

WISCONSIN NATURAL RESOURCES

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FALL 2021 \$3.50

Discover what's hidden

INSIDE

EAGLE TOWER SOARS AGAIN
MEAD'S DIY NATURE TOUR
PESHTIGO FIRE AT 150



OPENING NOTES

The briefest hint of fall is emerging, a quiet promise of the colorful season to come. Autumn, with its vibrant hues and crisp air, has a way of reminding us just how beautiful the natural world can be.

There are many ways to enjoy this wonderful transitional season. Take a quiet hike in the woods, watch wildlife or have a sit by a tranquil lake, hit the road for a fall color drive, participate in Wisconsin's rich hunting traditions for waterfowl, turkeys, rabbits and — the big one, of course — deer.

All of these things and more make fall days special.

State parks and other properties boast some of the best seats in the house for the annual color show. They're perfect for autumn activities, offering a backdrop of scenic splendor. Check dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks for all you need to plan a visit.

And read on for more about Wisconsin state parks and other resources connecting you to the state's great outdoors.

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COVER PHOTO OF CHIPPEWA MORaine
STATE RECREATION AREA BY KATIE PERSONS

FROM THE SECRETARY

Preston D. Cole



MIKE GORSKI

The ongoing pandemic has been difficult for many and continues to present new challenges. Despite the hardships, it is just as important to keep going. And at the Wisconsin DNR, we are doing just that.

We remain dedicated to our commitment to protecting the great people of Wisconsin and our natural resources. It is a job I take very seriously and so do my colleagues, who are dedicated to making sure people across the state have clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, public lands to enjoy and help when conducting business in Wisconsin.

Although Gov. Evers declared 2019 the Year of Clean Drinking Water, the work continues to ensure there is safe water for all Wisconsinites. We know that tens of thousands of people today cannot drink the water from their taps.

Wisconsin has more than 11,450 public water systems — the most of any state across the country. Meanwhile, another one in four Wisconsinites get their water from private wells. We know that drinking water across the state may be contaminated, and we also know there are solutions.

This summer, several DNR staff and I joined our colleagues from the Department of Health Services to launch the Safe Water for All campaign focused on educating the public on the leading drinking water contaminants and their impact on public health.

To help keep the public informed on the state of water in Wisconsin, the

DNR is hosting the Safe Water for All panel series this September and October. The panels will go into more detail about the leading contaminants and solutions for clean water. (You can learn more about the campaign by hovering over the QR code on this page with your smartphone, or go to dnr.wi.gov and search “safe water.”)

I am incredibly proud of the hard work our staff — in the office and in the field — are doing to help find, treat and prevent contaminants like lead, nitrates and PFAS from getting into our water. That work directly impacts the public lands we all enjoy, including the rivers, lakes and streams eloquently highlighted across these pages.

Ensuring our public lands and waters are protected also helps support outdoor recreation, which contributes to the health and well-being of Wisconsinites and our visitors and provides a much-needed injection into our local economies.

Wisconsin cannot be the economic engine we need to be if pollution keeps people from turning on their taps to drink the water, fish in our lakes and rivers, or breathe the air while out walking or hiking. Protecting our land, water and air is not only good for the environment but is also good for our local economies.

While you're out finding your adventure in Wisconsin — hopefully with a few new ideas from this issue — please know, dear reader, that we are hard at work for you. Be safe and stay healthy. 🍷



SCAN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT
THE SAFE WATER FOR ALL CAMPAIGN.

DATELINE DNR

WISCONSIN SHIPWRECKS SET FOR SANCTUARY DESIGNATION

A 962-square-mile area of the state's Lake Michigan coast — from Ozaukee County north of Milwaukee to Kewaunee County at the base of the Door Peninsula — is nearing official designation as the Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on June 23 published the final rule for the designation, which takes place following a review period by Gov. Tony Evers and U.S. Congress over a 45-day period of continuous session. Based on the tentative congressional calendar, the designation could become official by mid-December.

The state and NOAA will co-manage the sanctuary protecting 36 known shipwrecks, including 21 on the National Register of Historic Places. Research suggests dozens more shipwrecks would be discovered in the sanctuary.

Preserved by the cold waters of Lake Michigan, several of the shipwrecks are essentially intact, appearing much like they

did when they sank. Wisconsin's oldest known shipwreck — the Gallinipper, dating to 1833 — is within sanctuary boundaries.

"The shipwrecks that scatter Lake Michigan help tell the story of Wisconsin," said DNR Secretary Preston D. Cole. "Preserving the artifacts of our maritime heritage is an important way to remember and learn from those who came before us."

Sanctuary designation will not change control of Wisconsin's lands or waters. Nor will it affect riparian rights of property owners, shipping, fishing or public access. Sanctuary regulations are narrowly focused on underwater cultural resources, enhancing the state's past stewardship efforts.

Wisconsin submitted the sanctuary nomination in December 2014, and it has garnered widespread support. The area would become the 15th NOAA marine sanctuary. For details, visit sanctuaries.noaa.gov/wisconsin.



A diver swims near the wreck of the two-masted schooner Walter B. Allen, which sank off the Wisconsin coast near Sheboygan in April 1880.

TAMARA THOMSEN/WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY



JOSEPH WARREN

OCTOBER 16

If all goes as planned, popular candlelight hikes will be back at state properties this fall. Kohler-Andrae State Park in Sheboygan has one set for this mid-October date, and the MacKenzie Center in Poynette plans a night hike with campfire on Nov. 6. Other places likely will be adding to the schedule. As always, check for updates before you go — dnr.wi.gov/events.

NOVEMBER 20

As Wisconsin deer hunters know, the Saturday before Thanksgiving is circled on the calendar as the start of the nine-day gun deer season.

Other 2021 deer hunting dates include:

Sept. 18-Jan. 9 — archery and crossbow;

Oct. 2-10 — gun hunt for those with disabilities;

Oct. 9-10 — youth deer hunt; and

Dec. 9-12 — statewide antlerless hunt.

Buy a license at gowild.wi.gov, and check dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt/deer for everything you need to get ready for the hunt.



LINDA FRESHWATERS ARNDT



CHRISTOPHER TALL

COLOR REPORT HAS IT ALL FOR FALL

With autumn just around the corner, start checking the Wisconsin Department of Tourism's Fall Color Report for updates on where and when to see the state's best colors. There may be lots of green now, but that will change in a hurry as days become shorter and cooler and trees get prepped for a long winter's nap. The online report offers a county-by-county color

update and features fall trip ideas and more to help you maximize your autumn enjoyment — travelwisconsin.com/fall-color-report.

A PHOENIX AFFAIR FOR

Eagle tower

STORY BY AMY ANDROFF AND PHOTOS BY JOSHUA MORRIS



Eagle Tower, remembered by generations of visitors to Door County's Peninsula State Park, soars again high above the treetops.



COLLABORATION, COMMITMENT AND FOREST SCIENCE ALLOW POPULAR STATE PARK TOWER TO RISE AGAIN

If you live in Wisconsin, chances are you at least know of Eagle Tower.

More likely, you — along with thousands of visitors from around the world — recall indelible experiences taking in spectacular views of Lake Michigan, the surrounding islands, and Michigan's Upper Peninsula from the iconic tower.

Situated on a 180-foot limestone bluff called Eagle Bluff, the tower many people remember stood for decades, offering a captivating and much beloved panorama of Peninsula State Park.

That well-known observation tower was a 76-foot timber structure built in 1932, replacing an original tower erected in 1914. But in 2015, the popular tower's deteriorating

state caused the Department of Natural Resources to have serious concerns about its structural integrity and safety.

The DNR asked the federal Forest Products Laboratory, located in Madison, to assess the structure.

In May 2015, Eagle Tower was closed to the public and structural assessments began in earnest.

"Because of FPL's long-standing stature as an unbiased source of technical information on wood and wood products, we were asked to provide scientific and technical assistance to

the (DNR) during their assessment of the historic viewing tower and subsequent construction of a new viewing tower," explained Robert Ross, FPL's supervisory research general engineer, who led the team assessing the tower.



Tower construction, from the inside.



Stunning panoramic views from Eagle Tower include Lake Michigan and the surrounding landscape.



The new tower stands 60 feet high with an observation deck 253 feet above the waters of Green Bay. Accessibility is a highlight, with an 850-foot walkway that winds through the tree canopy.

During the FPL's initial visual inspection of the tower, Ross observed considerable deterioration of both structural and non-structural wood members. Of greatest concern was the condition of the tower's main supporting columns.

Deep splits and cracks within many of the timbers and the main load-bearing support columns were evident. Holes were also visible in the timber, most likely the result of bird nesting activities.

Splits and deterioration in the vicinity of connections and where the support columns contacted the concrete pads were of significant concern. Ross also observed evidence of lateral movement from the upper sections of the tower.

That is all to say, the old Eagle Tower was in rough shape and ready for retirement. In September 2016, Eagle Tower was dismantled.



SENSING IT'S TIME TO REPLACE

After the tower came down, FPL researchers used several nondestructive techniques to assess the condition of the large timber poles from the structure.

Stress wave timers were used to inspect the internal integrity of the poles. Sensors were positioned on opposite sides of the timber, and a tap on the pole generated stress waves in the wood.

Because stress waves take longer to travel between sensors in deteriorated wood, degraded timber could be easily identified.

Additionally, microdrilling resistance, a technique used to identify decay and voids in both lumber and live trees, was used to identify degraded beam areas. When wood decays, it becomes soft; drill penetration will meet little resistance from deteriorated wood.



Microdrilling resistance results indicated deterioration in the vicinity of a bird nest in the timber. Both tests found that critical support beams were significantly deteriorated and could not be reused for any structural purpose.

After intense community and local government deliberation, a replacement tower was agreed upon. Ayres Associates, which has offices in five Wisconsin cities, completed the new design.

Construction took longer than expected, with normal delays not to mention the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, earlier this year, the tower was ready.

The stunning new Eagle Tower officially opened to the public on May 19, with a July 9 ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating the long-awaited revival.

IDEAL VIEWING SPOT

The new Eagle Tower stands 60 feet high and has an observation deck 253 feet above the Bay of Green Bay. Visitors can access the tower using an 850-foot accessible canopy walk or by climbing 100 steps to the top.

The tower offers panoramic views of surrounding Peninsula State Park, nearby lands, waters and bay islands, the Upper Michigan shoreline and local communities.

Why was the current height chosen for the new tower?

In the initial design planning stages, the new tower's height was debated, and technology ultimately helped settle the issue, Ross explained.

"The DNR conducted an assessment of the view from the bluff upon which the tower rests," he said. "A drone was

used to evaluate the best panoramic view at various heights above the bluff. Based on these tests they selected the height."

The immense scale of the project is truly difficult to grasp unless you're standing right next to the cement support pads that bear the structure. Massive doesn't quite capture the enormity of the tower's design.

The new tower's ADA-compliant ramp launches from the forest floor and flies through the tree canopy — much like the eagle for which the tower is named — taking visitors aloft into the surrounding forest.

Approximately three wheelchairs wide, the ramp gives all visitors a squirrel's eye view of the forest, with educational stops at strategic corners, until it ends with the stunning view from the location of the old tower.

Every design care has been taken to build the new tower to look aesthetically similar to the previous version. Visitors who want to climb the spiraling stairs to the top still have that opportunity.

PARTNERSHIPS AND PRIDE

The \$3.5 million cost of the tower was covered through partnerships with state legislators from the area, the DNR and the Friends of Peninsula State Park, which donated \$750,000 to the project.

Diane Brusoe, DNR's deputy division administrator for the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Division, said hopes are the new tower will be as beloved as the old.

"We look forward to the new Eagle Tower being a unique and iconic destination for visitors and for the countless memories being made by those who



Visitors can climb the 100 steps to the tower's observation deck or reach the deck by a sprawling accessible walkway.

LEARN MORE

Access is free to Eagle Tower, in Door County's Peninsula State Park, with parking available near the tower site and access from various hiking and biking trails. A vehicle admission sticker is required to enter the park, which also features upgrades this year including new restroom and shower facilities, campsite grills and fire rings, additional campground electrical service and an addition to the park's White Cedar Nature Center. For details on Peninsula State Park including park maps and admission information, check dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/peninsula. To learn more about the Forest Products Laboratory and advancements that aid projects such as Eagle Tower, see fpl.fs.fed.us.



Many partners have helped the DNR make the Eagle Tower dream a reality, including the Friends of Peninsula State Park, which donated \$750,000 toward the \$3.5 million cost.

come to enjoy it," she said. "Eagle Tower is a celebration of community and making outdoor recreation opportunities available to anyone, regardless of your ability."

Eagle Tower is the only known fully accessible wood observation tower of its height in the country.

"The feedback we've received is overwhelmingly positive," said DNR's Eric Hyde, superintendent at Peninsula State Park. "Visitors are enjoying the new tower, whether it's been a decades-long tradition to visit or a brand-new experience."

"Eagle Tower is back, and we couldn't be prouder of how it's turned out."

MODERN ENGINEERING

FPL researchers are equally proud of their participation in this project. Ross said the technical assistance provided by FPL led to the selection of materials used for construction.

The timbers for the ramp and tower are what's known as "glulam," or glued-laminated timber. They were supplied by Sentinel Structures, one of Wisconsin's oldest lumber companies.

"Based on technical input from FPL, the DNR chose to use modern engineered wood products to construct the tower," Ross said.

"In addition, to meet ADA requirements,

the DNR decided to construct a sloping ramp, using engineered wood products, that would gradually wind from the site's parking lot through the local section of the park, raise above the parking lot and out onto the top level of the viewing tower."

Although the old timbers from the last tower couldn't be reused in the new structure, local artisans reclaimed them for their work. Trees cleared to make a path for the ramp were used to build benches and signage for the park.

Soaring once again, Eagle Tower is a full-circle Wisconsin story. But more than that, it's a tribute to the beloved natural surroundings, trees, people, businesses, materials and inclusivity the location has to offer.

Eagle Tower offers a truly magical experience. It's a place where many a first kiss happened, where birdwatchers may finally catch a glimpse of a rare native species, or where a child discovers the wonder of nature and grows into an adult who in turn brings their own children.

The new Eagle Tower — beautiful, structurally sound and ADA compliant — can be magical for everyone. 🌲

Amy Androff is a public affairs specialist for the Forest Products Laboratory in Madison. Joshua Morris is a public information officer for the DNR.

A ribbon cutting officially marks the opening of the new tower on July 9. Yielding ceremonial scissors are Mike Bergum, center, supervisor for the DNR's East Central District, and Chris Holicek, president of the Friends of Peninsula State Park.





Voluntary Public Access lands, marked by signage, can be found statewide.

BENEFITS IN ABUNDANCE

LAND ACCESS PROGRAM PROVIDES PLENTIFUL REWARDS FOR LANDOWNERS AND USERS ALIKE

CLAIRE VANVALKENBURG

In Wisconsin, being a good neighbor is the norm. That may be a big reason why the DNR's Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program is one of the largest in the Midwest.

VPA-HIP allows private landowners the opportunity to open their property to the public through lease agreements, thereby enhancing outdoor recreation. The program also encourages the expansion of wildlife habitat management in Wisconsin.

Landowners enrolled in the VPA program can apply for funding for land management projects such as prescribed burning, conservation cover and upland wildlife habitat management. Proposed projects are vetted by the DNR to be sure they are appropriate and don't damage sensitive resources.

Funding for the program is made available through the DNR from money authorized in the 2018 Farm Bill and administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Lease agreements with landowners are flexible in duration and pay per acre based on land type. Eligible lands include grasslands, wetlands, forestlands and, in some cases, agricultural lands.

Enrollment priority is given to areas of 40 acres or more with at least a quarter of the land usable cover. Location near

existing public fishing or hunting grounds is preferred. Wisconsin statute offers liability protection to landowners who allow public access for outdoor recreation.

VPA-HIP benefits everyone involved. Landowners gain resources and funding to manage their property, and Wisconsin residents have an additional 30,000 acres for recreational activities.

Recent survey responders have noted how important the VPA program is for passing on the traditions of hunting and outdoor recreation. Most said they've used the program to hunt, but 47% of users also took advantage of VPA lands to fish, trap and observe wildlife.

In addition, 90% of landowners and 96% of recreational users said they were

satisfied with their experience in the VPA program.

"It's a great program," one participating landowner noted. "It really helps let people hunt and helps with herd control, so you don't have to worry about deer numbers and damage as much."

SUPPORT FOR TRADITIONS

The DNR's R3 program — recruitment, retention and reactivation — works closely with the VPA program, seeking ways to bolster participation in fishing, trapping and shooting sports. Thanks to VPA-HIP, there are more places to pass on Wisconsin's outdoor traditions.

No permission is needed to hunt, trap, fish or observe wildlife on VPA properties; don't contact landowners to ask about access. Other activities such as harvesting wild edibles or antler sheds are not permitted.

Access is allowed only on foot and only where posted. Be aware of boundaries. No tree stands or blinds, trail cameras, camping or campfires are allowed.

Land users are asked to adhere to a common-sense code of conduct summed up with: "Be ethical, courteous and safe."

If you're planning a hunting getaway this fall, consider VPA properties, which often are quieter than most public hunting grounds, allowing for more harvest opportunities.

Wisconsinites know that sharing resources means more opportunities for everyone. With the VPA program, there is something for every neighbor. 🍷

LEARN MORE

For details on the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program, including how to apply to enroll a property and how to find VPA lands by county list or interactive map, check dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/VPA.

Claire VanValkenburg is a communications specialist in the DNR's Division of Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

NATURE AT YOUR CONVENIENCE

**VIRTUALLY
OR IN PERSON,
MEAD'S
NATURALIST
PROGRAMS
SAFELY SERVE
THE PUBLIC**

STORY BY KATHRYN A. KAHLER AND PHOTOS BY MEAD STAFF

When COVID-19 restrictions were put in place in the spring of 2020, staff at DNR properties around the state found innovative ways to provide contactless opportunities to engage the public with nature while promoting wellness and self-discovery.

The education team at the Stanton W. Mead Education and Visitor Center at George W. Mead Wildlife Area took on the challenge and developed two new programs — self-guided hikes and “Virtual Mondays at Mead.”

“We expect both programs to continue into the future,” said Craig Ziolkowski, property supervisor at Mead, in central Wisconsin. “Mondays at Mead’ will likely morph into part virtual and part in-person, shared via some form of video conference technology. The self-guided lessons are also likely to continue.”

GAUGING SUCCESS

Presenters for “Virtual Mondays at Mead” — held the fourth Monday of each month since April — are experts in their respective fields of study.

In May, followers heard Lesa Kardash, a DNR wildlife biologist at the Buena Vista Wildlife Area, talk about the state’s prairie chicken population and current grassland management techniques.

July’s virtual lessons came from Karen Oberhauser, director of UW-Madison’s Arboretum, Aldo Leopold Professor of Restoration Ecology and professor in UW’s Department of Entomology, who talked about the life cycle, habitat and migration of monarch butterflies.

“We are very thankful to have them,” Ziolkowski said. “Most are from outside the area, and by offering a virtual format, many who were unable to travel were still able to join us.”

“As this was our first virtual program offering, we are very pleased with participation and continue to see participation growth as we refine our outreach and marketing.”

Participation with the self-guided hikes was a little harder to gauge, as staff all worked under Safer at Home guidance with little in-person public interaction.

“From tracks in the snow and the frequency of refilling trail guides and brochures, we can tell it was widely used,” Ziolkowski said. “Schools that remained in-person as well as youth organizations and home-schoolers also

Interpretive trail signs change monthly to offer new lessons throughout the changing seasons.



utilized the self-guided hikes into early June.”

BENEFITS BEYOND SAFETY

Ziolkowski and members of the Mead education team — Joan Voigt and Pam Resech — see significant benefits to the programs, beyond keeping people safe.

“In addition to learning about a variety of natural history topics, these programs afforded our long-standing customers

the ability to stay connected and engage with the property as well as each other,” Voigt said. “Virtual Mondays at Mead” also provided the opportunity to engage new customers throughout the state and beyond.

“We’re especially excited about this, because it brings many aspects of the outdoors to people who may not have the opportunity to join us in person as well as connect with those who are more familiar with Mead Wildlife Area.”

There’s also an efficiency element to the new programs when compared with naturalist-led hikes.

“The opportunity to reach new audiences and share the outdoors with people is really exciting,” said Resech. “Both programs create lots of opportunity and often require fewer resources than more traditional in-person formats.”

Kathryn A. Kahler is associate editor of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.



ONLINE OR ON SITE, LEARN MORE WITH MEAD

Join in for a cyber look at nature as the Mead Education and Visitor Center hosts a series of virtual presentations on Wisconsin’s amazing flora, fauna and natural resources.

“Virtual Mondays at Mead” events — typically held the fourth Monday of the month, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. — feature a unique topic and are led by experts and current researchers. The Zoom presentations are free and sponsored by the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society.

Registration is required. Visit meadwildlife.org/page/upcoming-events to sign up and check for program updates, with winter presentations still in the planning stage.

• SEPT. 27 Astronomy

Sebastian Zamfir, Ph.D., assistant professor of physics and astronomy at UW-Stevens Point and director of Blocher Planetarium and Pejsa Observatory, discusses star gazing and constellations in the night sky.

• OCT. 11 Bats in Wisconsin

Janet Raddatz, Wisconsin master naturalist and DNR bat program volunteer, offers an overview on the eight bat species recorded in Wisconsin, how bats have a significant

role in ecosystems, bats as pollinators, how bats survive winter and which species migrate from Wisconsin.

• OCT. 25 Wisconsin Turtles

Andrew Badje, DNR conservation biologist, presents turtle identification, range and ecology of Wisconsin’s 11 native turtle species.

Along with these virtual presentations, Mead also welcomes visitors on site to a series of self-guided trail walks. Explore the habitats and interrelationships with wildlife on the Mead property through these interpretive lessons.

Trail information handouts and other materials are available in the brochure rack where the walks begin at the kiosk by the main entrance to the visitor center parking lot. The Mead Wildlife Education Team will introduce a new family-friendly, self-guided interpretive lesson each month.

• SEPT. 10-OCT. 14 Tree ID and Forest Plants

• OCT. 15-NOV. 11 Owls in Wisconsin

• NOV. 12-DEC. 9 Wisconsin Wildlife Safari

• DEC. 10-JAN. 20 Bald Eagles

Both the “Virtual Mondays at Mead” and the self-guided hikes are funded through generous contributions made by the Mead Wildlife Area Trust (Mead Witter Foundation and Friends of the Mead/McMillan Association Inc., collectively). Technical support for “Virtual Mondays at Mead” is courtesy of the Aldo Leopold Audubon Society.

For more information about Mead’s educational programs, email Pam Resech, pamela.resech@wisconsin.gov, or Joan Voigt, joan.voigt@wisconsin.gov. Or visit meadwildlife.org.

Mead Wildlife Area is located at 201517 County Road S, Milladore. Maps are available on the website.

For an overview of the Mead Wildlife Area, including a scenic video, go to dnr.wi.gov and search “Mead.”

— KATHRYN A. KAHLER

**GOVERNOR
KNOWLES
STATE
FOREST**

Camp, paddle,
hike, horseback
ride, bike, hunt,
fish, ski and
snowmobile
at Governor
Knowles
State Forest.
This 55-mile-
long forest in
northwestern
Wisconsin
parallels the St.
Croix National
Scenic Riverway
and offers three
campgrounds
— St. Croix,
Trade River
Equestrian and
Sioux Portage
Group —
and nine
rustic
backpack
campsites within
32,500 wooded
acres.



#OUTWIGO TO HIDDEN GEMS

WISCONSIN STATE PARK SYSTEM HARBORS A WEALTH OF UNSUNG TREASURES

JONNA MAYBERRY

Many state parks, forests and trails are so well-traversed you're bound to run into friends along the way. And then there are the hidden gem properties that offer a chance to stumble upon solitude.

Followers of the Department of Natural Resources on Instagram have a way of finding these special places, capturing beautiful images as they visit. Most of the photos included here are from that photo sharing app.

Whether you're exploring our most visited state properties or one of these lesser-known spots, be sure to tag @wi_dnr and use #OutWiGo for a chance to be featured on our Instagram page.

To get connected on all of the DNR's digital platforms, go to dnr.wi.gov/social.

And check dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks to learn more about exploring the Wisconsin State Park System, where you can discover all the outdoor riches Wisconsin has to offer. 🌲

Jonna Mayberry is a public information officer in the DNR's Office of Communications.



STRAIGHT LAKE STATE PARK

Enjoy glacial features that provide grand vistas on the trails within this 2,000-acre park, open only to foot traffic. Carry in your nonmotorized boat to enjoy paddling and fishing on spring-fed Straight Lake as well as Rainbow Lake, stocked annually with rainbow trout. Ice fishing is popular in winter. The park also offers 10 walk-in campsites and a picnic area with reservable shelter. A picturesque segment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail meanders through the park, located near Luck in northwest Wisconsin's Polk County.

BUFFALO RIVER STATE TRAIL

Early French explorers named the river they saw in west-central Wisconsin for the bison that inhabited the area. The Buffalo River lends its name to this state trail running 36 miles between Fairchild and Mondovi. Built on a former railroad corridor, it follows the scenic Buffalo River Valley and passes by farmlands, woods, hills and wetlands. This is a multi-use trail allowing hiking, biking, horseback riding, ATVs, snowmobiles, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Good trail etiquette ensures enjoyment by all.



DENNIS YOCKERS



DNR FILES

CHIPPEWA MORaine STATE RECREATION AREA

View the unspoiled beauty of kettle lakes and glacial features at this state recreation area situated along the Ice Age National Scenic Trail near New Auburn, in northwest Wisconsin. Hiking, snowshoeing, backpack camping, fishing and bird watching are popular activities. Additionally, the David R. Obey Ice Age Interpretive Center houses first-class glacial, cultural and natural history displays.





MILL BLUFF STATE PARK

Take in the views at this park just outside Camp Douglas in Juneau County. Hike the 223 stone steps built by the Works Progress Administration in the 1930s to reach the observation deck atop the park's namesake Mill Bluff. The park is part of the Ice Age National Scientific Reserve and features picturesque rock formations. On the short and partly accessible Nature Trail, a historical marker describes the area's geology and users can learn about area wildlife, trees and wildflowers. Campsites, picnic areas, a shelter and a swimming pond also are found at the park.



NATURAL BRIDGE STATE PARK

Take in the beauty of the park's wind- and water-sculpted natural sandstone arch, missed by the glaciers during the last Ice Age. While you're there, be sure to view the rock shelter near the bridge, which was used by Native Americans when the glacier was melting 11,000 years ago. Natural Bridge, a day-use park in Sauk County, features 4 miles of hiking trails and a large picnic area. It can be a quiet change of pace from the nearby and often visited Devil's Lake State Park.



BRAD BELLISLE



AMY BRYANT @root_wings_properties

GREAT RIVER STATE TRAIL

Take this 24-mile trail to travel through prairies and the backwaters of the Upper Mississippi River Valley. Built on an abandoned Chicago-Northwestern railroad line, the trail has a finely crushed limestone surface suitable for walking and bicycling for much of the year and snowmobiling, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing in winter. The Great River State Trail, with an access point from Perrot State Park, is within a larger area called the Mississippi Flyway and passes through two National Wildlife Refuges. It's also part of the 3,000-mile Mississippi River Trail, a system of bike-friendly roads and trails that travels from the Mississippi River headwaters all the way to the Gulf of Mexico.



JENNIFER STALSBERG

TOWER HILL STATE PARK

Enjoy Wisconsin history and nature at Tower Hill State Park outside Spring Green. Learn how lead shot was made in the mid-1800s by exploring the reconstructed shot tower. Hike bluff trails and enjoy river views. A picnic area with shelter and a small campground of 10 reservable sites are available. The Wisconsin River runs alongside the park, and a canoe landing makes paddling a perfect pastime here.

HAVENWOODS STATE FOREST

Talk about a hidden gem — this state forest is camouflaged among half a million people! Havenwoods, on Milwaukee's north side, is Wisconsin's only urban state forest, featuring 237 acres of grasslands, woods and wetlands. Hiking and running are popular here on more than 6 miles of trails. Watch wildlife, explore the forest's ponds, stroll over a 120-foot bridge, have a picnic or find a bench to relax outdoors. A nature center features seasonal exhibits, drop-in activities and items to borrow for exploring, such as binoculars, snowshoes, field guides and other tools.



ROCK ISLAND STATE PARK

No motor vehicles or bicycles are allowed on this rustic 912-acre Lake Michigan island. A ferry takes visitors from Washington Island to Rock Island, at the very tip of Door County, from Memorial Day weekend through Columbus Day in October. Hiking trails, a swimming beach and walk-in campsites await. The Pottawatomie Lighthouse is a favorite island feature, with daily tours offered by live-in docents during the ferry season, supported by the Friends of Rock Island State Park.





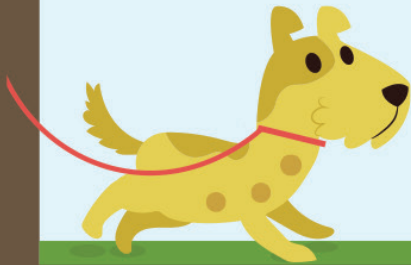
WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW **BEFORE** YOU

OutWiGo



Pack in, pack out.

Your litter should leave with you. Pet waste, too.



*No one likes
a litterbug,
Cheesedog!*

Plan ahead and prepare.

Bring water and hand sanitizer, just in case.

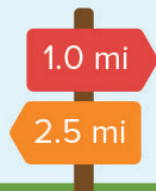
*No bubblers?
No problem.
H2O on the go!*



Share the love!

Popular parks fill up fast.

Skip the long lines and explore one of Wisconsin's many hidden gems including state trails, natural areas, wildlife areas and more.



*Cheers to new adventures
without the wait!*



Leave what you find.

Nature is awesome. Let it be.

*We rock.
Do not disturb.*



Respect wildlife.

Wildlife is wonderful.
Observe from a distance.

Talking cheese?!



*A deer!
I'll watch from here.*



A happy moment
for new angler
Jayde Panye.

DNR'S NEW FISHMOBILE INSPIRES
ANGLING'S NEXT GENERATION

REELS ON WHEELS

STORY BY ANDREA ZANI
AND PHOTOS BY ANDY MANIS

This summer, the DNR launched a new educational fishing program dedicated to engaging youth in urban areas.

The Mobile First Catch Center, dubbed the Fishmobile, is a trailer filled with everything needed for hands-on learning including rods, tackle and life vests for participating kids. DNR staff hope the First Catch Center can become a regular presence in urban communities to help young people catch on to fishing.

"I'm just really thrilled to have it all there and put together," said Theresa Stabo, the DNR's fishing outreach and R3 coordinator, who helps lead recruitment, retention and reactivation efforts for the department. Stabo is the Fishmobile's on-site coordinator.

"In Wisconsin's communities of color, people have been historically excluded



Megan McCarter is ready to try her luck after a lesson at the DNR's new Fishmobile.

from the fishing community," she said. "We want to make sure everyone feels safe at the water's edge — that they have access and know they have the right to be there. We want to make sure everybody feels welcome."

Once on location, staff work with kids on knot-tying, practice casting and safety

before adding hooks and worms and heading to the water.

Funding for the program was provided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Sport Fish Restoration Program and the nonprofit Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation, which developed the First Catch Center initiative.



DNR staff prepare participants for a morning on the water. At left, Theresa Stabo explains the importance of a good fishing knot, while Andrew Krismer readies a rod and reel for Alan Samba, above.

LEARNING THROUGH FISHING

One of the Fishmobile's first stops was Warner Park in Madison, where staff was joined by summer campers from the Vera Court Neighborhood Center.

"It's one of those things they don't necessarily get to do that much," Tim Hall, elementary program manager for the center, said about fishing.

"You never know how something can

change them. You just want to give them as many skills as possible."

Beyond showing them the ropes with fishing, the outing can help teach "practical skills on life in general," Hall said.

"We definitely want to teach them more about emotional intelligence. With fishing, it's that calm state — it's all about patience," he said. "Sometimes you get something, and sometimes you don't. So it's really a good lesson."

Many of the summer campers were new to fishing. "I think I did a really good job for the first try," said Alayshia Randall Horn.

Megan McCarter and Djelika Sow both had little experience but looked smooth on practice casting. Others had tried fishing enough to know just what they thought of the sport.

"I'm OK with fishing," said Jayde Panye, "except somebody else has to touch the fish — and they have to touch the worm!"

LIFELONG PASTIME

After events in Madison, the Fishmobile made a stop at the Wisconsin State Fair in August before heading to Milwaukee's Harbor District for Harbor Fest on Sept. 19.

Community outreach is the No. 1 goal. By working with youth, the idea is to instill a love of fishing that can continue throughout their lives.

"We hope they'll think about these times and keep on doing it," Stabo said. ♡

Andrea Zani is managing editor of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine. Andy Manis is a freelance photographer based in Madison.



Jacob Amaya triumphs at knot-tying, above, and Idrissa Sow proudly shows his catch to Muhammad Krubally, left. Group leader Tim Hall, below center, helps keep young anglers' lines untangled.



LEARN MORE

A fishing license is needed for anyone over age 15 and can be purchased at gowild.wi.gov, as low as \$5 for first-time buyers. For more on fishing, visit dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing.

Spectacular Willow Falls stands out as Willow River State Park's most iconic spot.

DNR FILES

'POTENTIAL'

BECOMES BEAUTIFUL REALITY

50 YEARS LATER, WILLOW RIVER REMAINS ONE OF THE MOST VISITED WISCONSIN STATE PARKS

DOUG KILLIAN

What was once three flourishing hydroelectric dams near Hudson has become one of the busiest parks in Wisconsin. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the popular spot known for its spectacular waterfall views: Willow River State Park.

"It was just prairie, dams and a river when we started laying out the roads, campgrounds, picnic areas and beach," said Bernie McGaver, who coordinated the park design with then property manager Bill Killian and a team from the Department of Natural Resources.

"We could see the potential with the beauty of the falls and natural habitat."

McGaver eventually became area supervisor of five regional park properties — Willow River, Interstate and Kinnickinnic state parks, along with Red Cedar State Trail and Hoffman Hills State Recreation Area.

He retired from the DNR in 1990 after a 39-year career, and I was fortunate to interview him about Willow River a few months before he died in April at age 88.

Killian, who happens to be my father, was also among those tasked with developing the former Northern States Power Co. dams and land when he and our family moved there from the smaller Wildcat Mountain State Park near Ontario.

Killian had experience developing new recreational properties for the DNR. During his time at Wildcat Mountain, he played a key role in turning 32 miles of nearby abandoned train tracks into the Elroy-Sparta State Trail, which opened in 1965 as the first rails-to-trails project in the nation.

Killian and McGaver began the Willow River planning work in earnest in June 1970, and the 2,800-acre Willow River State Park opened to the public in the summer of 1971.



Bill Killian, the DNR's first property manager at Willow River State Park, is pictured in front of Little Falls dam in 1971, the year the park opened to the public.

COURTESY OF DOUG KILLIAN



Scenic waterfalls popular with park visitors were created when dams were removed from Willow River in the 1990s.

BENI PIERSON

Killian was manager at Willow River until retiring in 1981. He died in August 2019 at the age of 100.

WORK AND HOBBY SPOT

To create Willow River State Park, the first step was planning the park's main road, which was graded and graveled. From there, Killian and McGaver planned the campground by Little Falls Lake with an emphasis on providing as much privacy from trees around each site as possible.

To create the swimming beach, the plan called for literally tons of sand to be brought in by dump truck. Hiking trails were cut out, now doubling as trails for cross-country skiing in winter.

As the park was being created, Killian was able to pursue a favorite hobby along the way.

"Bill was an avid agate collector," McGaver said of his friend's affinity for the often colorful type of quartz valued by artisans as gemstones.

"I remember him telling me how he and his family would agate hunt on the weekends in the park as the roads were being built. He brought some of his treasures to the office and polished them, too."

WHAT TO DO WITH DAMS

The park initially included dams at Willow Falls near Burkhardt, at Mound Pond 2 miles north of Burkhardt and at Little Falls in the main park. Killian and

McGaver hand-controlled the Willow Falls and Little Falls dams depending on rainfall to regulate water flow through the Trout Brook residential area, Lake Mallalieu and ultimately into the St. Croix River in Hudson.

The Willow Falls and Mound Pond dams started deteriorating and were removed in 1992 and 1997, respectively. That returned the Willow River to its original form, including Willow Falls' scenic cascade in a 200-foot gorge.

Mound Pond now features a hiking trail to the Rattle Bridge, a former railroad bridge and popular fishing spot.

The Little Falls dam eventually needed major repair also, which was started in 2015 and necessitated lowering the water and closing the beach. The dam was reopened in 2020, which refilled the lake to benefit swimming, fishing and boating by nonmotorized watercraft.

CRAZY FOR CAMPING

Over the years, a nature center was added near the beach, and campgrounds were expanded to the park's natural prairie area.

"Demand for camping was so strong that we had to limit each stay to no more than two consecutive weeks," McGaver said of camping when the park first opened.

"People from Minneapolis-St. Paul (only 25 miles away in Minnesota) in particular were interested in staying in

the campground all summer and commuting to their jobs across the border."

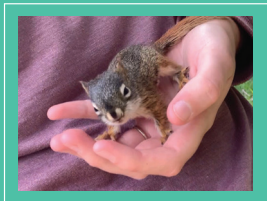
Willow River now has three campgrounds totaling about 150 sites — plus four group campsite areas — and camping remains very popular. The park has one of the highest campground occupancy rates in the Wisconsin State Park System.

Willow River is one of Wisconsin's most visited state parks overall, typically drawing nearly 1 million guests annually. Given the popularity of outdoor activities through the pandemic and beyond, the park is well on its way to another million-plus visitors during this 50th anniversary year. 🍷

Doug Killian writes from his home in Lake Elmo, Minnesota, where he holds fond memories of days spent at Willow River State Park.

LEARN MORE

For more about Willow River State Park in northwest Wisconsin, check dnr.wi.gov/topic/parks/willowriver. For information about the Friends of Willow River and Kinnickinnic State Parks, see willowkinniffriends.org. And for camping reservations at state parks including Willow River, go to wisconsin.goingtocamp.com.



When this baby squirrel didn't want to return to the woods, advice from Conservation Warden Chris Kratcha helped send it safely on its way.

CONSERVATION WARDENS AT WORK

PROTECTING WILDLIFE IS PARAMOUNT AND
LOVE OF NATURAL RESOURCES APPARENT



DNR
Conservation
Warden Vong
Xiong was able
to round up
a bald eagle
with a broken
wing and
transfer it to a
rehabilitation
center.

Ask many DNR conservation wardens about their duties, and they'll tell you looking out for Wisconsin wildlife is one of the most rewarding parts of the job.

The Spring issue of Wisconsin Natural Resources featured several stories of wardens aiding animal friends, which proved popular with readers. Here are several more.

Bald eagle rescues were a particular theme through the year, with several wardens reporting interactions with the majestic birds. From baby barred owls to battling badgers, these stories cover it all.

Read on for details, and turn the page for more from DNR conservation wardens sharing personal experiences about what drew them to the job and what it's like to work as a warden.

For information on joining the ranks of these officers working to protect Wisconsin's natural resources, check dnr.wi.gov/topic/wardenrecruitment.



Wardens know not to mess with a badger, unless it's to help free it from being inadvertently caught in a trap.

STORY BY JOANNE M. HAAS
AND PHOTOS COURTESY OF
DNR CONSERVATION WARDENS

DNR Conservation Warden Meghan Jensen is two for two rescuing bald eagles this year.

Jensen was on patrol in January when the Trempealeau County Sheriff's Office relayed wildlife emergency information from a citizen who noticed an injured eagle in a ditch. After getting more details from the citizen, she found the bird partially hidden in vegetation.

Equipped with leather gloves and a large blanket, Jensen calmly approached the bird and tried to lift it. But she quickly realized its tail feathers were frozen in water. Back to the truck for an ice spud to chip away the ice and carefully free the feathers.

Jensen transported the eagle to the Coulee Region Humane Society in Onalaska, where staff removed a large ice chunk from the tail and took in the bird for treatment.

"I give a lot of credit to the initial caller for finding this bird," Jensen said. "Without their call, I don't think the bird would have survived."



Meghan Jensen holds a rescued eagle at the Coulee Region Humane Society.

Baby owl from campground.



Clayton Peters was one of two conservation wardens who assisted a great horned owl after the bird crashed into a truck trailer at night.



Jensen's second eagle encounter came when she took a call on Easter Sunday from the Buffalo County Sheriff's Office about a suspected injured eagle. The next day, Jensen and Conservation Warden Andrew Johnson drove to the general rural area in search of the injured bird.

An eagle would be easy to spot, right? Maybe, but not when it could be in the bird Olympics for hide and seek and tag!

The wardens were walking in a field when they saw the eagle had trekked to an adjoining corn field. As Johnson went to get his safety gear, Jensen kept her eagle eye on the bird.

It could walk just fine — make that run away just fine — and that's what it did as the wardens got closer. Eventually, they were

able to catch up to the bird and worked with staff in the DNR's Natural Heritage Conservation Program to transport the winged patient to an area rehabilitator for treatment.

READY FOR REHAB

In another eagle case, Conservation Warden Vong Xiong was called by a Jackson County landowner concerning an eagle with a suspected broken wing. Xiong worked with the landowner to find the eagle, which was quite alert to the approach of its uniformed rescuer.

The eagle was still able to fly a few feet off the ground as Xiong sought to gently capture him. Finally, Xiong secured the eagle, which was transferred to the area humane society and eventually to the experts at the Raptor Education Group Inc., known as REGI, in Antigo.

Earlier in the year, Conservation Warden Ben Mott had taken a sick bald eagle to REGI, one of two eagles found about two days and 10 miles apart. Both were ill (unfortunately, one died) with what was suspected to be lead poisoning, likely from eating something that contained it.

At another rehabilitation spot, Wild Instincts in Rhinelander, DNR Conservation Warden Mason Weber got painstakingly personal with a bald eagle in rehab after it lost a nasty territorial fight with another eagle.

As a new warden, Weber was getting important field training from Conservation Warden Tim Otto. On this day, the rehabbers at Wild Instincts worked with Weber to give him experience in handling these remarkable raptors.

These esteemed birds can sometimes find themselves in precarious situations and in need of a warden's help.

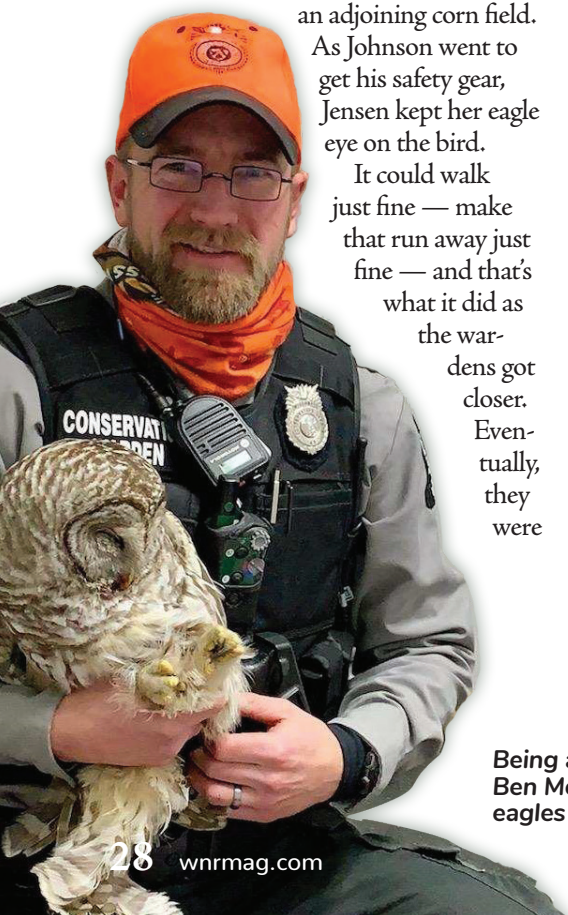
OTHER WILDLIFE RESCUES

Besides bald eagles, conservation wardens have been able to help many other wildlife species.

- ♦ DNR wardens Logan Woods and Blaine Ziarek teamed with Muskego Police Department officers to free a great horned owl snagged in holiday lights.

- ♦ The city of Neenah Police Department was alerted to a goose that appeared to be frozen to the ice near Doty Park in Neenah. They contacted DNR Conservation Warden Mary Bisch, who recruited fellow warden Annette Swanek. Together, they located the goose and were able to catch it, sending it off for treatment at the Bay Beach Wildlife Sanctuary in Green Bay.

- ♦ DNR Conservation Warden Amanda Kretschmer assisted in the case of a pesky turkey with a hankering to peck on vehicles in a Green Bay business area. Kretschmer joined Josh Martinez, a DNR wildlife biologist, and Brian Maedke, a USDA wildlife specialist, in safely relocating the bird.



Being a conservation warden has kept Ben Mott busy, including helping owls, eagles and other wildlife.



♦ Clayton Peters and Brandon Smith, both DNR wardens, freed a great horned owl that had crashed into a trailer being pulled by Peters' truck while he was on night patrol. The owl was taken to a wildlife rehabilitator for care.

♦ Conservation Warden Jonathan Kaiser aided a barred owl that had an unpleasant encounter with a vehicle. After getting a call from the Waupaca County Sheriff's Office, Kaiser took the bird in for the night then transported it to the care of Marge Gibson at the Raptor Education Group.

♦ In another barred owl hit-by-vehicle case, warden Mott also enlisted REGI to care for a bird's broken wing and leg. Three months later, Mott learned the best news: The owl was ready to return to the wild. Never one to miss an educational opportunity, Mott brought along his son to help release the owl at dusk, while the sunset put on quite a welcome home show.

♦ Conservation Warden Nick King assisted in the safe release of a badger, a protected species inadvertently caught in a trapper's small foothold trap, after the trapper alerted the DNR. No one wants to mess with a badger, but this one seemed to know he was being helped as he burrowed back into his den, pausing to deliver eye cannons that telegraphed: "Thanks, now back off!"

♦ Conservation Warden Kyle Johnson wrestled a stubborn woodchuck from its temporary but unsuitable home in the engine of a car after it was reported by a Janesville auto dealer.

♦ Conservation Warden Steve Swiertz freed a deer caught in a soccer net in Bayside, north of Milwaukee. With goal achieved, video of the detangling was posted by the Village of Bayside Police Department and picked up by local TV, scoring 15 minutes of fame for deer and rescuer.

♦ In Door County, Conservation Warden Chris Kratcha helped advise a woman on how to deal with a baby red squirrel as she tried to shoo it from the road. Despite several attempts to move the squirrel and return to her vehicle, the squirrel would run after her, crawl up her clothes and onto her shoulder. This happened no matter how fast she tried to get into her car. Kratcha suggested leaving the squirrel farther back in the woods and in a tree. Eventually, the advice worked, and the squirrel found a nice tree to call home.

Joanne M. Haas is a public information officer for the DNR's Division of Public Safety and Resource Protection.

FROM CAMP COUNSELOR TO CONSERVATION WARDEN

UNEXPECTED EXPERIENCES LEAD TO CAREER PROTECTING RESOURCES HE HAS GROWN TO LOVE

JUAN GOMEZ



Lt. Juan Gomez

Greetings! I'm Lt. Juan Gomez with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

I have worked as a conservation warden for the state of Wisconsin since 2008 and would like to tell you about my nontraditional pathway to my career as a conservation warden.

I was born and raised in Chicago and grew up in the Humboldt Park neighborhood known for its crime, drugs and violence during the '80s and '90s. By age 11, I had my fair share of gang exposure and witnessed criminal activity daily.

But my family knew one thing: They didn't want me to get involved with drugs or with

local gangs, so they sent me off to a recreational youth camp in northern Wisconsin that summer.

As a city kid, this was my first exposure to the outdoors, where I engaged in fishing, camping, canoeing and hiking activities. My love for the outdoors grew immensely because of that summer camp, and when I turned 16, I even became a camp counselor.

These experiences led me to pursue a degree in recreation management at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. My summer camp adventures brought about my love for the outdoors, but it was my college days that led me to my career with the Wisconsin DNR.

INSPIRED BY HUNTING TRADITIONS

During my freshman year of college, I was heading home to Chicago for Thanksgiving break. At the same time, Wisconsin was holding its traditional nine-day deer firearm hunting season that starts the Saturday before Thanksgiving and ends the Sunday after the holiday.

During my ride home from Wisconsin, I couldn't help but notice all the deer being transported on or in vehicles. This was an unusual view for a city kid whose only exposure to wildlife had been at camp in Wisconsin's Northwoods.

When I returned to school the following week, I met with my advisor at the campus multicultural office. I told him about the surprising sight I'd seen, and he filled me in on the famed Wisconsin deer hunting tradition. The following spring, I enrolled in a hunter safety course and participated in my first deer hunt that fall.

In Wisconsin, hunter safety courses are put together by volunteer instructors. Alongside these instructors, DNR conservation wardens are available to answer general questions from the public and provide updates on the rules and regulations.

Following my participation in the hunter safety course, I began researching conservation warden positions available in Wisconsin and found myself more and more passionate about the career. After taking part in ride-alongs with various conservation wardens to learn more

A Chicago native, DNR Conservation Warden Juan Gomez has embraced Wisconsin's deer hunting tradition since first trying it in college and now relishes sharing the experience with others.

about their day-to-day work educating people and enforcing laws, I began applying for warden jobs.

In 2008, I was hired full-time as a DNR conservation warden and have loved every minute of it.

'FACE OF THE DNR'

Conservation wardens are responsible for protecting natural resources and ensuring the safety of everyone who enjoys the outdoors. Conservation wardens investigate hunting, fishing, environmental and recreational vehicle violations and rely heavily on the relationships they build in their communities to successfully fulfill their duties.

Throughout my career, I have made it a point to work with others who have had limited exposure to the outdoors. I have organized several Learn to Hunt events exposing families to new hunting traditions. These events have been a great way for me to connect with those who are new to hunting or other outdoor sports.

Conservation wardens are the

face of the DNR within the communities they serve. We typically open our hiring process in April each year and are always looking for great candidates.

There are many skills and abilities the DNR looks for in warden applicants, such as:

- A passion for helping people and protecting our natural resources;
- Honesty, integrity, self-motivation, curiosity, confidence and professionalism;
- An ability to self-direct daily work activities in an efficient and accountable manner;
- An interest in community-involvement and problem-solving; and
- A desire to communicate with and serve the diverse people of Wisconsin.

It's amazing to know that all it takes is an experience or two to help guide us through our life journeys. Had I not reached out to my mentor about my experience seeing deer hunting that freshman year, I would never have been exposed to the local warden.



My interaction with the warden sparked my interest in the career of natural resource protection and has led me to creating many outdoor memories with my family. I am truly blessed to spend time with my family enjoying the resources I protect. 🦌

Lt. Juan Gomez joined the DNR as a conservation warden in 2008. This column originally appeared in March on the Latino Outdoors website, latinooutdoors.org.



WORDS FROM THE WARDENS

In 2018, Department of Natural Resources conservation wardens began partnering with the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association on a monthly column, "Words from the Wardens," featured in the WWA's electronic newsletter. Topics cover a range of issues related to waterfowl hunting, from weapons and wetlands laws to hunter safety and ethics to hunting tips and ways for enjoying eating what you shoot. A recent column appears on the next page. To see all columns and find a link to subscribe to the WWA newsletter, check wisducks.org/words-from-the-wardens. For more from the DNR on waterfowl hunting, see dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt/waterfowl.



DNR Conservation Warden Pete McCormick snapped this big-sky view while on patrol at the Mud Lake Wildlife Area in Columbia County.

WARDEN AND WATERFOWL HUNTER

PASSION FOR THE HUNT DRIVES HIS DESIRE
TO SHARE TIPS SO OTHERS CAN PARTAKE

TAYLOR MEINHOLZ

With the early goose season upon us, I'd like to share with you how I prepare for one of my favorite times of the year that is as much social as actual hunting.

My DNR conservation warden station is in Kenosha County, and I hunt primarily in southeastern areas. However, I have hunted waterfowl all over our state.

My hunting started when I was 12, and I've been serious about waterfowl hunting for a decade. It helps to have patient family and friends.

Like you, I treasure my time outdoors anywhere in Wisconsin, but waterfowl hunting is in another category for me. The waterfowl season is a way for me to get together with my friends, recall stories of our past adventures, and create new memories that will become the stories we tell next year.

READY FOR THE HUNT

When it comes to equipment prep, I have three words for you: practice, practice, practice.

Before the early goose period starts and ushers in the new hunting seasons, I take a close look at my gun.

I clean and maintain my gun. Then I head

to the range to test it. This is important, as you don't want any surprises when you're out. I also see how I'm doing by shooting trap and sporting clays.

Most hunters agree the most important part of the outing is locking down the location. Birds are more comfortable when they have found food and security.

Here's my general rule: When scouting geese, wherever you see the birds congregating on Friday is where you should hunt on Saturday.

MANNERS AND SETUP

When approaching someone to hunt on their private property, remember to be polite and always ask for permission. If you don't get permission no matter how polite you are, don't get discouraged. You may talk to 10 people and get eight who say no, but you also may get two who say yes.

When setting up in the field, the most important thing is "the hide," which is

where the hunter and blinds will be located. If the geese pick you out, it doesn't matter if you are a champion caller, they will not come close enough for a shot.

Best-case scenario? Set up with the wind and sun at your back. Hopefully, birds will land wings out, feet down at 10 yards.

SAFETY FIRST

There was no way I would end without reminding all of us of some important safety tips and regulations.

- It is illegal to discharge a firearm within 100 yards of an occupied dwelling.
- Understand daily bag limits and how they change with season dates.
- Understand the season, including the splits.
- You cannot discharge a firearm within 50 feet from the road, nor from or across a roadway.
- Only take safe shots where you are confident you can make a clean kill.

I wish you all an enjoyable fall hunting season. And if you hear someone practicing their call, it's probably just me — I need a lot of practice. 🦌

Taylor Meinholz is a DNR conservation warden and an avid waterfowl hunter. This column originally appeared in the Wisconsin Waterfowl Association's September 2020 electronic newsletter.



Taylor Meinholz



From left, Zachery Feest, Taylor Meinholz and Michael Hirschboeck, all conservation wardens with the Wisconsin DNR, enjoy the camaraderie of a group waterfowl hunting outing.



LEGACY

A mural on display at the Peshtigo Fire Museum depicts the raging fire that claimed more than 1,000 lives in the city.

FORGED BY TRAGEDY

PESHTIGO MARKS 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF HISTORIC FIRE AND CELEBRATES THE CITY'S RESILIENCY

JOSHUA MORRIS

The city of Peshtigo adopted its name from the Peshtigo River, which passes through the heart of this northeast Wisconsin community.

Rewind to Oct. 8, 1871, and the only thing passing through Peshtigo's streets was a sinister fire that claimed more than 1,000 lives in the city and scorched over 1.2 million acres of land, all told.

Despite being overshadowed by the Great Chicago Fire, which took place simultaneously, the Peshtigo Fire was far more deadly. The three-day Chicago conflagration accounted for about 300 deaths, making the Peshtigo Fire the deadliest in American history.

There are multiple accounts of what ignited this fire, but the exact cause re-

mains speculative. During that particular year, the forests of Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan had faced a great drought, leading to arid conditions. Peshtigo had not seen any significant rain in months.

Part of what made the sweeping fire so deadly was the speed at which it traveled as it raged through Wisconsin and Michigan. On that fateful Sunday, a perfect storm of elements collided to create hurricane-force winds. The air currents contributed to 100 mph winds that rapidly spread the fire.

At the time, Peshtigo had established itself as a lumber-producing city. Tragically, the city's wooden architecture served as a conductor for the blazing flames.

Peshtigo's population then was approximately 1,700 residents, none of whom were aware of the devastation to come. There was no time to evacuate and certainly no time to call for help.

The heat from the embers was so tremendous that being exposed meant

almost instantaneous death. For many, the closest refuge from the lurking flames was the river. But many drowned in an attempt to escape the fire's grasp, and others perished from hypothermia as they waited for hours in the cold Peshtigo River.

By the end of the fire, there was only one building still standing in the city. The death count including Peshtigo and surrounding areas was estimated somewhere between 1,200 and 2,400.

MARKING 150 YEARS

The city of Peshtigo remains, 150 years later, with an estimated population of 3,400. A commemoration of the fire's 150th anniversary will take place Sept. 24-26.

Peshtigo Mayor Cathi Malke recalls a recent interview she gave regarding the upcoming anniversary, with the interviewer being perplexed when she referred to the commemorative event as a "celebration." Why the positive spin on something so horrific?

"I told him that we want to use this time to celebrate our city and how we moved forward," Malke said. "But we will never forget the lives that were lost, because that was our groundwork. Many of the survivor's descendants still live in the area."



The Peshtigo Fire Museum is housed in a historic building, the first church rebuilt after the deadly 1871 fire.

"So I call this a celebration not to demean the people who lost their lives, but the exact opposite. We grew from it, and our people have been strong enough to keep moving forward."

The three-day event will start with a Friday evening dinner and story, which will give an account of the Peshtigo Fire. The following two days will feature a mix of history and recreation for people of all ages.

Malke said she has learned through her travels that the Peshtigo Fire is largely unknown to most Americans, giving the city's history a higher level of significance to those in Peshtigo.

"To me, it's our legacy, our history," Malke said. "In Peshtigo, you know your neighbors, and they are always willing to help as we did those many years ago."

As an example of the city's close-knit nature, Malke offers a tale from last year, when she contracted COVID-19. Her illness was so severe that doctors described her recovery as a miracle.

"I was not supposed to make it," she said. "I had a whole city praying for me and constantly bringing my family food for months. The kindness was overwhelming, but that's what this community is all about."

FIREFIGHTING, THEN AND NOW

Advances in fighting fires — especially wildfires, which can be a threat no matter what the time period — have come a long way since the Peshtigo Fire.

At the time, the Peshtigo Fire Co. had a single horse-drawn steam pumper to protect houses and small factories. It stood no match for the apocalyptic fire of that fateful October day.

Today's firefighting technology and communications are far different, of course. But despite all of the advances, fire suppression itself is approached much the same as in 1871, said Catherine Koele, wildfire prevention specialist for the DNR.

"I think the one thing that hasn't changed is that we continue to fight fire from the ground," Koele said. "That is our primary resource and our way to attack a fire directly."

"We have used air suppression to help detect fire and coordinate resources on the ground, but ultimately, the one thing that hasn't changed is our ability to fight fire with boots on the ground."

At the time of the Peshtigo Fire, the most prominent method of communication was through telegraph wires. Unfortunately for those in town, unaware of the unbridled flames blazing toward them, the lines were all charred long before any call for help could be made.

It wasn't until about a week later that news spread about the unthinkable tragedy that had occurred in Peshtigo.

Today, communication plays a pivotal role in helping to suppress a fire, with modern forms of communication used to keep the public informed and monitor reports of fires from communities around the state.

"Social media has allowed us instant ability to connect with the media and public," Koele said. "We still use radio and TV to run a full gamut of methods to connect with the public."

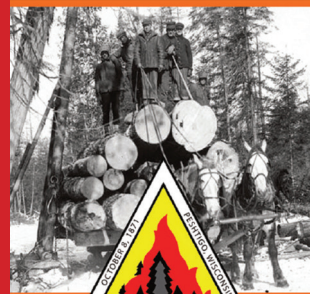
"The biggest message here is that people need to be aware of when it's fire season and know what to do in the event of an evacuation."

Perhaps the history and knowledge of the Peshtigo Fire will never reach a national level, but the spirit of resiliency is on full display in Peshtigo. The ability to endure has been forged by the country's deadliest fire. 🦁

Joshua Morris is a public information officer in the DNR's Office of Communications.

PESHTIGO

RE-BUILT FROM THE ASHES
OF OCTOBER 8, 1871



LEARN MORE

The Peshtigo Fire Museum preserves the history of the tragic 1871 Peshtigo Fire. The museum, run by the Peshtigo Historical Society, is located at 400 Oconto Ave., in a building that was the first church rebuilt in Peshtigo after the fire. Normal museum hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Memorial Day weekend through the anniversary of the fire, Oct. 8; donations are appreciated. For information and details of the Peshtigo Fire including personal stories of some of its survivors, check peshtigofiremuseum.com.

Peshtigo Historical Days, a three-day event commemorating the sesquicentennial of the Peshtigo Fire, is Sept. 24-26 at Badger Park. History-related events will blend with family-friendly activities to remember the fire and celebrate how Peshtigo "rebuilt from the ashes" into the vibrant community of today. For information on Peshtigo, see ci.peshtigo.wi.us.



As mural details show, there was nowhere for residents to escape the fire.



Goslings make the leap from a nesting box at Oakwood Nature Preserve.

WONDERS OUTSIDE MY WINDOW

URBAN PRESERVE
PUTS NATURE'S BEAUTY
WITHIN ARM'S REACH

ROBERT GREENLER

Right outside the window of my apartment I can see a bowl-shaped depression — a glacial kettle — that contains a vernal pond surrounded by a mixed hardwood forest, home to a wide variety of plants and animals.

This habitat is the nature preserve at Oakwood Village University Woods, a retirement community on the west side of Madison. I moved here in 2002 and am continually impressed with the wide diversity of life in this 9-acre refuge, surrounded by city streets and buildings.

The Oakwood Nature Preserve is a wonderful place. Beyond wanting to preserve it, we have the urge to enhance it, to make it better and to make others aware of the wonders it harbors.

We have to keep answering the question: What do we do to make it a better place? Not everyone agrees on the answer.

For example, some of us are excited by our occasional sightings of coyotes, but others are not so sure coyotes are

a good thing. Haven't we heard stories they might attack an unattended small dog? Don't people call them varmints? Who needs coyotes?

There are gardeners who claim to hate rabbits, because rabbits eat the things in the garden that are intended for the gardener's table. And I've talked with people who have a dislike for squirrels, because squirrels eat the bird-feeder seeds intended for the birds.

And skunks? Well, we all know about skunks.

I know of two instances where our local red-tailed hawks were caught — red-handed, so to speak — catching and



Monarchs and other pollinators benefit from the preserve's many wildflowers.



ROBERT GREENLER



COURTESY OF OAKWOOD VILLAGE



COURTESY OF ROBERT GREENLER

The Oakwood Nature Preserve is a special place for Robert Greenler, seen above among the bee balm and at left with a cecropia moth. Greenler has written a book of essays inspired by the 9-acre parcel at his Madison retirement community and organized a group to help care for its upkeep.

eating local squirrels. This should endear them to the squirrel dislikers, because they clearly keep the squirrel population under control.

That was especially true one year when the hawks were able to catch enough squirrels to raise a fine healthy pair of hawklets in the tall white pine tree at the south end of the apartment building where I live.

TWO SIDES TO EVERY COIN

The rabbit haters should be gratified that in the evenings and early mornings, starting in a recent October, we heard the conversations between a male and female great horned owl. It signaled their intention to form a partnership, establish a nest and start incubating eggs in late December or early January.

These magnificent owls are masters at silently swooping down to remove the rabbit

from the rutabaga patch, and thereby keep the

rabbit population from taking over the world.

One year, they nested in the snag of an old tree in clear view from an accessible path in the nature preserve. The two owlets became the most famous residents of Oakwood Village as they peeped out of the nesting cavity, fledged and proceeded to grow into adolescents in our woods.

Then there are those pesky crows, which congregate in great noisy flocks and sometimes go into an aggressive rage when they discover the great horned owl sleeping, in the daytime, on a branch next to the trunk of a tall tree.

The word that comes to mind is harassment, but with crows it is called "mobbing," and it is clearly an attempt to keep the owls from nesting in the territory the crows would like to claim as their own. They know instinctively the owl would feast on a young crow, given the opportunity.

The fact that the owls are still with us means the crows are not always successful. Of course, crows are skilled at slipping into the unguarded nest of any

other bird species to help themselves to a meal of eggs — or nestlings.

If you are a bunny lover, then perhaps you are glad there are crows giving the hawks and owls a hard time. But what if you don't like the noisy crows?

What about deer? It may be a treat to see an occasional deer gazing at us through the summer foliage in the nature preserve or, as I saw earlier this year, a doe suckling her spotted fawn.

But there are those who have enjoyed growing apple trees and have learned that deer also like apple trees. Some of these people have come to view the urban deer as a pest.

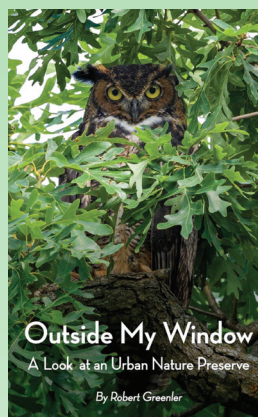
EVERYTHING INTERCONNECTED

Aldo Leopold, the well-known Wisconsin environmentalist, was an enthusiastic deer hunter and, early in his career, considered it a desirable forest management objective to increase the deer population for the benefit of deer hunters.

The prevailing wisdom of that time was that wolves killed deer, and so the



FILE PHOTO



GLENN CHAMBLISS COVER PHOTO

LEARN MORE

Robert Greenler is emeritus professor of physics at UW-Milwaukee, where he organized and previously directed “Science Bag,” an interactive public program series that began in 1973 and is set to return post-pandemic.

For details on this series, including a video archive of past programs, see uwm.edu/science-bag.

Greenler has been involved with the Oakwood Nature Preserve since moving to Madison's Oakwood Village University Woods campus in 2002. Six years ago, he recruited other residents and formed the Prairie Caretakers to help with the property's support and maintenance.

In 2020, Greenler published a book featuring his essays of life at the preserve. “Outside My Window: A Look at an Urban Nature Preserve” is available for \$10 in paperback from Amazon, Barnes & Noble and other booksellers.

Oakwood Nature Preserve is open to public access. To learn more about the preserve and the Prairie Caretakers, see oakwoodvillage.net/stories/restoring-a-treasure.

elimination of wolves should increase the population of deer. However, he came to understand that when a deer population increases beyond a certain level, it destroys the food resources the deer depend on and results in an unhealthy, starving herd.

This was the beginning of his greater understanding that the health of any segment of the animal community depends on the health of the entire ecosystem — a system so intimately connected that altering any part of it affects all of the other parts.

The system includes not only mammals, but also plants, birds, amphibians, insects — all living things — and the healthy system is one in which there is a balance among all of its components.

GROWING SPECIES OF THE PRESERVE

We have a changing ecosystem in our nature preserve. A 1-acre parking lot, built two decades ago, added runoff water to our vernal pond, which changed its character and made it a suitable habitat for various frogs and salamanders.

With the help of the DNR, we introduced some of these species, hurrying along what would probably have happened in time by other natural processes. The frogs have prospered and attracted blue herons, green herons and an occasional kingfisher, as well as providing food for the raccoons, crows and others.

The health of the system is improved, as more and more members of the interconnecting food web are present.

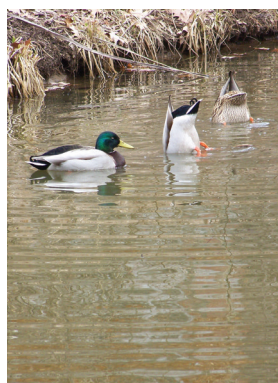
So, we welcome every native resident or visitor we have sighted in the preserve: the turkey, spotted sandpiper, red-tailed hawk, Cooper's hawk, great horned owl, mallard, wood duck, Canada goose and many other birds, dragonfly, damselfly, deer mouse, vole, bat, chipmunk, woodchuck, muskrat, mink, possum, skunk, raccoon, deer, flying squirrel, gray squirrel, rabbit, coyote.

Each one is evidence of a healthy ecosystem, right there, outside my window.

But who needs coyotes? Who needs to see



ROBERT GREENLER PHOTOS



Bird species are numerous at the Oakwood Nature Preserve. From top: yellow-bellied sapsucker, red-tailed hawk and mallard ducks.

bats flying in an evening over the pond, silhouetted against a sunset sky, or hear the what-cheer-cheer song of the cardinal in the spring?

Who needs to watch monarch butterflies in the long days of summer, crowding on the blossom spike of a prairie blazing star to sip its nectar; or discover the miracle of a giant puffball in the fall; or spot a chickadee, in the hungry time of winter, feeding on a life-saving frozen cluster of highbush cranberries?

NUDGE TOWARD APPRECIATION

It may appear that some of us need these things and others don't. Leopold asserts that “For us in the minority ... the chance to see a pasque flower is a right as inalienable as free speech.”

Those are strong words, calling it an “inalienable right.” Others might call it a “need” or a “privilege” or a “gift” or a “pleasure.”

I see these different words as describing points on a continuum of appreciation. And I know different individuals who fit on the continuum at different points, ranging from Leopold's “minority” at one end to an attitude of indifference on the other.

Such a diversity of people composes the community

around the Oakwood Nature Preserve.

What can we hope to do with this preserve? Perhaps two things. One is to help nurture more of Leopold's “pasque flowers,” which I will interpret to signify each of the different parts of the beautiful, complex ecosystem.

The other is to help more and more people become aware of what is to be found here and, thereby, nudge them along that continuum of appreciation for the wonders that exist here.

Perhaps some of you will be encouraged to work on these goals for the nature that lies just outside your window. ☻

Robert Greenler writes from his home at Oakwood Village University Woods in Madison.

YOUR OUTDOORS

PEACE OF THE WOODS MAKES IT EASY TO FORGET

J. B. SENSENBRENNER

My boots crunching on the gravel road sounded like a marching army. Thankfully, I had the cover of darkness hiding me as I slowed down to soften the sound.

“Crunch ... crunch ... crunch.” No matter what I did, my steps were loud. I put my head down, realizing it was hopeless to be any quieter, and walked faster to get to the logging road.

After walking past the trail in the blackness, I turned around and walked back along the shoulder of the road until I found the trail in the tall grass. I stepped off the road into a foot of water. What a terrible way to start the hunt.

I was excited because it was the opening day of the deer bow hunting season. The cold water soaking my right foot didn't slow me down as I followed a narrow deer trail.

Something jumped to my left! I don't know who was more surprised, me or the creature. I froze and listened. It was a stalemate. I moved first, walking slowly to my tree stand. It felt good to be in the woods engulfed by nature.

I climbed the tree and sat down to wait for daylight. I listened to the eerie silence. It was so quiet that it challenged my hearing to tune into the slightest sounds.

I turned my head left and right, trying to identify noises. I heard water running in a babbling brook. A second sound was the breeze shaking leaves in the maple trees. Then it was quiet again. It was so peaceful.

I felt hidden from the world. As the morning light started to separate the trees from the sky, I felt safeguarded by the green September leaves surrounding me, making it hard for me to be seen and for me to see deer.

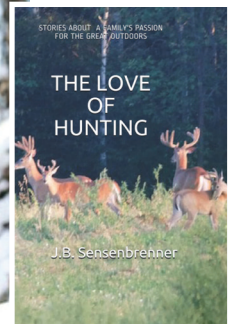
It was good. I felt like my purpose was to blend in with God's creation. Mission accomplished.

I sat back and took a deep breath. Woods air was different than city air. It wasn't hurried or pressured. It was clean and fresh. My eyes opened when I heard crunching.

Sometimes,
simply
spending
time in a quiet
woods —
with maybe a
wildlife visitor
or three along
the way — is
enough for
even the most
seasoned
hunter.



LINDA FRESHWATERS ARNDT



Like many Wisconsinites, the author has enjoyed a lifelong passion for hunting and the outdoors, reflected in his new book.

COURTESY OF J.B. SENSENBRENNER

Two shadows appeared with long necks slowly moving up and down chewing acorns. I could hear the shells crack. Two young deer were eating their breakfast.

I looked around for their mother. A scratching of leaves on the hilltop gave her away. Within minutes, the deer drifted away like clouds and disappeared into a thicket on my left.

Then it was quiet again. The peace of the woods was beautiful. I sat back once again and relaxed.

After sitting several hours, I climbed down and walked back to our small log cabin. I felt cleansed. I wasn't done hunting but was satisfied.

When I opened the cabin door, I saw my bow and arrows in their case leaning in the corner. 🏹

This story is an excerpt from “The Love of Hunting,” by J.B. Sensenbrenner of Appleton. The author (a cousin of retired U.S. Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner) recounts his many adventures enjoying hunting and fishing in Wisconsin, from youth experiences to present day. The book is available for \$20 at amazon.com.

READERS WRITE



YOUNG READER HOPES TO HELP

In “Woodland Dunes property holds promise for rare bumble bee” (Summer 2021), I enjoyed reading about the rusty patched bumble bee and that they have to get rid of the honeysuckle to make a proper home for the bees to live in. I also live close to Woodland Dunes, and I hope to help out one day.

Calvin Booth, age 11
Two Rivers

FASCINATED BY BUMBLE BEES

I was fascinated by the article on rusty patched bumble bees in the Summer edition. I initially saw the “thumbtack” on this one and got excited, but I am guessing it is not a rusty patched but a tricolored bumble bee (*Bombus ternarius*).

We work very hard all summer to have pollinator-friendly food flowers at all times of the season. By the fall, we have hundreds of these swarming our beds. There is also a very large bumble bee version that is less numerous but very fun to watch, especially on spiderwort flowers. We do not see honey bees, however.

Jeff Verdoorn
Harshaw

DNR conservation biologist Eva Lewandowski, author of the rusty patched story and coordinator of the statewide Bumble Bee Brigade, confirms the bee ID and encourages participation in the B3 citizen-based monitoring project — wiatri.net/inventory/bbb. She replies:

“Yes, this is a tricolored bumble bee. It can be identified by its very distinctive abdominal coloration of yellow, orange, orange, yellow, black, black. The one in the photo is a female, which we can tell because she is carrying pollen on her legs (the big orange blob).”



FIND POSTERS FROM ZOOLOGICAL MUSEUM

In the Summer issue, a reader inquired about obtaining the Game Fish of Wisconsin pictures (Spring 2021) in full-size poster form, and your response was they are no longer available. You can purchase beautiful Wisconsin fish posters by their family groups

or a large poster of all fishes of Wisconsin from the UW Zoological Museum. There are also posters of Wisconsin birds, bats and freshwater mussels — charge.wisc.edu/zoology/items.aspx.

Jean Unmuth, retired, DNR water resources
Sauk City

WOOD TURTLE CLASSIFICATION

Editor's note: In the Summer issue story “Preserve, protect, appreciate” about Wisconsin State Natural Areas, the author should have noted wood turtles are a state-threatened species, not state-endangered. Female wood turtles don't lay eggs until they're 14 to 18 years old and then lay only four to 17 eggs a year. Losing even one adult female a year can potentially sink small, local populations.

Since 2014, the DNR and partners have studied and monitored wood turtles and used the lessons learned for conservation strategies

to protect nests from predators and reduce turtles killed crossing roadways. They've created or restored more than 20 nest sites guarded with electric fencing and communal nest boxes protecting over 100 individual nests.

DNR wildlife biologists, U.S. Forest Service, Turtles for Tomorrow and private individuals also maintain similar sites on public and private land. Funding is secured to continue this work, and the first year of expanded monitoring is being completed through collaboration among the DNR, West Virginia University and the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa.



Send your letters to: Readers Write, WNR magazine, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707.
Or email dnrmagazine@wisconsin.gov.



MORE HISTORY OF HAMMERIN' HANK

Thank you for the interesting article “Legacy of a Legend” about Hank Aaron, published in the Summer magazine! It was wonderful to read about the establishment of the Hank Aaron State Trail and the impact it is having on his legacy and Wisconsinites, young and old.

Although Eau Claire is a long way from Milwaukee, to truly make it a “state” trail, it should be extended to the city where Hank made his professional baseball debut in Carson Park, on June 14, 1952. His debut was with the Eau Claire Bears, at age 18 years old.

Bill Montgomery
River Falls

Thanks for the letter and photo, Bill, and you are exactly right about Hank Aaron's time in 1952 with the Eau Claire Bears, then a minor league affiliate of the Boston Braves (the Braves moved to Milwaukee the next season). He played in 87 games for the Class C Northern League team that year, a moment in time captured in the book “A Summer Up North,” written by Jerry Poling and available from UW Press — uwpress.wisc.edu/books/2117.htm. Before Eau Claire, Aaron had a short stint with the Negro Leagues' Indianapolis Clowns, and he played the 1953 season at Class A Jacksonville, Florida. He made his Major League debut on April 13, 1954, at Crosley Field in Cincinnati, playing outfield for the Milwaukee Braves. The statue in this photo was unveiled at Eau Claire's historic Carson Park in 1994, with Aaron on hand for the ceremony.



THAT'S ONE HUNGRY TROUT

The old urban myth that trout only eat small stuff in the winter is clearly untrue. This brown was so hungry it even hit my spinner when it clearly had a mouthful.

Len Harris
Richland Center



GARDEN SKULL REVISITED

With each issue, there usually are one or two things that generate the most feedback. This time it was a skunk skull — or, rather, not a skunk, but a house cat. Several observant readers, including some of our own DNR friends, got in touch to let us know that the skull unearthed by Anita Clark in her Fitchburg garden (top photo at left) was of the feline variety. Here's a sampling of a few notes we received.

I have enjoyed Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine for many years, and the Summer issue does not disappoint. In the latest issue, a reader submitted photos of a skull they found. The skull actually belongs to a common house cat.

The defining clue is the shape of the molars. Felines have a carnassial pair that act like scissors to cut meat. Skunks do not have those specialized teeth; theirs are shaped like human molars and are flat for grinding.

Skunks also have a much longer rostrum (nose bones) than cats in proportion to the rest of the skull.

I have attached photos of a striped skunk and bobcat skull for comparison (bottom photo at left). Even though the sizes are drastically different, the defining characteristics for each is prominent. Thanks for your time.

Casey Rustan, wildlife biologist, Rhinelander

As someone who has a fairly complete Wisconsin mammal skull collection, especially furbearers, the skull in the photo is definitely a cat. The huge eye holes are a key indicator as a cat and not a skunk. I have house cat, bobcat, lynx and mountain lions in my collection, but based on where it was found is a major clue to the identification.

Kevin Wallenfang, DNR wildlife biologist

House cats look forward and have fewer teeth. It's a cat skull.

Don Samuelson, Rio

I've cleaned skulls for 30-plus years. I have a collection of small mammal skulls. ... I think it is in the cat family. Being that it was found in a flower garden, it could be a domesticated cat. What do you think?

Rodney Rohde, the Skull Man, Butternut

DNR wildlife biologist Rich Staffen replies: “These folks are correct. We misidentified this as a striped skunk when it is indeed a domestic cat. They were wise to catch this!”



BACK IN THE DAY

SPINNING A TALE FOR THE AGES

FASCINATING STORY OF MEPPS FISHING LURES FEEDS IMAGINATION

ANDREA ZANI

It's not often this magazine can combine elements of multiple regular features into one grand story, but that's just the case here.

Back in the Day, Taste of Wisconsin, Readers Write, Travel Resources — this story mixes elements of all three of those regular departments, even including a recipe, plus a fun fishing component to boot.

Ultimately, Back in the Day seemed the most appropriate way for us to label this tale, given the amount of interesting Wisconsin history packed into the piece. Longer than usual, it takes the place of a few of the magazine's regular features.

For now, we hope you enjoy this special "Readers Write Back in the Taste of Travel Wisconsin Resources" combo. It all started with a letter ...

I read Anne Sayers' story regarding state-based outdoor gear manufacturers (Travel Resources, Spring 2021) and was reminded of perhaps the most famous of them all: Mepps spinners from Sheldons' Inc., in Antigo.

Ah, the memories of, as a kid, using a Mepps on Boulder Lake while staying at Echo Valley Resort. That was big-time fishing! Try one once and you'll always keep a few in your tackle box — and one on your line.

Ron Skarie, Franklin



Anglers have known for years that selecting the right fly is the crucial first step to a good day on the water.



Squirrel tails, with the hair tied and dyed, are the not-so-secret of success to Mepps fishing lures from Sheldons' Inc., in Antigo.



Sheldons' has long reached out to squirrel hunters to provide tails from the animals for Mepps spinners.

DEAN TVEDT

SHELDONS' INC.

Sheldon sold his tackle store to focus on his growing business of importing and selling the lures, eventually buying the French company.

By 1960, sales had topped half a million and soon surpassed the goal set by Sheldon of 3 million spinners sold each year. Mepps spinners were here to stay.

These days, Mike Sheldon has taken over the Sheldon's Inc. business from his father Todd, who died in 1995. Sheldon's corporate headquarters in Antigo, where the spinners are now hand-assembled, encompasses nearly 50,000 square feet.

There are more than 4,000 Mepps spinners and spoons in all sizes, colors and hook configurations. The original spinner, the Mepps Aglia, is said to have caught more trophy fish than any other lure in the world.

ALL ABOUT THE TAIL

Reading about Mepps' history made us curious to know more about the popular hand-tied spinners, so like all good researchers, we dug a little deeper. It seems that what makes Mepps lures so successful is simple: squirrel tails.

"We've tried hundreds of other natural and synthetic materials: bear hair, fox, coyote, badger, skunk, deer, even Angus cow, but nothing works as well as squirrel tail hair," Mepps explains on its website.

It's the lack of fur on a squirrel's tail that makes the difference, according to Mepps. Squirrel tails are all hair, while other animals have mostly fur tails. When used to dress a hook in the water, the squirrel hair, unlike fur, makes a rippling, pulsating movement to attract fish.

Mepps has recycled nearly 8 million squirrel tails since the mid-1960s — "We do not advocate harvesting of squirrels solely for their tails," Mepps notes — and pays up to 26 cents per tail, depending on quality and quantity.

There's a certain way squirrel tails must be saved for use in the spinners: Dry them with the tailbone in, for example. Check the Mepps website for all the harvesting and handling details and where to send them in Antigo.

A FISHING ICON

The Mepps squirrel tail lure is so iconic, it has been featured in "Wisconsin 101: Our History in Objects."

The project — wi101.wisc.edu — is a statewide digital history collaboration from the UW-Madison History Department, Wisconsin Historical Society and Wisconsin Public Radio's "Wisconsin Life" program. Individuals can nominate objects to be featured and may be asked to write the story of the item for the digital museum.

Joe Hermolin, president of the Langlade County Historical Society, is a regular contributor to Wisconsin 101. In 2015, he wrote about the original Aglia lure from Mepps — which Wisconsin 101 notes is a French acronym for Manufacturier d'Engins de Precision pour Peches Sportives, or Manufacturer of Precision Equipment for Sport Fishing.

"Driving through Antigo, visitors are often puzzled by a sign proclaiming 'Squirrel Tails Wanted.' It identifies Sheldon's Inc., manufacturer of Mepps lures," Hermolin's entry notes. "Tails arrive from around the country. ...

"A typical Wisconsin squirrel tail is generally good for about 10 lures, but different varieties of squirrels from other regions may yield more. They may be dyed different colors for variety."

These days, Mepps also may use buck tails for its lures to satisfy production needs, as squirrel tails are somewhat harder to come by, Hermolin's story adds. He attributes that to changing appetites, with "decreasing interest nationwide in dining on squirrel meat."

According to mepps.com, Mepps spinners date to 1938, when they were invented by French engineer Andre Meulnart.

In 1951, Antigo tackle store owner Todd Sheldon was looking to change his fishing luck on the Wolf River. He tied on a small Mepps spinner given to him by a friend, a World War II GI named Frank Velek. In two hours, Sheldon had caught four trout totaling more than 12 pounds.

Sheldon knew he'd found something special, and the lures proved successful for many more fish beyond trout. At his tackle store, Sheldon began selling Mepps spinners — imported from a French woman who sent them in exchange for nylon stockings.

When the lures began selling far faster than the woman needed stockings, Sheldon started buying them directly from the Meulnart factory in France. The Mepps reputation quickly grew, along with sales, and in 1956,

SQUIRREL HUNTING

Wisconsin's statewide hunting season for gray and fox squirrels is Sept. 18 to Jan. 31. A small game license is required, and the daily bag limit is five. Hunting flying squirrels, a protected species, is prohibited. For details on all hunting in the state, check dnr.wi.gov/topic/hunt.

SPEAKING OF SQUIRREL MEAT

Like a long walk through the woods with no particular destination, our look into the fascinating Mepps story took us down yet another happy trail — and right back to our own magazine.

Looking to read more about squirrels, and their tails, we found a story published in the October 1990 issue of *Wisconsin Natural Resources* titled “Bushytails” about, you guessed it, squirrels.

The story was written by magazine staff and John M. Keener, who was then retired as director of the DNR's Bureau of

Wildlife Management. Keener's knowledge of squirrels, apparent in “Bushytails,” covered just about every aspect of these creatures, from habitat and food needs to squirrel history to size, color and behavior of different species.

“If you were throwing a party, you'd probably label gray squirrels the ‘party animals’ and fox squirrels the ‘quiet drinking crowd,’” he writes. While grays spend most of their time jostling and chattering in trees, fox squirrels are a bit more grounded, Keener notes, “nosing around ... sniffing for nuts.”

The gray squirrel is one of two species most common in Wisconsin, along with the fox squirrel. Grays are a bit smaller than fox squirrels, more sociable and skittish and the better climber of the two, darting up the tallest tree in no time.

LINDA FRESHWATERS ARNDT

BUSHYTAILS

JOHN M. KEENER AND WNR STAFF

To my way of thinking, one of the finest ways to spend a fall day is tromping an oak-hickory woods hunting squirrels.

A quality squirrel hunt is true sport that takes patience, skill and the proper equipment. Take the time to study their habits a bit and you'll see more

bushytails whether you're hunting or just enjoying an autumn walk.

Worldwide there are at least 267 species of squirrels. The common species in Wisconsin are the gray, fox, red and flying squirrels. Hunters seek the meatier fox and gray squirrels.

David Macdonald in his “Encyclopedia of Mammals” describes squirrels as “cheeky opportunists,” and I like that description. Squirrels are among the most widespread mammals because they are generalists adapted to a broad range of habitats.

For hunters and wildlife watchers alike, squirrels may well provide more sport and more enjoyment than any other Wisconsin mammal.

Successful hunters and squirrel watchers pay close attention to the shrubs and trees that spell GROCERIES to hungry bushytails. Both fox and gray squirrels eat nuts and acorns.

Nuts provide fat and sugars; fruits, buds, shoots and even insects provide better sources of protein. Everyone knows squirrels love to eat acorns. They relish them the way people do cookies — eating them from the soft dough stage through the time they are tough and dry.

Squirrels prefer the insulation and protection of winter dens in hollow trees to the leafy nests or dreys we often see high in branches. Dens are better buffers from rain and cold.

Hunters should look for squirrel tracks and signs near the edges of heavily wooded areas. Gnawed nuts, split acorns, broken branch tips, kernels of corn with the “hearts” eaten out, scats and nest holes are all common signs.

You may also spot some gnawed bones. Squirrels chew bones to get minerals and to sharpen their teeth, which constantly grow throughout their lifetime.

Squirrels are among the few quarry that allow

Keener also writes in detail about squirrel hunting — and eating — with a recipe for the post-hunt meal “concocted by UW-Madison food science professors.” Following are excerpts, including the recipe, because we’ll gladly leave it to the pros to explain how to eat squirrel.

Funny how you can start out with the story of a fishing lure and end up with squirrel for dinner! 🐿

Andrea Zani is managing editor of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.

hunters and wildlife watchers to get a decent night’s sleep. They are mainly active during the day between dawn and dusk, foraging most heavily from about 10 a.m. until noon and again in the early afternoon.

Hunters will do well to scout a hunting area by taking some fall walks ahead of time, then get into the woods at dawn or slightly before on the day of the hunt. Station yourself among some hickory or oak openings where you can get clear, unobstructed views of a few treetops.

Squirrels have keen eyes that can sense the slightest movements. It takes the utmost patience to plan clear, safe shots and wait until the squirrels are absolutely still.

Some people save the squirrel tails and share them with businesses or friends who tie flies for fishers. Prompt handling and cooling produces meat with no gamy flavors.

Several cookbooks suggest half a squirrel per person portions. Don’t believe it. We always plan on a squirrel a person and there are no leftovers!

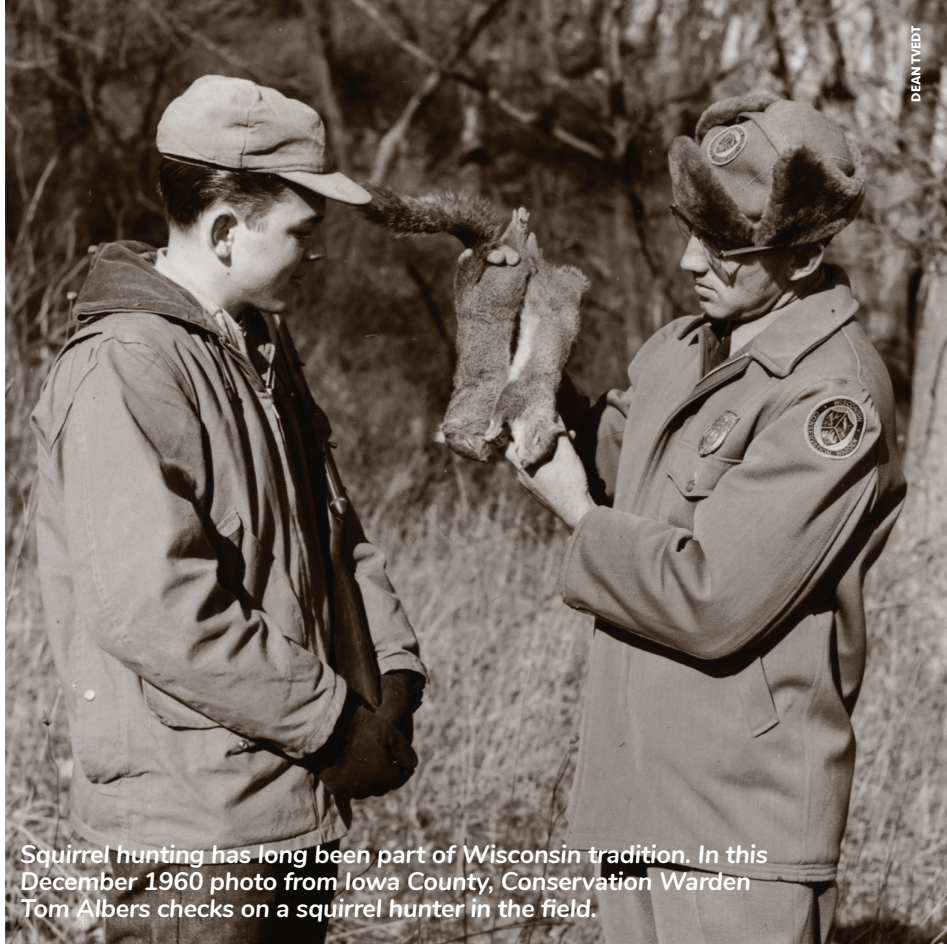
The rosy to reddish meat has a pleasant flavor. A Texas magazine reports “squirrel meat was so much a part of the rural menu that the animals were known as ‘limb chickens.’”

That’s a good way to think about them. Like chickens, young squirrels are tender enough to be browned and braised. Older squirrels need to be marinated and stewed to make a tasty dish.

We really enjoy this recipe concocted by UW-Madison food science professors Mary Mennes and Charlotte Dunn.

Come to think of it, I’d better revise my opening comments. One of the finest ways to spend a fall day is tromping the woods, looking, hunting and cooking a few bushytails. 🐿

John M. Keener spent many falls hunting squirrels in the southern Wisconsin woods.



Squirrel hunting has long been part of Wisconsin tradition. In this December 1960 photo from Iowa County, Conservation Warden Tom Albers checks on a squirrel hunter in the field.

Squirrel FRICASSEE

INGREDIENTS

- 1 young squirrel, cut into pieces
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ½ cup flour
- a few tablespoons oil
- 1 small onion, sliced
- 1 tablespoon paprika
- 1 sliced tart apple
- 2 cups beef or chicken broth
- small amount of flour and milk for gravy
- 8 ounces cooked, hot noodles

DIRECTIONS

- Dredge squirrel pieces in salt, pepper and flour mixture. Pan fry in oil in a covered hot skillet for 30 minutes. Add onion, paprika, apple and broth and cover tightly. Simmer for two hours.
- Just before serving, remove the squirrel and make a gravy of the drippings by adding flour and a little milk to the pan drippings. Place noodles on a serving platter. Top with the squirrel pieces and pour over the hot gravy. Serve immediately.

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OUTSIDE IN WISCONSIN

HALF MOON LAKE FISHERY AREA

Don't let the "fishery" part of the name fool you. Half Moon Lake Fishery Area, like a long list of state fisheries areas, is a true outdoor gem that's about so much more than fishing.

Located in the far southwest corner of Jackson County on the Black River, the fishery area is within a half-hour drive of greater La Crosse and about an hour from Eau Claire. It's near several State Natural Areas and the North Bend Bottoms Wildlife Area.

Half Moon Lake Fishery Area includes forested and lowland shrub wetlands and is classified as an Area of Special Natural Resource Interest, which informs management decisions. The river backwater is managed for warmwater fish species, and the property offers trapping opportunities as well as hunting for deer, small game, bear and turkey. Visitors also can enjoy hiking, bird and wildlife watching and cross-country skiing.

State fisheries areas are found throughout Wisconsin, with many recreational activities at these beautiful properties. For details and a county-by-county list of all fisheries areas, go to dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/FisheriesAreas. 📍



— ANDREA ZANI