

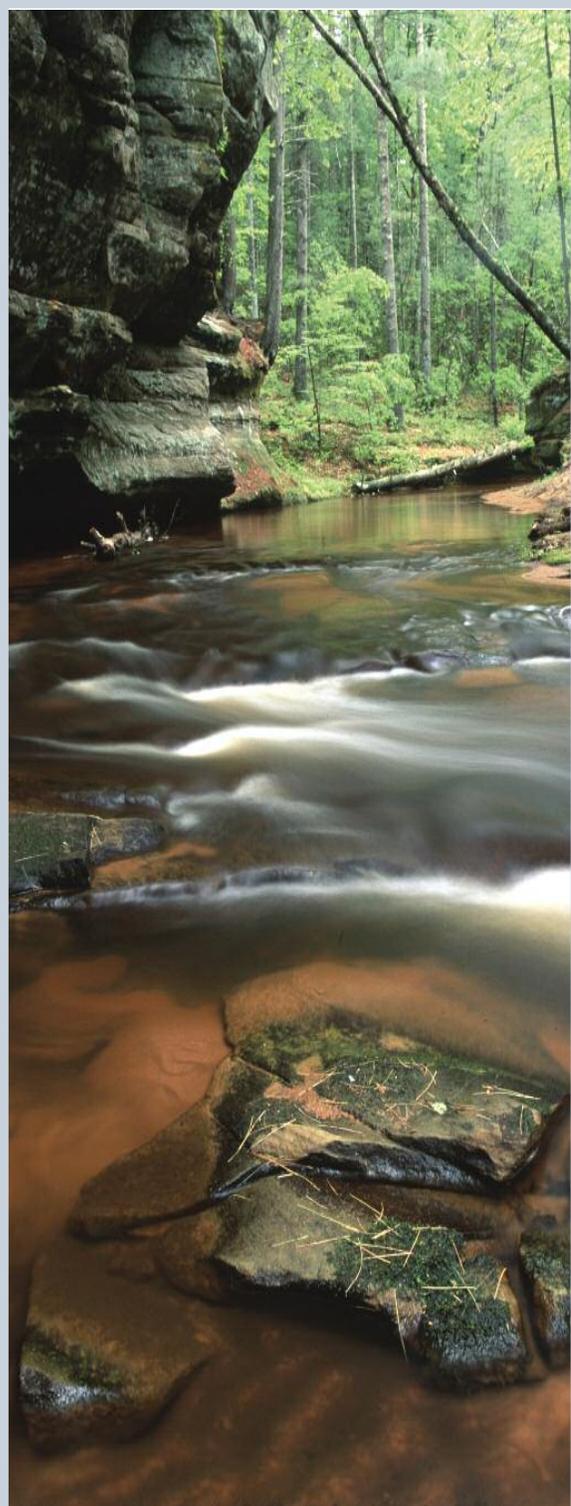


Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Uses and Trends

As the America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative looks to reconnect Americans to the outdoors, Wisconsin must examine its outdoor recreation uses and trends to better understand how Wisconsinites currently connect to the state's outdoor recreation resources. The second theme of the AGO Report, "Enhance Recreational Access and Opportunities," was developed out of the public's desire to remove barriers to recreation and to make recreation a higher priority for land and water management agencies. The survey analyses in this chapter can be used to determine what improvements are needed in regard to access and opportunities in outdoor recreation.

By identifying outdoor recreation demand by demographics and by projecting outdoor recreation activity trends relevant to the immediate future, Chapter 2 of the SCORP gives Wisconsin communities direction in outdoor recreation planning. Under AGO, community-based efforts to increase outdoor recreation access will receive federal government support (AGO Recommendation 2.2). Such support will include technical assistance for local, state, and tribal efforts to enhance recreation (AGO Action Item 2.2a), and backing of community programs that improve safety of open spaces and access routes (AGO Action Item 2.2c).





The challenge for recreation providers is to understand the ever-changing needs of the outdoor recreation public.

Overview

Over 87% of Wisconsinites enjoy some form of outdoor recreation. This staggeringly high number reflects a state that is passionate about outdoor recreation and the traditions that go with it. Outdoor recreation happens over a variety of landscapes—whether in a duck blind along the Mississippi River or bicycling on a paved trail in Milwaukee, Wisconsin provides high quality outdoor recreation experiences for a diverse population. The challenge for recreation providers is to understand the ever-changing needs of the outdoor recreation public.

This chapter explores several of the factors that influence a person's recreation preferences—recreation settings, recreation experiences, and geographic locations—and classifies recreational activities and users according to these groupings. By dividing recreational activities into standard categories, this chapter seeks to explain recreation preferences within Wisconsin.

Recreation demand survey results for this SCORP are primarily based on the 2005–2009 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE). The NSRE's Wisconsin data is based on 718 survey responses across five versions.

Participation in Outdoor Recreation

Wisconsinites are active participants in most forms of outdoor recreation, and recreation participation rates within Wisconsin are higher than most other regions of the country. This high level of participation may be attributed to the combination of Wisconsin’s abundant recreation resources as well as the state’s four season climate, which provides unique

recreational opportunities year-round. Table 2-1 lists the 72 outdoor recreation activities surveyed for this SCORP. DNR identified these activities by following state and nationally recognized outdoor recreation demand survey methodology as detailed in Appendix B.

Table 2-1: Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Participants by Participation Rate (Age 16+), 5-year view

Activity	2005–2009 Participation		Activity	2005–2009 Participation	
	Percent Participating	Number of Participants (1,000s)		Percent Participating	Number of Participants (1,000s)
Walk for pleasure	87.7	3,947	Off-highway vehicle driving	19.8	891
Gardening or landscaping for pleasure	65.4	2,944	Trail running	18.6	773
View/photograph natural scenery	65.3	2,939	Snowmobiling	18.3	824
Attend outdoor sports events	65.0	2,926	Big game hunting	18.0	810
Family gathering	63.5	2,858	Canoeing	17.9	806
Visit nature centers, etc.	63.5	2,858	Visit prehistoric/archeological sites	15.5	698
View/photograph other wildlife	57.9	2,606	Boat tours or excursions	13.9	626
Driving for pleasure	52.8	2,377	Ice skating outdoors	13.5	608
View/photograph wildflowers, trees, etc.	52.4	2,359	Ice fishing	13.1	590
Sightseeing	50.6	2,278	Waterskiing	13.0	585
Bicycling	48.7	2,192	Coldwater fishing	12.8	576
Boating (any type)	47.3	2,129	Primitive camping	11.4	513
Picnicking	47.0	2,115	Small game hunting	11.3	509
Visit historic sites	46.7	2,102	Rafting	9.2	414
Snow/ice activities (any type)	45.9	2,066	Cross country skiing	8.8	396
Yard games, e.g., horseshoes	44.7	2,012	Horseback riding (any type)	8.7	392
Gather mushrooms, berries, etc.	42.8	1,926	Tennis outdoors	8.5	383
Visit a beach	42.3	1,904	Backpacking	7.4	333
Golf	41.8	1,881	Kayaking	7.3	329
Swimming in lakes, streams, etc.	41.7	1,877	Rowing	7.2	324
View/photograph birds	41.7	1,877	Downhill skiing	7.0	315
Freshwater fishing	37.4	1,683	Horseback riding on trails	6.6	297
Day hiking	36.7	1,652	Use personal watercraft	6.5	293
Motorboating	36.0	1,620	Snorkeling	6.2	279
Visit a farm or agricultural setting	35.3	1,589	Snowshoeing	6.1	275
Swimming in an outdoor pool	34.5	1,553	Migratory bird hunting	4.1	185
Visit a wilderness or primitive area	33.7	1,517	Sailing	3.9	176
Warmwater fishing	33.2	1,494	Rock climbing	3.8	171
Attend outdoor concerts, plays, etc.	32.8	1,476	Snowboarding	3.7	167
Soccer outdoors	32.3	1,460	Mountain climbing	2.7	122
Running or jogging	32.1	1,445	Caving	2.6	117
Mountain biking	30.7	1,382	Inline skating	2.5	113
Sledding	28.2	1,269	Orienteering	1.6	72
View/photograph fish	26.7	1,202	Scuba diving	1.1	50
Developed camping	25.4	1,143	Windsurfing	1.1	50
Handball or racquetball outdoors	23.5	1,058	Surfing	1.0	45
Visit other waterside (besides beach)	22.6	1,017			
Hunting (any type)	22.2	999			

See the 2005–2010 Wisconsin SCORP for additional detail on residents’ participation in outdoor recreation.

Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Setting Segmentation

While the above rankings are useful in determining which outdoor recreation activities are popular among Wisconsinites, it is also useful to understand what causes an activity to be popular. One method of examining outdoor recreation participation is by recreation setting, or the environment in which people recreate. For the purpose of this plan, the NSRE activities were divided into five groupings describing different activity and setting trends. These groupings, listed below, suggest that people in different recreation setting segments seek different kinds of experiences from outdoor recreation. By understanding recreation use in terms of these segments, we may begin to see how individual recreation activities fit within a broader spectrum of recreation settings.

Segmentation of Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Activities:

1. DEVELOPED LAND
2. LIMITED DEVELOPMENT
3. WATER
4. WINTER
5. VIEWING AND INTERPRETIVE



Bicycling is a very popular activity in Wisconsin.

Developed Land Activities

Outdoor recreation in developed settings includes a wide mix of recreational activities, all of which use some form of manmade development (such as roads or sidewalks) or involve a high level of social interaction. Developed land setting outdoor recreation is by far the most popular form of recreation in Wisconsin; more Wisconsin residents participate in two developed land recreation activities—walking for pleasure (87.7% participating) and gardening/landscaping for pleasure (65.4% participating)—than any other activities. Family gathering and bicycling are other popular activities in this category. Table 2-2 lists the percentage of Wisconsin residents participating in several popular developed land activities.

Table 2-2: Percent Wisconsin Residents Participating in Developed Land Activities (Age 16+)

Activity	Percent Participating	Estimated Number of Participants (1,000s)
Walk for pleasure	87.7	3,947
Gardening or landscaping for pleasure	65.4	2,944
Attend outdoor sports events	65.0	2,926
Family gathering	63.5	2,858
Driving for pleasure	52.8	2,377
Bicycling	48.7	2,192
Picnicking	47.0	2,115
Yard games, e.g., horseshoes	44.7	2,012
Golf	41.8	1,881
Soccer outdoors	32.3	1,460
Running or jogging	32.1	1,445
Developed camping	25.4	1,143
Handball or racquetball outdoors	23.5	1,058
Horseback riding (any type)	8.7	392
Tennis outdoors	8.5	383
Horseback riding on trails	6.6	297
Inline skating	2.5	113

See the 2005–2010 Wisconsin SCORP for additional detail on residents' participation in outdoor recreation.

Parks, Trails, and Pedestrians in Wisconsin



Public parks and trails are essential components of Wisconsin’s outdoor recreation infrastructure. Aside from other benefits, parks and trails serve as the setting for many of the state’s most popular outdoor activities. Walking is by far the most popular outdoor activity in Wisconsin. While much of recreational walking takes place on neighborhood sidewalks, the presence of parks and trails plays a significant role in activities like walking. Research has linked the presence of parks, trails, enjoyable scenery, and other people exercising to increased physical activity.



Activity	2005-2009 Participation	
	Percent Participating	Number of Participants (1,000s)
Walk for pleasure	87.7	3,947
Bicycling	48.7	2,192

While the presence of public parks and trails are essential to outdoor activities, the connectivity of surrounding communities to these recreational opportunities is also important. For example, a park connected to a local bike trail or located just a short walk down the street may see higher usage frequency from nearby neighborhoods as compared to one far and remote. Public parks and trails with coherent pedestrian connectivity, such as through popular activities of walking or biking, to adjacent communities can increase residents’ accessibility to outdoor recreation.



In 2011, a study assessed the pedestrian accessibility of Wisconsin’s parks and trails. This network analysis considered where people live, where parks and trails are located, and how parks and trails are connected by public sidewalks. This led to a county-by-county estimation of how many residents live within a ½-mile walk of a park or trail. The results indicate that over 70% of Wisconsin residents do not live within a ½-mile walk of a public park or trail. The assessment also revealed wide variation in park walkability across the state. For example, more than 50% of all residents in Dane, Milwaukee, and Rock counties live within a ½-mile of a park or trail. Meanwhile, in 31 other counties, less than 5% of residents have that level of pedestrian access.

Limited Development Activities

Wisconsin offers many outdoor recreation activities in undeveloped, or primitive, sites. Generally, these activities involve hiking, camping, or some form of hunting. Over 1/3 of Wisconsinites participate in day hiking. One in five participate in some form of hunting. While limited development facilities may be used in conjunction with these activities, the typical nature-based land activity participant wants to experience natural surroundings.

Water Activities

Water-based outdoor activities are among the most popular recreation activities in Wisconsin. Abundant water resources across the state offer a wide variety of recreation options from high speed motorboating to lazy lounging at the beach. Just under half of Wisconsin residents participate in boating, visiting a beach, or swimming in a lake or stream. The lakes and rivers of northwestern Wisconsin provide ample opportunities for water-based recreation. The Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River regions, both of which provide many miles of shoreline for water-based participants, are also popular areas for water recreation.



Abundant water resources across the state offer a wide variety of recreation options.

Table 2-3: Percent Wisconsin Residents Participating in Limited Development Activities (Age 16+)

Activity	Percent Participating	Estimated Number of Participants (1,000s)
Day hiking	36.7	1,652
Visit a wilderness or primitive area	33.7	1,517
Mountain biking	30.7	1,382
Hunting (any type)	22.2	999
Big game hunting	18.0	810
Small game hunting	11.3	509
Primitive camping	11.4	513
Migratory bird hunting	4.1	185
Backpacking	7.4	333
Rock climbing	3.8	171
Mountain climbing	2.7	122
Caving	2.6	117
Orienteering	1.6	72

See the 2005–2010 Wisconsin SCORP for additional detail on residents' participation in outdoor recreation.

Table 2-4: Percent Wisconsin Residents Participating in Water Activities (Age 16+)

Activity	Percent Participating	Estimated Number of Participants (1,000s)
Boating (any type)	47.3	2,129
Visit a beach	42.3	1,904
Swimming in lakes, streams, etc.	41.7	1,877
Freshwater fishing	37.4	1,683
Motorboating	36.0	1,620
Swimming in an outdoor pool	34.5	1,553
Warmwater fishing	33.2	1,494
Visit other waterside (besides beach)	22.6	1,017
Canoeing	17.9	806
Waterskiing	13.0	585
Coldwater fishing	12.8	576
Rafting	9.2	414
Kayaking	7.3	329
Rowing	7.2	324
Use personal watercraft	6.5	293
Snorkeling	6.2	279
Sailing	3.9	176
Scuba diving	1.1	50
Windsurfing	1.1	50
Surfing	1.0	45

See the 2005–2010 Wisconsin SCORP for additional detail on residents' participation in outdoor recreation.

Winter Activities

Snow- and ice-based activities are those that involve some form of frozen water. These activities are very popular among Wisconsinites with just over 45% of residents participating in some form of snow or ice activity. Sledding is the most popular of these activities, with just over a quarter (28.2%) of the state participating. Ice-related activities are also very popular in the state, with 608,000 Wisconsinites participating in ice skating and 590,000 participating in ice fishing.

Viewing and Interpretive Activities

Statewide, the most popular viewing and interpretive activity is viewing or photographing natural scenery, an activity in which over 65% of Wisconsinites participate. The second most popular viewing and interpretive activity is attending outdoor sporting events, with 65% of residents participating. Over half of all state residents have gone sightseeing within the last year, while just under half have visited historic sites. Physical activity is not generally a primary component of these activities, although it is often a complementary component. In general, rates of participation in viewing and interpretive activities are higher in Wisconsin than they are in other states. This may be a reflection of Wisconsin’s strong educational system and history of environmental awareness.

Wisconsin Recreational Trends and Observations

As society grows and changes, so too does the recreational landscape. Changes in demographics, the economy, user preferences, and availability of recreation venues all influence the demand for different recreational activities. As part of the NSRE survey work, Wisconsin recreational activities have been tracked over the last 15 years. By far the biggest change in Wisconsin has been the migration of rural populations to urban centers, which is reflected in increased demand for urban-based recreational activities.

Demographics

Demographics play an important role in the popularity of outdoor recreation activities. From the years 2000 to 2010, the 2010 Census showed that Wisconsin’s population grew 6%, which is well below the national average of 9.7%. The state fared better than four of the other six states in the Midwest region, trailing only Minnesota and Indiana in population growth. However, 2010 census data shows that rural counties in northern Wisconsin continued to lose population to urban areas in the past decade, while counties adjacent to major metro areas grew in population.

Table 2-5: **Percent Wisconsin Residents Participating in Snow- and Ice-Based Activities (Age 16+)**

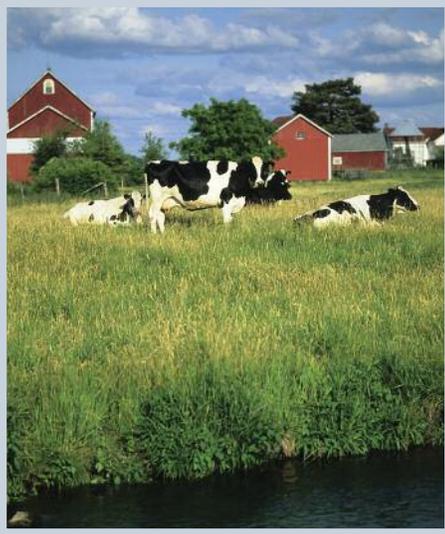
Activity	Percent Participating	Estimated Number of Participants (1,000s)
Snow/ice activities (any type)	45.9	2,066
Sledding	28.2	1,269
Snowmobiling	18.3	824
Ice skating outdoors	13.5	608
Ice fishing	13.1	590
Cross-country skiing	8.8	396
Downhill skiing	7.0	315
Snowshoeing	6.1	275
Snowboarding	3.7	167

See the 2005–2010 Wisconsin SCORP for additional detail on residents’ participation in outdoor recreation.

Table 2-6: **Percent Wisconsin Residents Participating in Viewing and Interpretive Activities (Age 16+)**

Activity	Percent Participating	Estimated Number of Participants (1,000s)
View/photograph natural scenery	65.3	2,939
Attend outdoor sports events	65.0	2,926
Visit nature centers, etc.	63.5	2,858
View/photograph other wildlife	57.9	2,606
View/photograph wildflowers, trees, etc.	52.4	2,359
Sightseeing	50.6	2,278
Visit historic sites	46.7	2,102
Gather mushrooms, berries, etc.	42.8	1,926
View/photograph birds	41.7	1,877
Visit a farm or agricultural setting	35.3	1,589
Attend outdoor concerts, plays, etc.	32.8	1,476
View/photograph fish	26.7	1,202
Visit prehistoric/archeological sites	15.5	698
Boat tours or excursions	13.9	626

See the 2005–2010 Wisconsin SCORP for additional detail on residents’ participation in outdoor recreation.



Rustic Roads, Byways, and Circle Tours

One relaxed way to enjoy the beauty of Wisconsin is to travel its rustic roads and byways. Wisconsin is the only state with a rustic road program, which was established in 1973. By 2011, 111 rustic roads totaling 639 miles now cut across 58 counties. These selectively preserved areas allow travelers to journey back in time through miles of charming and quaint paths that uniquely set them apart from other roads in the area. Rustic roads offer access to scenic resting points and connect scenes from Wisconsin's past, from lighthouses to Amish farms. As the only nationally designated scenic byway in the State, the Great River Road runs through 33 river towns while showcasing some of the oldest communities in Wisconsin. Other Wisconsin byways allow visitors to witness the beauty of our state through vantage points along lakes, rivers, bluffs, valleys, and swamps, all with various animal and plant life. With spans of 15 to 250 miles, byways offer historic and seasonal scenery through lakes, rivers, and national forests, all in flexible driving tours of 2 to 10 hours.

Wisconsin motorists can also enjoy highway expeditions around both Lake Michigan and Lake Superior via their respective circle tours. The Wisconsin portion of the Lake Michigan Circle Tour (LMCT) is 325 miles in length, and it extends along the entire eastern shore of Wisconsin. The Lake Superior Circle Tour (LSCT) on the northernmost shore of Wisconsin is 144 miles long, complete with optional passage through Big Bay State Park and Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. Both circle tours provide views of scenic waterfalls and miles of shoreline beaches, as well as numerous boating, camping, and fishing opportunities.

Table 2-7: **Top Growth Wisconsin Recreation Activities 1994–2009 (Age 16+)**

Recreation Use	Survey of 1994* (1,000s)	Survey of 2009* (1,000s)	Difference (1,000s)
Soccer outdoors	179.1	1,460.0	+ 1,280.9
View/photograph other wildlife	1,582.9	2,605.8	+ 1,022.9
Golf	888.8	1,882.3	+ 993.5
Handball or racquetball outdoors	96.8	1,058.3	+ 961.5
Walk for pleasure	2,988.0	3,946.9	+ 950.9
Attend outdoor sports events	1,995.2	2,923.5	+ 928.3
Bicycling	1,486.8	2,190.8	+ 704.0
Day hiking	949.0	1,652.8	+ 703.8
Running or jogging	803.8	1,446.8	+ 643.0
View/photograph birds	1,261.4	1,877.5	+ 616.1

*Each survey represents a rolling average of five previous years.

Table 2-8: **Top Growth Wisconsin Recreation Activities by Percent 1994–2009 (Age 16+)**

Recreation Use	Survey of 1994* (1,000s)	Survey of 2009* (1,000s)	Percent Difference
Handball or racquetball outdoors	96.8	1,058.3	+ 993.3%
Soccer outdoors	179.1	1,460.0	+ 715.2%
Kayaking	46.6	328.4	+ 604.7%
Surfing	10.3	44.5	+ 332%
Football	282.5	852.4	+ 201.7%
Horseback riding	139.3	389.9	+ 179.9%
Mountain/rock climbing	53.3	122.9	+ 130.6%
Use personal watercraft	131.9	293.7	+ 122.7%
Golf	888.8	1,882.3	+ 111.8%
Snowboarding	77.7	164.4	+ 111.6%

*Each survey represents a rolling average of five previous years.

From the years 2000 to 2010, nineteen Wisconsin rural counties lost population during this decade—experiencing more deaths than births that are part of a larger pattern of rural population loss across the Midwest. The 2010 census shows a shift from the 1990s, when only Milwaukee County experienced population loss. The population decline was mostly in the northern parts of the state, with Iron (down 14%), Florence (down 13%), and Price (down 11%) in the top three. The reasons for migration of younger people moving out of more rural areas are multifaceted that include job and educational opportunities, and a desire for diversity and cultural amenities (Applied Population Laboratory 2011). In stark contrast, just two Wisconsin counties lost population in the 1990s. A factor in this increased rural population loss is the recession that started in 2008, which pulled people away from rural areas and toward metro areas.

Wisconsin counties across the state line from the Chicago and Minneapolis metropolitan areas saw rapid population growth since the year 2000. St. Croix County, which lies within commuting range of Minneapolis and St. Paul, was the fastest-growing county in the state, increasing in population by more than 33% since 2000. Kenosha County, across the border from Chicago, grew 11.3% during the same period.

The state's Hispanic population has grown 74.2% since the year 2000. Hispanics now account for 5.9% of the state's population. Blacks remain the largest state minority group at 6.3%.

Fifteen Year Recreation Trends

A number of recreation activities have seen exponential growth over the last 15 years. In terms of sheer numbers, soccer has outpaced every other outdoor recreation activity. This growth can be attributed to the number of youth soccer leagues that have been formed over the last decade. Table 2-7 shows the top 10 recreational activities by total numbers.

Another way to show growth is by percentage change. This method shows a different set of recreation activities that have grown in popularity. Interestingly, most participants in these activities are urban residents. Table 2-8 reflects the top 10 recreational activities by total percentage change.



A number of recreation activities have seen exponential growth over the last 15 years. In terms of sheer numbers, soccer has outpaced every other outdoor recreation activity.

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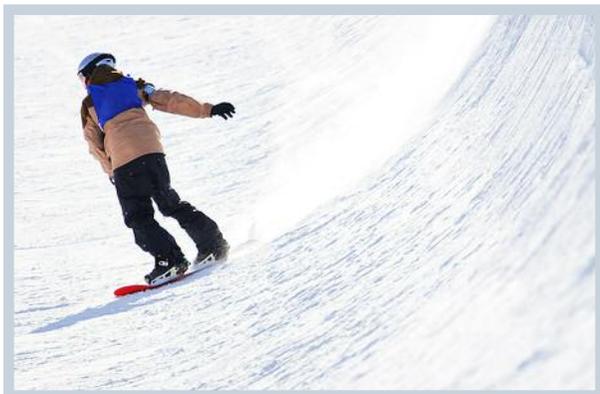
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Table 2-9 considers the percentage changes in recreation participation rates, as well as industry forecasts and opinions from recreation professionals, to suggest which activities will be popular in the future. These observa-

tions are made for a five year period, and therefore reflect the most pressing demands on recreation in the immediate future.

Table 2-9: **Projected Trends in Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Activities**

Increasing Demand 	Adventure racing	Popular as both an individual and a group activity.
	Driving for pleasure	An easy activity for the aging baby boomer generation.
	Developed/RV camping	Baby boomers are a continued driving force for this growth.
	Kayaking	Cheaper entry points have attracted more participants.
	Visit a dog park	Urban residents continue to demand more of these areas.
	Soccer outdoors	Youth growth is still strong in urban areas.
	BMX biking	X Games popularity may be driving this growth.
	Climbing	Indoor climbing walls have led to an outdoor resurgence.
	Stand up paddling/paddleboarding	A fast growing water sport sweeping the country.
	Triathlon (on- and off-road)	Varying distance events have allowed for growth.
	Off-highway vehicle driving	Post recession growth continues.
	Gardening or landscaping for pleasure	The "grow local" concept is taking hold at many levels.
Stable Demand 	Walk for pleasure	Market saturation does not allow for large growth.
	Running or jogging	Gen Y is replacing the baby boomers for this activity.
	Water parks	Recession may have caused this growth to slow.
	Motorboating	Still easy access in a water-based state.
	Day hiking	Popular with many generations.
	Golf	Time constraints do not allow for growth.
	Tent camping	Continues to be stable, but growth is illusive.
	Snowboarding	May have peaked after 20 years of growth.
	Trail running	A stable niche activity with Gen Y.
	View/photograph wildlife	An easy activity that spans generations.
	Bicycling (road and non-paved)	Popular with many generations – access is still key.
	Snowshoeing	After large growth, this has stabilized.
Decreasing Demand 	Hunting	Continues to struggle with generational loss and private access.
	Inline skating	A large decrease in the last six years, the bottom may be near.
	Skateboarding/skate parks	Gen M is free-skating with longboards.
	Horseback riding on trails	Recession impacts have caused this to decrease with no rebound.
	Softball	Baby boomers continue to leave this sport.
	Downhill skiing	Gen Y does not have the numbers to replace aging baby boomers.



Summary

As society continues to change and evolve, so too does outdoor recreation participation. Recreation participation reflects many elements: recreation preferences, the diversity of the Wisconsin population, the variety of recreation landscapes available throughout the state, and the increasing barriers placed upon the average recreationalist. Taken as a whole, these factors contribute to a diverse range of recreational activity preferences and demands throughout the state. As recreation providers attempt to accommodate these various needs, proactive planning will become increasingly important to ensure that recreation in Wisconsin remains accessible and adaptable to the needs of the state's population.