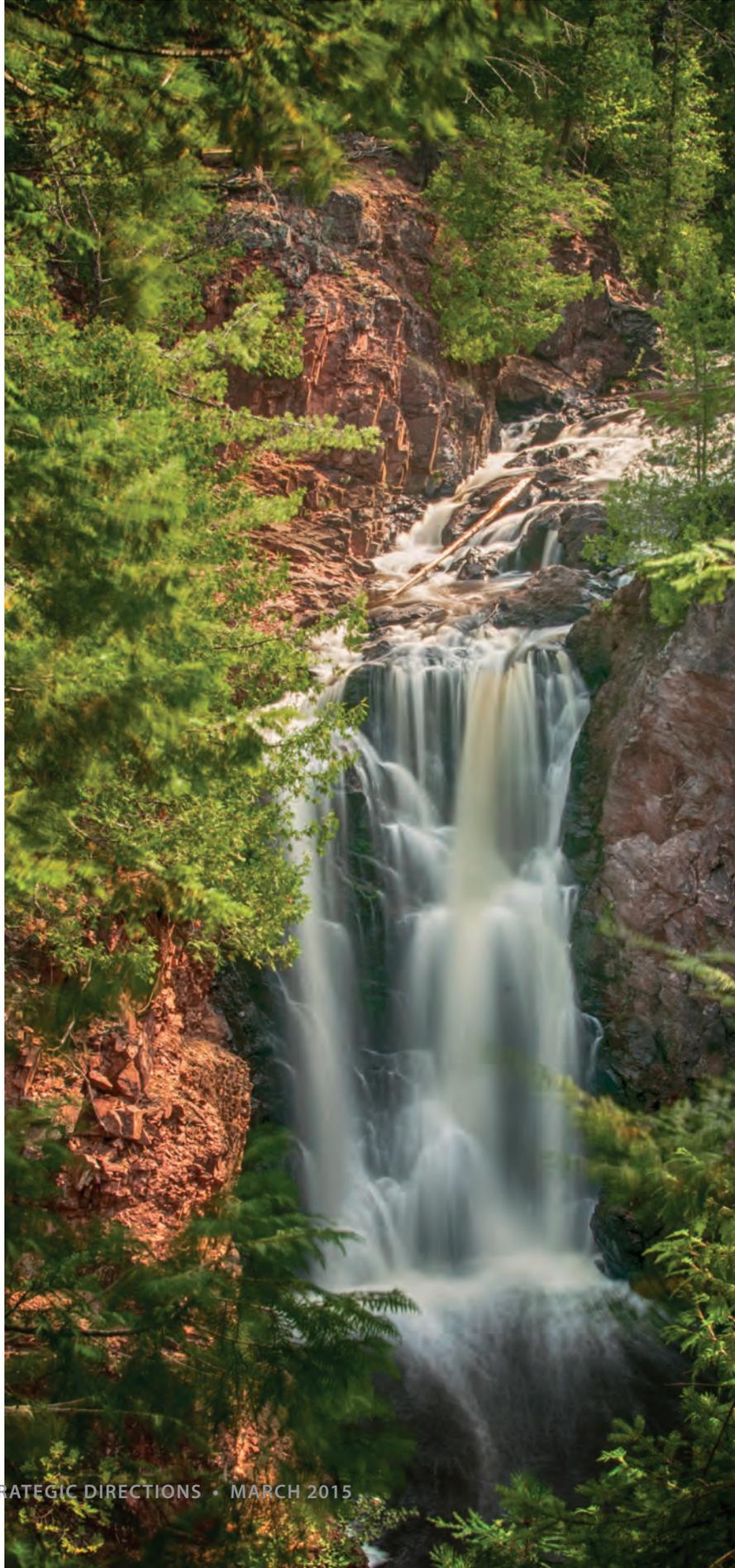
Actively Promote Excellence in Our Workforce

Direction:

Strengthen the Wisconsin State Park System Financial Condition

Direction:

Build and Strengthen Outreach and Partnerships





Strategic Direction

Provide Quality Outdoor Recreation Opportunities and Settings

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Operate, maintain, and enhance park resources and services to meet visitor needs and enrich the Wisconsin State Parks' experience.

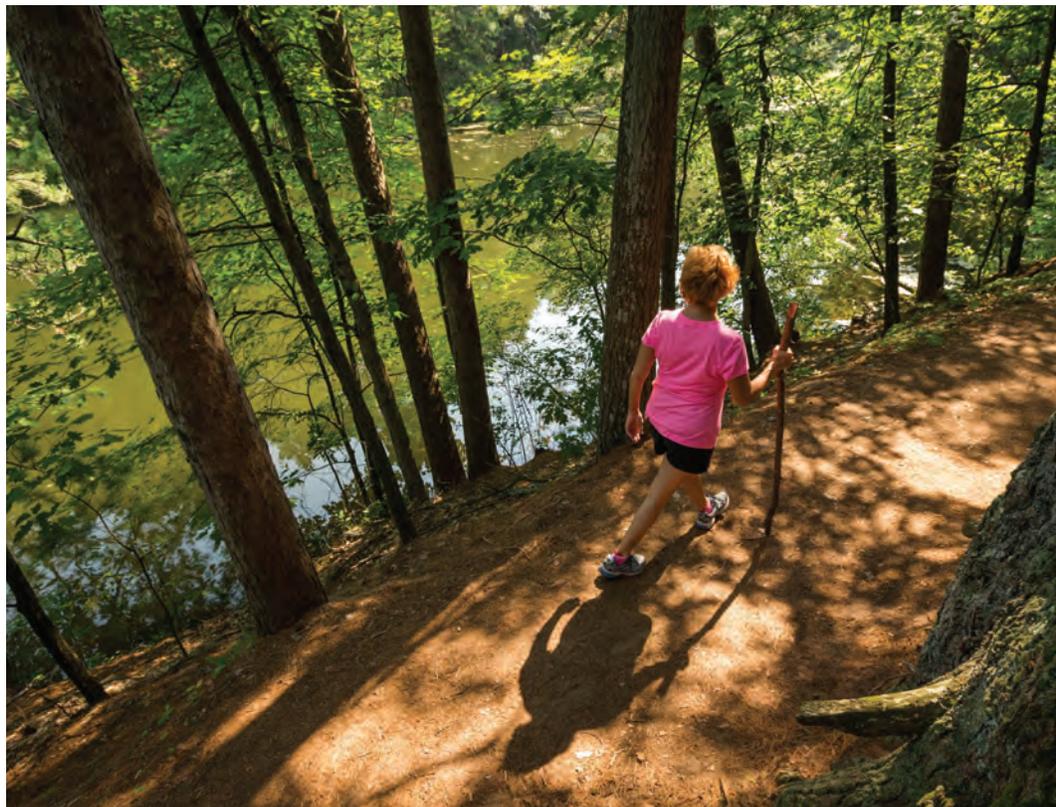
Goal 2: Ensure that quality outdoor recreation settings are provided by using informed decisions, transparent planning and accurate information.

Goal 3: Strategically pursue new park lands and facilities to meet current and future demand while taking into account available financial resources.

Goal 4: Continue to support and promote a statewide interconnected trails network.

Goal 5: Promote participation in Wisconsin's outdoor recreation opportunities that recognize changing demographics.

Operate, maintain, and enhance park resources and services to meet visitor needs and enrich the Wisconsin State Parks' experience.





Strategic Direction

Conserve, Manage, and Interpret Natural, Cultural, and Scenic Resources

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Continue to inventory, monitor and protect natural, cultural, and scenic resources.

Goal 2: Manage vegetation through silviculture and other practices within designated use areas to promote a high quality recreation experience.

Goal 3: Establish and integrate safeguards to best manage sensitive natural and cultural resources.

Goal 4: Provide creative interpretive and environmental education opportunities that expand public awareness and appreciation of important park resources and issues by reviewing and updating the Statewide Interpretive Plan and establish property interpretive goals that clearly define the interpretive niche of each Wisconsin State Park System property.





Strategic Direction

Actively Promote Excellence in Our Workforce

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Maximize the ability to serve customers by providing staff with training, equipment, and resources to efficiently and effectively perform their jobs and manage park resources.

Goal 2: Establish a legacy of leadership through recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention of highly-motivated, exceptionally-qualified individuals with diverse skill sets.

Goal 3: Prioritize investing in quality leadership and management through performance accomplishments, learning and communications.

Goal 4: Facilitate clear and effective communication between all Wisconsin State Park System employees.

Goal 5: Foster a culture of collaboration, innovation, and commitment to the Agency's mission and vision among all members of the Wisconsin State Park System team.

Maximize the ability to serve customers by providing staff with training, equipment, and resources to efficiently and effectively perform their jobs and manage park resources.





Strategic Direction

Strengthen the Wisconsin State Park System Financial Condition

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Identify technology efficiencies that improve customer satisfaction and provide cost savings.

Goal 2: Explore strategies to secure sustainable revenue sources.

Goal 3: Continue the development of a long term capital improvement and replacement strategy for park and trail infrastructure.

Goal 4: Effectively market and expand awareness of the Wisconsin State Park System.



Strategic Direction

Build and Strengthen Outreach and Partnerships

Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Establish and cultivate Wisconsin State Park System champions and advocates, including individuals, communities, private and non-profit organizations, government entities, and user groups.

Goal 2: Effectively utilize “friends” groups, NCO’s, recreation partners and volunteers by promoting and expanding opportunities that leverage and enhance on-the-ground park, trail, and program resources.

Goal 3: Seek new and creative partnerships with nontraditional organizations, such as public health organizations, land trusts and private corporations to promote healthy activities, leverage resources, support development projects and promote our parks and trails system.





Appendix A

Wisconsin State Park System Properties

51 STATE PARKS

(46 – Owned and Operated by State)

1. Amnicon Falls SP
2. Aztalan SP
3. Big Bay SP
4. Big Foot Beach SP
5. Blue Mound SP
6. Brunet Island SP
7. Buckhorn SP
8. Copper Falls SP
9. Council Grounds SP
10. Cross Plains SP
11. Devil's Lake SP
12. Glacial Heritage Area – Conservation Parks
13. Governor Dodge SP
14. Governor Nelson SP
15. Governor Thompson SP
16. Harrington Beach SP
17. Hartman Creek SP
18. High Cliff SP
19. Interstate SP
20. Kinnickinnic SP
21. Kohler-Andrae SP
22. Lake Kegonsa SP
23. Lake Wissota SP
24. Lakeshore SP
25. Merrick SP
26. Mill Bluff SP
27. Mirror Lake SP
28. Natural Bridge SP
29. Nelson Dewey SP
30. New Glarus Woods SP
31. Newport SP
32. Pattison SP
33. Peninsula SP
34. Perrot SP
35. Potawatomi SP
36. Rib Mountain SP

37. Roche-A-Cri SP
38. Rock Island SP
39. Rocky Arbor SP
40. Straight Lake SP
41. Tower Hill SP
42. Whitefish Dunes SP
43. Wildcat Mountain SP
44. Willow River SP
45. Wyalusing SP
46. Yellowstone Lake SP

(5 – Operated Locally or by Non-Profit Groups)

1. Belmont Mound SP
2. Copper Culture SP
3. Cushing Memorial SP
4. Heritage Hill SP
5. Lost Dauphin SP

Belmont Mound, Copper Culture and Heritage Hill are owned by the State and open to the public, but operated by non-profit organizations. Lost Dauphin is owned by the State and is open to the public, but operated by a local unit of government.

8 SOUTHERN STATE FORESTS OR UNITS

1. Havenwoods SF
2. Kettle Moraine SF – Lapham Peak Unit
3. Kettle Moraine SF – Loew Lake Unit
4. Kettle Moraine SF – Mukwonago River Unit
5. Kettle Moraine SF – Northern Unit
6. Kettle Moraine SF – Pike Lake Unit
7. Kettle Moraine SF – Southern Unit
8. Point Beach SF

10 STATE RECREATION AREAS

1. Big Rib River SRA
2. Browntown-Cadiz Springs SRA
3. Capital Springs SRA
4. Chippewa Moraine Ice Age SRA
5. Fenley SRA
6. Fisher Creek SRA
7. Hoffman Hills SRA
8. Menominee River SRA
9. Richard Bong SRA
10. Sauk Prairie SRA

9 ICE AGE NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC RESERVE UNITS

1. Campbellsport Drumlins
2. Chippewa Moraine State Recreation Area
3. Cross Plains Reserve
4. Devil's Lake State Park
5. Horicon State Wildlife Area and National Wildlife Refuge
6. Interstate State Park
7. Kettle Moraine State Forest—Northern Unit
8. Mill Bluff State Park
9. Two Creeks Buried Forest

42 STATE TRAILS

(15 – Owned and Operated by State)

1. 400 ST
2. Badger ST
3. Bearskin ST
4. Buffalo River ST
5. Chippewa River ST
6. Elroy-Sparta ST
7. Glacial Drumlin ST
8. Great River ST
9. Hank Aaron ST
10. La Crosse River ST
11. Lake Michigan SWT*
12. Military Ridge ST
13. Red Cedar ST
14. Sugar River ST
15. Tuscobia ST

* State Water Trail

(25 – Owned by State, but Operated by County Government)

1. Ahnapee ST
2. Capital City ST
3. Cattail ST
4. Devil's River ST
5. Eisenbahn ST
6. Fox River ST
7. Friendship ST
8. Gandy Dancer ST
9. Green Circle ST
10. Hillsboro ST
11. Mascoutin Valley ST
12. Mountain-Bay ST
13. Newton-Blackmour ST
14. Nicolet ST
15. Oconto River ST
16. Old Abe ST
17. Pecatonica ST
18. Saunders ST
19. Stower Seven Lakes ST
20. Tomorrow River ST
21. White River ST
22. Wild Goose ST
23. Wild River ST
24. Wiouwash ST
25. Wolf River ST

(2 – National Scenic Trails, Ownership and Operator Varies)

1. Ice Age National Scenic Trail
2. North Country National Scenic Trail



Appendix B

Partnerships

Friends of the Wisconsin State Park System

A lead partner to the Wisconsin State Park System is the Friends of Wisconsin State Parks, Inc. (FWSP). Believing that each generation is responsible for leaving behind a better legacy of conservation, the Friends of Wisconsin State Parks was created to preserve, protect, promote and enhance Wisconsin's state parks, forests, trails and recreation areas. A friend of Wisconsin State Parks is a non-profit umbrella organization supporting over 80 friends groups around the state. FWSP provides technical support, sponsors events such as Work*Play*Earth Day, an annual Volunteer Jamboree, photography contest, and Gold Seal and HERO awards.

Every year friends groups provide thousands of volunteer hours to help support the mission and activities of the Wisconsin state parks, forests, trails, and recreation areas. Friend's members:

- serve as campground hosts, visitor center hosts, naturalists and nature center hosts, adopt a trail volunteers, and assist with other special projects at the property;
- raise money to purchase playground equipment, interpretive displays, signs, shelters, kiosks, educational materials, and more;
- organize annual park cleanups and regular trail work days;
- plan and help with special events including Candlelight nights, Community campfires, festivals/concerts, educational programs and other special events;
- provide and assist with concessions; and

- assist with the construction of trails, shelters and accessible cabins, birdhouses, and more

Wisconsin leads the nation in numbers of property Friends groups, growing from just 10 groups in 1989 to 81 today. Of these groups, 22 are affiliated with state trails, 38 are affiliated with state parks, 6 are affiliated with state forests, and 15 are affiliated with environmental education centers, state recreation areas and other natural areas. In 2013, Friends groups statewide logged over \$647,500 in donations to the Wisconsin State Park System and more than 142,000 volunteer hours. As the program continues to grow, so too does its capacity to help the park system.

Cooperative Trail Program

The Cooperative Trail Program started in 1985 when the WDNR entered into cooperative agreements with Dodge and Fond du Lac counties regarding the Wild Goose State Trail.





Given the many contributions of the Wisconsin State Park System to the economy and culture of Wisconsin, there are many opportunities for other partners to promote, support, and advocate for the organization.

Since then, 25 additional designated state trails have become cooperatively operated and maintained. These trails are cooperatively run by counties throughout Wisconsin under cooperative agreements or Memorandums of Agreement. Contracts are negotiated with each county, giving the county the authority and responsibility to manage and operate the trail under consideration. The WDNR enters into these agreements under the authority of State Statute 23.175. Participation in the state trail fee program is determined by each county as established in State Statute 27.01 (8). If a trail does charge a trail fee, the WDNR retains a portion of the fees while the county retains a commission on the fees (up to 70 percent). All counties must use the retained trail fees for trail operations. In cooperation with the WDNR, counties also designate appropriate trail uses in trail master plans.

The National Park Service

An important partner for the Wisconsin State Park System is the National Park Service (NPS). Two Wisconsin trails are designated and administered at both the national and state levels: the Ice Age National Scenic Trail and State Scenic Trail, and the North Country National Scenic and State Scenic Trail. Because these trails are designated as both national and state trails, the National Park Service shares responsibility in administration with the WDNR. Working together under the guidance of the NPS, the agencies provide planning, acquisition, design, financing, development, and operating services for these national and state trails.

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism

The Wisconsin Department of Tourism serves as a vital partner for the Wisconsin State Park System. Tourism provides information on state parks and the state park system to in-state and out-of-state visitors alike. The department's website, travelwisconsin.com, advertises individual state park properties and provides information on camping and recreation

within state parks. The Department of Tourism is brought together with the Wisconsin State Park System through a memorandum of understanding indicating a responsibility to collaborate on cross-promotions of events and programs. Tourism provides assistance in the design of the state parks annual visitor guide and other materials.

The Ice Age Trail Alliance

Assisting the WDNR and NPS in trail construction is the Ice Age Trail Alliance that is a non-profit, citizen-based volunteer organization. Established in 1958, the alliance now has 21 county chapters who support the Ice Age Trail and work cooperatively with the NPS, WDNR, local governments, businesses, and private landowners. Alliance staff and volunteers work to protect, promote, build, and maintain the Ice Age Trail, which tells the story of the Ice Age and continental glaciation along a scenic footpath.

North Country Trail Association

Another partner to both the WDNR and NPS is the North Country Trail Association, which has three chapters in Wisconsin that advocate for the establishment and operation of the North Country National Scenic Trail.

Other Partners

There are a number of other partners affiliated with the Wisconsin State Park System through agreements and projects. One of these is the Wisconsin State Historical Society, which works with the Wisconsin State Park System to ensure the preservation and protection of the state's historic resources. Given the many contributions of the Wisconsin State Park System to the economy and culture of Wisconsin, there are many opportunities for other partners to promote, support, and advocate for the organization. These future partners may include nonprofit organizations, other governmental agencies, and the private sector.





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