

Milwaukee duo plans walk on WATERS



Alyssa Armbruster, inset left, and Julia Robson will spend late August and much of September on a walk of 300-plus miles to raise awareness of issues facing the Great Lakes, including Lake Michigan, shown here.

RYAN GLASFORD

DNR FILES

FROM MICHIGAN TO SUPERIOR, GREAT LAKES ARE FOCUS OF OUTREACH EFFORT.

Julia Robson and Alyssa Armbruster

The Great Lakes are the largest freshwater system on our planet, containing 20 percent of the world's freshwater supply and providing more than 30 million people with clean drinking water every day. This finite resource generates billions of dollars in annual economic impact, according to numerous reports, and provides jobs to millions in Great Lakes communities. What's more, the Great Lakes Basin provides critical habitat for a variety of fish and wildlife species in the region.

In spite of their majesty, the Great Lakes are part of a fragile ecosystem that faces serious threats from pollution, invasive species, degradation and loss of wetlands. Much progress has been made toward improving the health and vitality of the Great Lakes since the passage of the federal Clean Water Act and establishment of programs such as the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. But the need for research, restoration, regulation and education on local, statewide

and national levels remains imperative.

In a unique effort to promote the progress that has been made toward restoring the Great Lakes while also drawing attention to the issues the lakes still face, we are planning a Walk to Sustain Our Great Lakes. Our two-person hike across Wisconsin will cover 332 miles over the course of four weeks, beginning Aug. 26 on Lake Michigan in Milwaukee and ending on the shores of Lake Superior in the Porcupine Mountains of Michigan's

Upper Peninsula.

The journey will take us across both urban and forested landscapes and pass through three of Wisconsin's five Great Lakes Areas of Concern. These AOCs — as designated by the U.S.-Canada Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement first signed in 1972 — are Great Lakes rivers and harbors that have experienced severe environmental degradation due to pollution and habitat loss. There are 43 AOCs throughout the Great Lakes Basin between the United States and Canada.

In each of the AOCs we pass through, we plan to meet with local individuals and organizations that have partnered to restore these areas, so they can share their success stories from a community perspective. By focusing on our route and outreach efforts in both coastal and inland communities, we hope to stress that no matter where you live within the Great Lakes Basin, your everyday actions can have an effect.

Our Great Lakes journey will take place in various phases. After a sendoff event open to the public at Discovery World on Milwaukee's lakefront, we will first complete a 47-mile trek along Lake Michigan to the sandy dune beaches of Kohler-Andrae State Park in Sheboy-

gan. Our route will include the Oak Leaf Trail, Ozaukee County Interurban Trail and Sheboygan Interurban Trail.

The next jaunt will be approximately 54 miles up to Green Bay, where we will spend two days (scheduled for Sept. 9 and 10) meeting with the community and touring important sites such as the Cat Island Chain Restoration Project and the Point au Sable Nature Preserve. We then will resume our trek along the Fox River State Trail and Mountain Bay State Trail for 38 miles up to the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, where we will hike the 89-mile Nicolet State Trail through the forest until reaching the Wisconsin-Michigan border.

Upon reaching Michigan, we plan to take trails and forest roads through the Ottawa National Forest to the entrance of the Porcupine Mountains on roughly Sept. 17. The final leg of our trek will take us through the Presque Isle River Scenic Site, a designated National Natural Landmark managed by Michigan's Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park.

Accommodations along the way will be mostly camping, with the occasional motel or similar stay in the more urban communities.

To garner as much awareness as possible for Great Lakes issues, we have partnered with Rayni Day Productions to produce a feature-length documentary. The film will feature our journey through Wisconsin as well as interviews with researchers and community groups about the multitude of projects being implemented throughout the Great Lakes Basin to improve and protect our lakes. ❧

Julia Robson and Alyssa Armbruster are both graduates of UW-Milwaukee's Conservation and Environmental Science Program and work in natural resource management for Milwaukee County Parks.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more about Julia Robson and Alyssa Armbruster's Walk to Sustain Our Great Lakes – including the Aug. 26 sendoff event, social media updates and ways to get involved through community participation or donations – check the website at wsogl.com.