

Forming A Wisconsin State Park System Friends Group



All friends groups form as a cooperative partnership with the Wisconsin State Parks system through the sole support of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) properties, facilities and programs. Interested groups can begin to discuss group goals and the formation of an official friends group with the DNR Property Manager. Friends groups are defined, authorized and administered by Wisconsin Administrative Code NR 1.71 Policy on Friends Groups. Citizens interested in forming a Friends Group will want to become familiar with this code and the purpose of a Friends Group.

Friends Groups are:

- Recognized by the department and bureau as an official friends group through:
 - Support services through the Bureau of Parks and Recreation Management
 - DNR Website [Friends Group web page](#)
 - DNR [Event Calendar](#) and other marketing of co-sponsored events
 - Recognition of donations and support through the Natural Resources Board
- Authorized by a shared agreement to:
 - Use designated facilities
 - Operate on the property for sales/events
 - Fundraise with specific purpose of supporting a state park, trail, recreation area or forest within the Wisconsin State Park System
 - Support activities that enhance cultural, interpretive and recreation activities
- Eligible to apply for stewardship matching funds through the Knowles Nelson grants for Friends groups (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Stewardship/ApplyFriends>) for education and recreation enhancements up to \$20,000
- Eligible to apply for Natural Resource Foundation of Wisconsin grants (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/parks/friends/grants>) designated for friends groups and related activities
- Eligible to become a member of the [Friends of Wisconsin State Parks](#) and to apply for grants and receive other membership benefits. Contact [Patty Loosen](#) at 608-294-0810

How to form a Friends Group:

- Discuss interest in forming a group with the Property Manager by presenting a plan of how the group would like to support the property in the short and long-term. Obtain agreement and approval from the Property Manager to proceed with forming a friends group.
- Educate your group members about how to form and maintain a nonprofit tax-exempt organization and take action to establish a non-profit, non-stock, tax-exempt corporation organized to support, assist and promote the mission and activities of department properties, facilities and programs and other activities as approved by the department under the provisions of a written agreement with the department:
 - Watch IRS Video: **Starting Out** (<https://www.stayexempt.irs.gov/home/starting-out/starting-out>)– An educational video about how to apply for non-profit and tax-exempt status and a few tools to get your organization moving in the right direction.
 - Read: **Lifecycle of a Public Charity (Exempt Organization)** (<https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/charitable-organizations/life-cycle-of-a-public-charity>) to learn more about the requirements for maintaining the organization.
 - Refer to the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions (<https://www.wdfr.org/CharitableOrganizations/default.htm>) to create the friends group organization.
 - Request a Friends Group Agreement with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources from the Property Manager. This document outlines the roles and responsibilities of each party in the cooperative partnership.