



Golden events

Hikers on the trail through Fern Dell in Mirror Lake State Park in 1969.

DEAN TVEDT

THREE WISCONSIN STATE PARK GEMS CELEBRATE 50TH ANNIVERSARIES THIS SUMMER.

Paul Holtan

Within a four-week period in the summer of 1966, Wisconsin opened three new state parks to the public, joining 29 others that had been established since the first state park, Interstate Park, opened in 1900.

It was the first time since the mid-1930s that the state had added three new parks in one year, and it was almost a direct benefit of cigarettes, or at least the sale of cigarettes.

In 1961, the Wisconsin Legislature enacted a long-range program of acquisition and improvement of state recreational facilities known as the Outdoor Resources Action Program or ORAP. The program was funded by a one-cent tax per pack of cigarettes that prompted a wave of new park purchases, maintenance projects and the era of rails-to-trails developments.

Three of those first acquisitions were Hartman Creek State Park, Lake Kegonsa State Park and Mirror Lake State Park in 1962. It took several years from acquisition to opening the parks in that summer of 1966.

This summer, all three parks will be holding 50th anniversary celebrations of their openings.

Hartman Creek in Waupaca County celebrated its anniversary June 4, with

events ranging from presentations by wildlife, forestry and warden staff, to free fishing and living history programs put on by park staff and the Friends of Hartman Creek State Park. Smokey Bear even paid a visit.

As with many Wisconsin state park system properties, a lot of the improvements and facilities at the park are due to partnerships and friends groups. For Hartman Creek that includes the Friends of Hartman Creek State Park as well as bike and horse clubs, the Ice Age Trail Alliance and the Wisconsin Master Naturalist Program.

Mirror Lake and Lake Kegonsa will hold their celebrations this month with Mirror Lake's on Saturday, Aug. 13 and Lake Kegonsa's on Sunday, Aug. 14. Both parks will waive admission fees for the events.

Mirror Lake State Park, in Sauk County, is about halfway between the major tourist centers of Wisconsin Dells and Baraboo. There will be a full day of events including special guests and



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Mirror Lake State Park today.

entertainment at the new amphitheater that was built with the support of the Friends of Mirror Lake State Park, along with presentations by DNR staff and other dignitaries, including the friends' group president and past superintendents. There will also be a presentation and displays on park history, dedication of 50th anniversary plaque and burying of a time capsule. Later in the afternoon, there will be a performance by Ho-Chunk Nation drummers and dancers and an evening concert.

Mirror Lake State Park will also have special programs throughout the summer to highlight park history and a "fact-a-day" calendar counting down the 50 days to the Aug. 13 event. Each day will feature a different event from the park history or some other facts related to the park. The calendar will be on display in the park office and will be posted on the Mirror Lake State Park page of the DNR website.

Lake Kegonsa State Park, in Dane

County between Stoughton and Madison, is on the eastern shore of Lake Kegonsa, a 3,200-acre lake connected to the Yahara chain of lakes. Its anniversary celebration will kick off with a guided nature hike in the morning followed by a cutting of the anniversary cake. In the afternoon there will be a falconry program, children's activities and historical displays of the park.

While the parks opened in 1966, at that time they were far from the polished recreational properties they have all become.

An Aug. 11, 1966 article in the *Stoughton Courier Hub* noted: "The temporary U.S. Forest Service-approved toilets have been installed. Dead trees and tangly brush have been removed and gravel laid in the last three weeks for a forest road. Eventually this will be black-topped."

Thanks to the original ORAP and its reauthorization in 1969, followed by passage of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program in 1989 that continued to provide funds for land acquisition, recreational development and trails, expansions and improvements continued at all three parks over the past 50 years that have made all three gems in the state park system.

Hartman Creek State Park

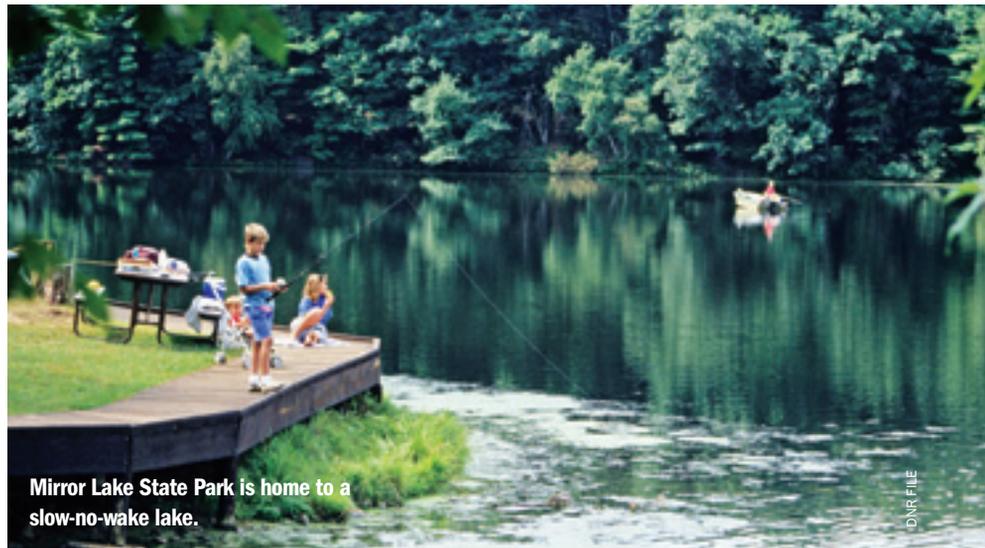
Prior to being established as a state park, Hartman Creek was once a state-operated fish hatchery, where dams were built to create four spring-fed lakes — Allen, Hartman, Grebe and Mid. The park also adjoins Pope, Marl and Manomin lakes, natural lakes that are at the head of Waupaca's famed Chain O' Lakes, a group of 22 spring-fed lakes. While there are no public landings within the park (other than off Knight Lane), small boats and canoes may be carried down to Allen, Hartman or Mid lakes and launched along the shore. The three lakes give Hartman Creek State Park approximately 65 acres of clean, clear, spring-fed water, with a 300-foot sand beach and large marked-off swimming area on Hartman Lake.

The park opened with the 350-acre fish hatchery property and purchase of adjacent private lands bringing the total to 975 acres. It has since grown to 1,500 acres. The park is located on part of the terminal moraine of the Wisconsin glacier and there are potholes, gullies and springs that feed the lakes. Hartman Creek State Park includes 3 miles of the Ice Age Scenic Trail, crossing through Waupaca and Portage counties.



Hartman Creek State Park celebrated its 50th anniversary in June.

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Mirror Lake State Park is home to a slow-no-wake lake.

DNR FILE

The park has a 100-site family campground and five group campsites. The campsites are located in either a red pine forest or an old apple orchard/hardwood mix of trees. Hikers have about 10 miles of varied trails to choose from in the park, and there are about 12 miles of off-road biking trails in the park which are combination hiking/biking segments. A 6-mile segment is all single-track and was completed by a local bike club. In winter, 6 miles of trails are available for cross-country skiing and 3.5 miles of trails are available for snowshoeing.

In the mid-1990s a local horse club approached the park about the possibility of opening horse trails in the park. Initially, the park opened 2 miles of existing trails to equestrians, which has since been expanded to nearly 8 miles of scenic trail through forest, prairie and along Allen Creek.

In 1997 Bob and Christine Faulks donated the Hellestad House to the park. Ole and Anne Hellestad, immigrants from Norway in the mid-1800s, settled in central Wisconsin and built the home.

The home was moved to the park and more than 1,850 hours of volunteer time went into restoring the Norwegian log cabin, which is nestled near the Allen Lake Picnic Area. The home is used to educate school groups on the life story of the family that journeyed so far to become citizens of the community. For several days each summer, the Friends of Hartman Creek State Park open the doors to welcome visitors where they can see the Hellestad family heirlooms along with changing displays of animal and plant life in the park.



A dedication of the mobility impaired fishing structure at Mirror Lake.

DNR FILE

Mirror Lake State Park

The lake from which the park takes its name was created in 1860, when Horace LaBar built a wooden dam across Dell Creek to form what was then called LaBar's Pond. LaBar then built a mill to produce flour, which he shipped to Chicago.

Because the 137-acre Mirror Lake is a slow-no-wake lake, it is extremely popular for canoeing and kayaking. The boat landing located within the state park hosts concessions with boat, canoe and kayak rentals available in the summer. On either side of the boat launch there is an accessible fishing pier to the north and an accessible boardwalk with fishing access to the south.

Sandstone bluffs that were untouched by the glaciers form a narrow "dalles of Mirror Lake" and lead to "Upper Mirror Lake," a broad, flat, shallow area where Dell Creek enters the lake. This is a favorite place for migrating waterfowl, and a variety of ducks, grebes, coots and great blue herons in spring.

The park has a 200-foot sand beach, three picnic areas and an accessible, open, reservable picnic shelter in the Bluewater Bay camping area. There are 151 family campsites in three separate campgrounds with seven group sites. In the summer, concerts are held in the amphitheater that was reconstructed in 2014 thanks in part to a major donation from the Friends of Mirror Lake State Park.

The same year Mirror Lake opened to the public, the state also expanded the park property, purchasing land that included the Seth Peterson cottage designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The cottage had fallen into disrepair and was destined for demolition until local citizens organized to save the structure. They formed the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy and, with a grant approved by the state legislature, were able to raise funds to restore and preserve the cottage, which is now listed on the state and national lists of historical places. The cottage is available as a rental unit within the park and according to the conservancy has received more than 10,000 overnight guests from most states and many foreign countries over the past two decades.

Mirror Lake is also home to the first accessible cabin to be built in a Wisconsin state park, leading the way for nine more accessible cabins in other parks. There are 19 miles of hiking trails in the park, 18 miles of which are groomed in the winter for skate and classic cross-



The Lake Kegonsa State Park boat ramp as it looks today on its 50th anniversary.

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The park's boat ramp taken years ago before repairs and upgrades to accommodate more boaters.

DNR FILE

country skiing. Snowshoers are welcome throughout the park and on trails not groomed for skiing.

Lake Kegonsa State Park

Lake Kegonsa State Park was first officially classified as a "roadside" state park, because of its relatively small size and proximity to the Interstate. At 342 acres, it is one of the smaller state parks, but it packs a lot of punch into its space. The park is located on the northeast side of 3,208-acre Lake Kegonsa, one of the famed "Four Lakes" of the Yahara River chain in the Madison area. Park visitors enjoy a variety of water sports, including sailing, boating and water-skiing. It provides boaters with double concrete launch ramps. Swimmers enjoy the beach and the extra-large sunbathing lawn, and the park offers a separate beach for dogs.

In the Winnebago tribal language, Kegonsa means "lake of many fishes," and the lake offers excellent fishing for walleye, northern, bluegill, perch, crappie and catfish.

The park's wooded campsites are widely spaced and provide privacy that is much sought after by campers. Open-

ing with just 36 campsites on Aug. 12, 1966, the park has added campgrounds over the years and now offers 96 family campsites and a group camp with six sites that can accommodate as many as 20 campers per site.

There are 66 acres of re-established prairie with a variety of grasses and restored prairie plants and the 1.2-mile White Oak nature trail that gently winds through the 80-acre woods with 200-year-old stately oaks, passing a number of linear mounds that authorities believe were built by Woodland Indians hundreds of years ago.

In winter, cross-country skiing is popular on the park's 5 miles of ski trails. The trails are groomed and tracked for diagonal-stride skiers and groomed for skate skiers when snow conditions permit. There are 1.2 miles of designated snowshoe and hiking trails in the park. These trails travel along the lakeshore and through the woods, prairie and wetland areas. Lake Kegonsa offers excellent ice fishing, especially for panfish, but also for northern pike and walleye. 

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