Welcome to the Riverway

The Wisconsin River valley is a scenic marvel comprised of stately bluffs, mysterious wooded bottomlands and over 500 miles of sandy shoreline. Numerous islands provide camping and sandbar recreational opportunities free from crowds. The Wisconsin River is a hot summer weekend. Try to imagine the waste they will create. Anglers, campers and sunbathers all generate waste in the riverway—it’s a fact of life. People must take the trash they create with them. We have a “carry-in, carry-out” policy. Riverway law requires a water-tight container for trash in every boat/canoe and glass containers are prohibited. But what about the other stuff? Human wastes don’t have to have an adverse affect on the river if disposed of properly. Nobody likes to find them by accident when they are disposed of improperly. To properly dispose of such waste requires little effort. Find a place where there is some vegetative shelter and soil mixed with the sand. Simply dig a hole 6 inches deep to bury your group’s waste.

Deeper is not better since it inhibits the bacteria that breaks down the waste. Shallower depths increase the chance it will be exposed by wind or high water. Lastly, provide a paper sack for used toilet paper and feminine hygiene products. Either pack the sack out or burn it right before you douse your campfire. For more information on “Leave No Trace” principles, go to www.them.gov/yourtrails/st.

Please, don’t bury campfires, sand will smother but not extinguish the fire and it will burn for hours or even days. People walking barefoot on sandbars can severely burn their feet in a thinly buried fire pit. Try to use up all the charred firewood. Blackened logs are unsightly and mar the beauty of a sandbar.

If you carry along a plastic grocery sack, you have a handy water carrier to put out your campfire and it will serve double duty as a trash collector.
The Wisconsin River is very broad and sandy bottom forming islands which render navigation difficult. It is full of vine clad islands. On the banks appear fertile lands diversified by woods, prairies and fields. We saw oak, walnut, basswood and another kind of tree armed with long thorns. Father Jacques Marquette (June 1673)

Over three hundred years have passed since Father Marquette penned the first known written description of the Wisconsin River. Remarkably, in many places, the river has retained the same "look" viewed by the first Jesuit missionary. The tremendous scenic quality of the lower Wisconsin River valley and the richness and diversity of the local flora and fauna provided the State of Wisconsin with an opportunity to create and implement a new and innovative plan for protection and preservation of the valley. The regulations are not intended to provide a quality public recreational area for timber harvests on lands visible from the river. For sites not visible from the river, the regulations are minimal. In the case of structures or modification of existing structures not visible for the river, the sole restriction is on the height of the structure to assure it does not become visible from the river. For timber harvests on lands not visible from the river, the siting of harvest must be obtained from the Natural Resources (DNR) to certify the harvest area is not visible from the river. For new construction on lands visible from the river, compliance with the performance standards must be achieved in order to render the structure "visually inconspicuous" under leaf-on conditions. "Visually inconspicuous" is defined as "difficult to be seen or not readily noticeable" and does not mean the structure must be totally unseen when viewed from the river. The performance standards require that the structure be designed in a manner consistent with sound forestry management practices.

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The Wisconsin River Valley, as a whole, is a wild and lonesome valley, with great sand banks and thickly-wooded morasses. Settlement is slight. For the few spots hardly changed since Paul Bunyan’s day, at early dawn can we understand the wilderness. Yet there remains the river, in a few spots hardly changed since Paul Bunyan’s day, at early dawn can we understand the wilderness. Yet there remains the river, in a few spots hardly changed since Paul Bunyan’s day, at early dawn can we understand the wilderness. Yet there remains the river, in a few spots hardly changed since Paul Bunyan’s day, at early dawn can we understand the wilderness. Yet there remains the river, in a few spots hardly changed since Paul Bunyan’s day, at early dawn can we understand the wilderness. Yet there remains the river, in a few spots hardly changed since Paul Bunyan’s day, at early dawn can we understand the wilderness. 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Sometimes the sand is even undercut and will not support a person walking on it. The downstream end is often unstable and river. Sandbars are constantly moving, and this current has on the sandy bottom of the river. Sandbars can increase to a strength that can overturn their feet, and in only a short time the flow can keep you and your family and friends safe when using the river.

Boscobel Chamber of Commerce
800 Wisconsin Ave.
Boscobel, WI 53805
(Grant County)
608-374-2672
www.boscobelwisconsin.com
bahomer@centurytel.net

Dodgeville Chamber of Commerce
338 N. Iowa
Dodgeville, WI 53533
(Iowa County)
608-935-5905
877-863-6433
www.dodgeville.com
info@dodgeville.com

Mazomanie Chamber of Commerce
Being organized at this time
608-795-2100

Muscooda Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 587
Muscoda, WI 53573
(Grant County)
608-739-9158
www.muscooda.com

Richland Center Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 128
397 W. Seminary St.
Richland Center, WI 53581-0128
(Grant County)
608-647-6205
800-422-1318
www.richlandcenterchamber.com
info@richlandcenterchamber.com

Spring Green Area Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 3, 3 39
Jefferson St.
Spring Green, WI 53588-0003
(Sauk/Iowa Counties)
608-588-2042
www.springgreen.com
info@springgreen.com

Sauk-Prairie Area Chamber of Commerce
421 Water Street, Suite 105
Prairie du Sac, WI 53578
(Sauk County)
608-643-4168,
800-645-68
www.saukprairiearea.com
information@saukprairie.com

Prairie du Chien Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Council
PO Box 326, 2 3 1 Main Prairie du Chien, WI 53821-0326
608-326-8555
800-732-1673
www.prairieduchien.org
info@prairieduchien.org

Other Publications Available
The Uplands, Inc.
PO Box 20
M. Horeb, WI 53572
800-279-9472
www.uplands.wi.sw/wic@aad.com

HiddenValleys, Inc
PO Box 29
Richland Center, WI 53581
608-730-3500
800-592-6968
www.hiddenvalleys.com
belum.net

Wisconsin Department of Tourism
123 W. Washington Ave.
Madison, WI 53703
800-266-2161
727-237 (WI and neighboring states)
800-432-376 (National)
www.travelwisconsin.com
tourist@travelwisconsin.com

Lower Wisconsin State Riverway on the Internet

These websites will provide you with some additional information about the Wisconsin River. www.dnr.state.wi.us The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources website. You can link to all DNR information from this site. www.wiparks.com The Wisconsin State Parks website. Will take you directly to Wisconsin State parks information http://far.state.wi.us The Wisconsin State Riverway Board site. You can get information pertaining to the Wisconsin River performance standards and contact Riverway Board staff for information and assistance. Also links to interesting related sites.

www.dot.wisconsin.gov/travel Givess you latest road conditions as well as informa
tion on detours and construction sites statewide.

www.wvic.com Wisconsin Valley Improvement Corporation website. WVIC is the company that maintains the dams on the Wisconsin River upstream from the LWSR. This site contains much information on the Wisconsin River and provides information on water levels and flow conditions upstream.

Most of the Chambers of Commerce within the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway also have their own websites. These sites are listed along with mailing address and phone number under the heading “Information Sources,” elsewhere on this page.

Have Fun, Be Safe

The Wisconsin River is described as the hardest working river in the world. With many dams regulating the flow and providing power for communities along the upper stretches, it may well be. On the Lower Wisconsin Riverway, however, it takes a break from work and flows in a slower lazy manner…. Or does it? The river here often only looks lazy and slow, in many cases flowing in a full-sized car. This flow is often not even noticeable to the person standing on the edge of a sandbar, but is strong enough to trap the visitor who is not aware of the power hidden from view. If you do step into a deep hole. DNR encourages everyone to always wear a life preserver and be careful when using the river. Have fun, be safe, and come back again!

Emergency Services

The Wisconsin River is normally a calm river, but rapidly changing weather conditions and the sometimes rapidly rising water levels can lead to dangerous situations for persons traveling and camping on the river. Many Wisconsin River users carry cell phones for emergency use. If you do, there are precautions you can take to ensure that the help you need will be able to find you. The Lower Wisconsin Riverway is 93 miles long and borders 7 counties, so it may be difficult for Emergency Services to determine where you are in order to dispatch the nearest agency to assist you. You should be aware that not everywhere in the River Valley has cell phone service. However, every county along the Riverway has 911 capabilities, so a call to 911 will reach an emergency dispatcher. The dispatcher, however, will have no way to know exactly where you are unless you are able to tell them. At each landing along the river you will see a sign identifying that landing, and telling you the distance downstream to the next landing. By noting this information, you will know the name of the landing you passed last, and when you passed it. This will enable a dispatcher in any of the counties along the river to dispatch the nearest emergency service agency to your assistance.

Poison Ivy

Virtually every island with vegetation and most shoreland areas within the State Riverway contains poison ivy. Learn to recognize its 3 leaves (Rhus radicans) is a member of the cashew family of plants. It grows as a small creeping plant, a climbing vine or as a shrub. The stems are woody. The leaves are alternate with three glossy to dull dark green leaflets; the leaf margin can be wavy, smooth or lobed. From mid-summer through winter many poison ivy plants support dense clusters of pea-sized white berries.

An oil, urushiol, is contained in the leaves, flowers, fruits, bark and roots of poison ivy. It can cause skin irritation, inflammation, itching, and swelling, often followed by yellowish, watery blisters. People vary in sensitivity to poison ivy. Some individuals are very sensitive to its effects while others seem to be immune. Symptoms usually appear within 24 hours of exposure, though reaction time can range from a few hours to several days.

First-aid treatment

Starts with the removal of contaminated clothing. All exposed skin areas should be washed thoroughly with soap and water. AVOID using household laundry soaps. They are alkaline and can cause erythema. A secondary infection may occur if the rash is not properly treated.

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Limited Access Areas

The area that surrounds the Mazomanie Beach is closed to camping or use from 8 p.m. to 6 a.m. The closed area extends from one mile upstream from the beach to one mile downstream from the beach. A map is available at www.lwr.state.wi.us or by contacting the property manager. Additional areas are closed directly adjacent to the beach that prohibits any entry for any reason from April 1 to September 15.

Camping is restricted to no more than 3 days on State owned islands and sandbars. Camping at these locations is restricted to persons and their equipment arriving by watercraft only. A camping permit is not required.

Restrictions on Transporting Firewood
In order to prevent the movement of invasive forest insects and diseases, firewood burned must originate from within the state and within 50 miles from the property where the wood will be used. Firewood from sources approved by the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is allowable. Firewood includes all wood, processed or unprocessed, intended for use in a campfire. The Department may seize and dispose of firewood possession in violation of this rule. For more information on firewood regulations, please visit http://dir.wi.gov/invasives/firewood/

Boat and Canoe Rentals

Wisconsin River Outings
715 Wisconsin Ave.
Boscobel, WI 53805
754 St. Hwy. 12
Sauk City, WI 53583
608-643-6724
608-739-3247
bremmer@mt.net

Private vendors along the Wisconsin River can help you plan your trip as well as provide rental services. Rentals are usually by the hour, day, or longer. Shuttle services may be available. Be sure to ask about anticipated changes in river flow and sandbar camping.

Riverway Recreation is Dangerous—Please Be Careful

Drownings—Drownings can be prevented if Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs) are worn. A person can disappear under the water in seconds. DNRR encourages you to always wear a life preserver when in or on the river.

If You Are Not Prepared To Swim It;

Do Not Canoe Or Wade It.

The Elements

The sun can be devastating to your skin when you’re on the river for any length of time. Use sunscreen, bring a hat and always have extra clothing to extend your stay. Mosquitoes are most abundant near vegetation and backwater of the river. Don’t forget the insect repellent!

Water levels can rise quickly if rains occur in near or in the river valley. Always secure your canoe and equipment and cell phone.

Emergency

Dial 911

Popular Canoe Routes

Destination Miles Canoeing Time

Sauk City to Arena 11.0 3½ hours

Arena to Spring Green 10.0 3 hours

Spring Green to Muscoda 22.0 6 hours

Muscoda to Blue River 8.0 2 hours

Blue River to Boscobel 10.0 3 hours

Boscobel to Bridgeport 6.0 2 hours

Riverway Camping

Black Hawk River Runs
PO Box 77
Spring Green, WI 53588
608-653-8747
blackhawkriver@cyahoo.com

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
State Riverway Valley—Diverse and Abundant Resources
Selection from A Voyagers Guide to the Lower Wisconsin River by Stan Nichols

The Valley of the Wisconsin
The geography of the Lower Wisconsin River is strikingly different from its upper stretches. Geographically, the Lower Wisconsin starts near the site of the Prairie du Sac dam. Heading north by car from Sauk City you drive over a small rise to a short ways past the dam site on Highway 78 which is the terminal moraine from the last glaciation. Below this point the river flows westward through a great gorge which has been unaltered by past glacial activity. Looking to the north or south you can see the walls of the gorge rising abruptly 300 to 400 feet. The gorge is over four miles wide at Prairie du Sac, narrowing to two miles at Muscoda and a half mile at Bridgeport.

Drop and Speed
The river descends slowly through the gorge on its way to the Mississippi—dropping approximately 1½ feet per mile. River currents upstream range from 3 to 5 miles per hour, but the average speed at Muscoda is only 1 to 2 miles per hour. The Lower Wisconsin River has no rapids or falls. It is clearly a river for people who like to travel at a leisurely pace.

Soft Stone—Wide Valley
The walls of the gorge are sandstones and limestones, laid down by the shallow seas of Cambrian and Ordovician times. The Cambrian sandstones dominate the valley walls on the Sauk City end of the river. This sandstone is relatively soft and has allowed the river to carve a valley much wider than at Bridgeport where the harder Ordovician age dolomites dominate the bluffs.

Migrating Sand Bars
Because of the gentle drop, the slow current of the river is neither cutting down nor building up its bed. It erodes soil horizontally, scooping sediment from the outside of one meandering loop and depositing it on the inside of the next loop. The shore can lose or gain a lot of ground that way. The sandbars migrate downstream, like lazy canoers. Some move very slowly; other sandbars, however, travel downstream as much as 800 feet per year. The river carries over ten tons of sediment a day past Muscoda.

The Rich Flora
The plant life of the Lower Wisconsin River is very diverse. About 34 species of plants are found in the Wisconsin driftless (unglaciated) area that are found nowhere else in the state. Other species are more common here than elsewhere because of migration patterns or unique habitats.

The steep cliffs of southwestern Wisconsin provide a unique environment for certain very rare plants as well as aesthetic splendor.

The Diverse Landscape
The landscape along the Lower Wisconsin is complex and hard to read. Because of periodic flooding and the sandy soil, a few feet of change in elevation can make the difference between a floodplain forest and a sand barren. The vegetation of the river valley falls into seven basic types: bottomland forest, wetlands, prairies, blows and difference between a floodplain forest and a sand barren. The vegetation of the river periodic flooding and the sandy soil, a few feet of change in elevation can make the...
History Along the Lower Wisconsin

For thousands of years, long before European explorers and entrepreneurs entered the Lower Wisconsin region, native people recognized the importance of the Mississippi River and its tributaries as a water highway system. The Fox-Wisconsin riverway provided a valuable link between the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes. Raw materials and finished goods from all over the continent travelled the river system in trade networks dating back over 3000 years.

Before Columbus

Archaeologists have found evidence of people in the Lower Wisconsin region as early as 10,000 years ago. By 1000 BC, the rich natural resources of the floodplains, terraces and upland bluffs had attracted people who settled along the riverway. Social and religious gatherings, held in the warmer months when food was plentiful, brought people from surrounding camps together for ceremonies and trade. Pottery making appeared around this time and similarities in design linked the inhabitants of the Lower Wisconsin to traditions similar in design linked the inhabitants of the Lower Wisconsin to traditions along the Mississippi and Illinois rivers.

By AD 600, the influence of the Hopewell culture, originating in Ohio, spread goods and ideas through what is now the eastern United States, using the rivers as highways. Travelers, and Marquette and Joliet traversed the Mississippi to return to their village.

In 1766, Jonathan Carver described his journey down the Lower Wisconsin. Near present day Prairie du Sac, Carver sighted a large village occupied by Sauk Indians whose chief was Pyesa, the father of Black Hawk. Two years after Carver’s visit, the Sauk moved their village to the Rock River in Illinois.

It was in this village, Saukenauk, that the seeds of the Black Hawk War were sown.

Black Hawk War

The importance of the lead mines of the Lower Wisconsin region was recognized as early as the American Revolution. The Sauk and Fox Indians, under the direction of Julien Dubuque, shipped large quantities of lead to American markets in the east. In 1864, the Sauk and Fox entered into a treaty with the United States government. This treaty caused thirty years of unrest, culminating in the Black Hawk War of 1832.

The United States government began leasing mines in 1817 and by the 1850s, the region was the most densely populated area in the Northwest territories. The increasing number of skirmishes between settlers and Indians led to the construction of two military forts along the Lower Wisconsin. Fort Crawford at Prairie du Chien and Fort Winnebago at the portage of the Wisconsin and Fox rivers. In 1831, the United States government moved the Sauk and Fox from their Illinois lands to the western side of the Mississippi.

In April of 1832, Black Hawk and 1200 men, women and children crossed the Mississippi to return to their village on the Rock River. This crossing began a four month long conflict called the Black Hawk War.

Black Hawk War: 4500 American regular and volunteer troops chased Black Hawk and his band through northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. The war ended with the Battle of Bad Axe where all of the band except Black Hawk and few of his followers were captured or killed. Black Hawk was taken prisoner three weeks later. The war had cost the Americans about 200 men in the fighting, less than 150 of Black Hawk’s band had survived.

One of the most important encounters of the war, called the Battle of Wisconsin Heights, occurred at a crossing on the Lower Wisconsin River south of Prairie du Sac. Black Hawk hurried his starving band to the river with soldiers in close pursuit. Greatly outnumbered, the Sauk chief and a few warriors stopped the troops advance as the remainder of the band built rafts to cross the river. The battle lasted for two hours in pouring rain until sunset. The American soldiers camped at the base of the bluffs that evening ready to resume fighting at the first sign of daylight. At sunrise, they found that Black Hawk had moved his band across the Wisconsin during the night and disappeared into the rugged country north of the river. Black Hawk’s strategy in this battle has been acclaimed as one of the most skilled in the American Indian Wars.

By 1848, when Wisconsin became a state, steamboats plied the river. Communities grew up along the river competing for leadership in the transportation industry. The railroad entered the area in the 1850s and bypassed the river communities as it sought a more direct overland route between the major ports and cities.

Map of Mounds Sites Available

For persons interested in visiting effigy mound sites in the Riverway and surrounding area, a beautiful brochure/maps is available. The Effigy Mounds Grand Tour provides a map for self-guided tours of a variety of mound sites. The sites are located on federal, state, tribal and private lands, most of which are located in or near the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway. Access to the sites ranges from easy (drive to the site) to adventurous (park and hike). Some sites provide beautiful vistas and sites are accessible by watercraft. The map was produced by a not-for-profit organization, Cultural Landscape Legacies, Inc., which is devoted to protection and preservation of mounds and other archaeological sites in the Upper Midwest.

To obtain a copy of the Effigy Mounds Grand Tour brochure, contact the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board at 1-800-221-3792 or 608-739-3188 or by e-mail at mark.csrb@wisc.gov. For more information on Cultural Landscape Legacies, visit the Web site at www.clli.org.

The Hopewell culture arrived in the Wisconsin River Valley about the time of Christ. Earthworks in the form of birds, animals, and reptiles were a local tradition called Late Woodland.
Endangered Resources

The State Riverway protects a fantastic array of endangered, threatened and uncommon plant and animal species! Twenty Natural Areas cover over 6,000 acres provide an environment vital to the survival of several natural communities. State Natural Areas are established to protect examples of all types of biotic communities and other significant features native to the state... for education, research, and most importantly to secure long term protection of the state’s genetic diversity for benefit of future generations. Some state natural areas along the Lower Wisconsin Riverway are Blue River Sand Barrens, Avoca Prairie-Savanna, and Ferry Bluff.

The globally rare flame flower, Talinum rugospermum, is found in the valley. Other endangered or threatened plant species include pink milkwort, yellow giant hyssop, round-stemmed false foxglove, tubercled orchid and wild quinine. Threatened wildlife include bald eagles and red-shouldered hawks. Other wildlife of special concern includes Cerulean warbler, bobolink, Arcadian flycatcher, Kentucky warbler and osprey.

Other endangered, threatened or special concern species include 13 types of fish, 10 mussels, 2 amphibians and 7 reptiles. The Pecatonica River mayfly recently found in Green County waters was thought to be extinct in Wisconsin! In total, 62 species of endangered, threatened or special concern status exist within the State Riverway boundaries. Future protection and management will ensure we can all continue to enjoy unusual educational opportunities along the Wisconsin River!

Riverway Forests

The forest community provides scenic background for river users, habitat for wildlife, and fiber for consumption. All timber within the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway boundary is protected by performance standards administered by the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board. There are several major forest types within the riverway.

Bottomland Hardwoods

Also known as floodplain forest or southern wet-mesic forest, this is the dominant forest type (28,000 acres) in the riverway. Seasonally flooded and typically growing on river-deposited, poorly drained soils, this forest type contains more species of trees than any other type of Wisconsin forest. The floodplain is dominated by silver maple, river birch, swamp white oak, American elm, green and black ashes, cottonwood, and black willow. Of interest is the presence of sycamore. Although a common tree south of Wisconsin, sycamore is a rare species of “special concern” in the state. Small populations exist near Arena in Iowa County and near Gotham in Richland County.

Upland Hardwoods

Found primarily on ridges and ridgetops, upland hardwoods within the river corridor include the southern mesic (moist), dry-mesic (medium moist) and dry forest types. Mesic forests, found generally on moist, north and east-facing slopes, are dominated by sugar maple, basswood, red oak and white ash. On slightly dryer slopes, dry-mesic forest of white and red oaks, with ironwood and basswood predominates.

The most xeric (dry) sites — ridges, etc. — are wooded with forests of black and white oaks, shagbark hickory, and black cherry. Several other tree species such as a black walnut, hackberry, bur oak and red maple are also found in the upland forests. Upland hardwoods cover over 17,000 acres of the State Riverway.

The oak timber types are of special concern. Changes in land use since pre-settlement times (1840) have made natural regeneration by oak species more difficult. To ensure oak for all uses by future generations in Wisconsin a forest management plan should be followed. Forest management plans can be prepared by private forest consultants or by foresters with the Wisconsin DNR.

Wyalusing State Park

The last bluff west marks the western reaches of the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway and the site of one of Wisconsin’s most beautiful state parks-Wyalusing State Park.

The bluff overlook alone makes your trip to this 2,600 acre park worthwhile as the view of the Wisconsin River joining with the Mississippi provides an awe-inspiring site.

The park offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities including family and group campsites. Reservations for family and group campsites can be made 11 months in advance by calling Reserve America at 888-947-2757 or online at www.reserveamerica.net. The Hugh Harp indoor Group Camp offers indoor lodging for 108 people. The facility consists of four dormitories and a main lodge with a fully equipped kitchen and dining facilities. Each dormitory has showers, sinks and flush toilets. Reservations are made through the park office up to one year in advance.

The park’s accessible boat and canoe launch from the Mississippi River. Canoists should watch for canoe trail signs as they enter from the west for a chance to enjoy a twisting, winding tour of river bottoms in a great watchable wildlife showroom! Canoe and kayak rental is available at the park concession. The park maintains a marked canoe trail through the backwater of the Mississippi River.

Showers are available in the Homestead and the Wisconsin Ridge Campgrounds. Firewood can be purchased at the park concession stand. Nature programs are provided by the park naturalist. The nature center is located next to the concession stand. The Peterson Shelter adjoins the Wisconsin Ridge Campground.

Admission stickers are required on all vehicles. Camping and reservation fees are in addition to admission stickers. Visit www.wyalusing.org or call 608-758-2591 for more information.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Lower Wisconsin State Riverway
1500 N. Johns Street
Dodgeville, WI 53533

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
Lower Wisconsin State Riverway
1500 N. Johns Street
Dodgeville, WI 53533

Additional information is available by contacting: Tower Hill State Park, 5808 Cty. C, Spring Green, WI 53588, or calling 608/588-2116.