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Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine (USPS #34625000) is published quarterly in Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The magazine is sustained through paid subscriptions. No tax money is used. Preferred Periodicals postage paid at Madison, WI. POSTMASTER and readers: subscription questions and address changes should be sent to Wisconsin Natural Resources, P.O. Box 37832, Boone, IA 50037-0832. Subscription rates are: \$8.97 for one year, \$15.97 for two years and \$21.97 for three years. Toll-free subscription inquiries will be answered at 1-800-678-9472.

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Governor Tony Evers

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PUBL-0C-020 ISSN-0736-2277

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### FROM THE SECRETARY

### Preston D. Cole



As 2020 comes to a close, it is no surprise this year has been unlike any other. Despite the unbelievable changes to our everyday lives, many of us took the time to slow down, reflect and take stock in what matters to us most.

Millions of you took advantage of Wisconsin's incredible natural resources, from our famed state parks to serene trails. You camped in our parks, hiked our trails, explored our rivers and lakes knowing it was a safe,

enriching activity that is good for both the mind and soul.

One of the reasons Wisconsin has such remarkable outdoor recreational opportunities is because we have invested in our public lands and access to those lands. One of the ways that has been made possible is through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, which was created in 1989 to preserve important natural resources, protect water quality and fisheries, and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation for all Wisconsinites to enjoy.

As we look toward 2021, we're seeking out more opportunities focused on accessibility. People of all backgrounds, regardless of ability, socioeconomic status, geographical location, age, race or partner preference, should have the opportunity to hunt, fish and hike in Wisconsin. We don't want anyone's circumstances to

hinder enjoying what's truly remarkable about the Badger State: our great outdoors.

This issue is dedicated to keeping the outdoors open for everyone. In the piece "Outdoors for everyone: Black Men Northwoods Retreat forges adventure and new experiences," James Edward Mills, journalist and outdoor recreation enthusiast, shares his tales from the woods.

The story highlights the sobering statistic that nationally, Black Americans represent 13% of the population, but make up only around 5% of recreational users. It's the inclusive work like his that gives people of color a true sense of belonging.

Also contained within these pages is a feature focused on mobility in the outdoors. In the piece "Access no issue for all-season chairs," we take a look at how powerful wheelchairs are helping hundreds reclaim the outdoors. With more than 500,000 Wisconsinites having a disability, providing the opportunity to get outdoors in a real way is what accessibility is all about.

Wisconsinites may love the long days of summer, but our crisp, sunny, snowy winter days are just as enjoyable. This issue's cover story spotlights the winter wonderlands awaiting hikers and snowshoers at Wisconsin's scenic state properties.

Other stories include tips for adding native plants to your home garden, a look at the economics of statewide tourism in the magazine's new Travel Resources feature, a photo tour of Wisconsin's beautiful Northwoods, a Wild Rabbit with Cherry Tomatoes and Polenta recipe from culinary historian and food essayist Kyle Cherek and more.

If you make your way outdoors this winter to a state park or natural area near you, be sure to share your adventures and tag us on social media using the hashtag #WildWisconsin.

In the meantime, as the pandemic continues, the DNR remains committed to providing a safe environment for our visitors, while also protecting the health of our staff. We appreciate your continued patience and are humbled by your support.

Be more than safe and stay healthy out there.

## DATELINE



### DECEMBER 21

Sure, the December solstice marks the first day of winter in the Northern Hemisphere and the shortest daylight of the year. But there's another way to look at it: The rebound to spring starts here.



### JANUARY 1

Happy New Year! Bet there aren't too many who'll be sad to put a challenging 2020 in the rear-view. Break out your new Friends of Wisconsin State Parks calendar and ring in 2021.



### JANUARY 16-17

The third full weekend in January means another chance to get out for Free Fishing Weekend. All waters of the state are open with no license required, usual regulations in place. Perfect chance to bundle up and give ice fishing a go.



#### 2021 PARK STICKERS, TRAIL PASSES NOW AVAILABLE

Get ready for 2021 adventures by purchasing an annual state property vehicle admission sticker. A sticker is required on all motor vehicles at state parks, forests and recreation areas.

Buy online at YourPassNow.com/ParkPass/wi — \$28 for Wisconsin vehicles or \$38 for out-of-state. Annual and daily admission stickers also may be purchased at parks via drive-up windows and electronic kiosks.

For cross-country ski season, state trail passes (\$25 annual or \$5 daily) are required for ages 16 and older using certain trails. Passes — also valid for biking, horseback riding and in-line skating — are sold at individual properties.

In addition, state park, forest and trail passes are available

over the phone by calling the DNR at 888-305-0398 between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. daily.

For state park details and pass information, see wiparks.net. One side note on the annual vehicle admission sticker:

It's the first time a winter image is featured. The sticker highlights cross-country skiing and was designed by Emma Dzurbanova, a foreign exchange student from the Czech Republic studying at Rice Lake High School. The artwork was selected as part of the DNR's annual statewide contest for high school students.



#### NEW ONLINE MAP SHOWCASES BROWNFIELDS SUCCESS STORIES AROUND THE STATE

When communities wish to address contaminated properties, partnerships often involve the DNR along with local governments and private parties to investigate, clean up and redevelop these areas. The result is thousands of "brownfields success

stories" all across Wisconsin.

In September, the DNR's Remediation and Redevelopment program launched a new interactive online map featuring some of the most interesting completed projects — dnr.wi.gov/topic/Brownfields/ Success.html. Users can click to see

details of nearly 100 success stories along with many before and after photos.

Since 1995, the RR program has been involved in environmental contamination cleanup activities around the state, helping bring closure to more than 15,000 brownfield sites.



#### MILESTONE AND NEW APP FOR SNAPSHOT

There's a new tool to explore information collected by the Snapshot Wisconsin citizen science project — a Data Dashboard. With Snapshot now surpassing 50 million trail camera photos collected, the interactive dashboard helps make findings more accessible to the public.

Users can select data by species of interest and explore animal activity, detection rates and more on a county-by-county basis. For details on the project and to check out the new Data Dashboard app, go to dnr.wi.gov, search "Snapshot Wisconsin."

### Winter wonderlands await hikers and snowshoers at Wisconsin's scenic state properties

ANDREA ZANI

All around Wisconsin, beautiful state parks, forests, trails and more offer opportunities to get outdoors for recreational activities of every sort. And the fun doesn't stop when winter winds blow

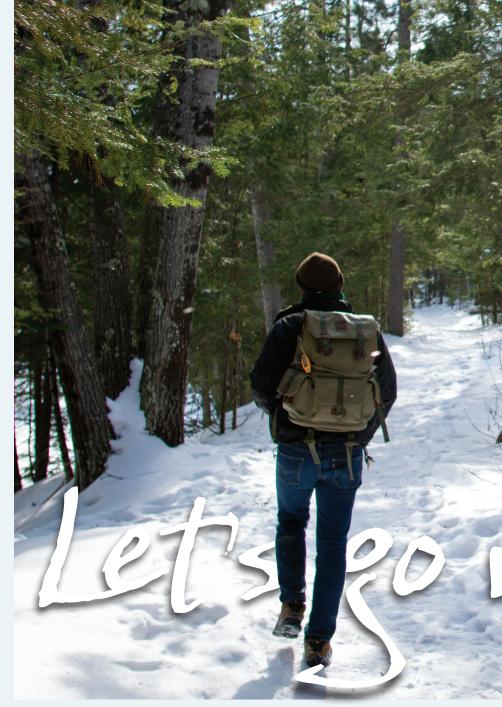
In fact, some would argue that winter brings out the best in our state parks for those who enjoy a quiet walk in the woods. Scenic snow-covered landscapes are perfect for exploring on foot, with generally fewer people around to disrupt wildlife watching, a reflective stroll with a friend or perhaps some much-needed solitude.

Opportunities to get out for hiking and snowshoeing in winter are plentiful and can be found statewide. We've highlighted several locations here, but you'll find much more information on the Wisconsin State Park System's DNR landing page at wiparks.net.

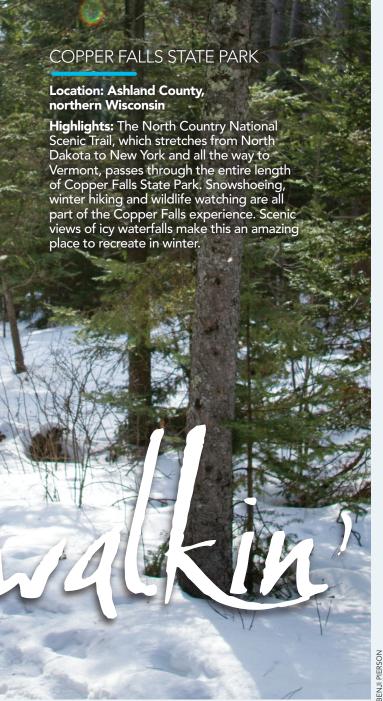
A vehicle admission sticker is required for entry to most state park properties. State trail passes are not required for hiking or snowshoeing on trails but are needed for skiing. Some park stickers and trail passes can be purchased online; annual and daily passes are available at individual properties. Find details on the website.

For skiers, trail conditions can be found at dnr.wi.gov/trailconditions once enough snow allows for grooming to begin. Hiking and snowshoeing are not permitted on designated ski trails.

As for winter events such as candlelight hikes, COVID-19 continues to change the look of things heading into 2021. But for the latest information on activities at state parks, forests, trails and more, check the Get Outdoors! calendar at dnr.wi.gov, search Get Outdoors.











#### GOVERNOR DODGE STATE PARK

#### Location: Iowa County, near Dodgeville

Highlights: Scenic landscapes are in abundance on many of the winter trails at Governor Dodge. Some spots meander through meadows and wooded valleys, while other trails climb to the top of rolling hills to provide excellent views. Bird watching is another activity to enjoy along the way.



#### PATTISON STATE PARK

#### **Location: Superior, in Douglas County**

Highlights: Pattison is wrapping up its 100th anniversary year and also celebrating the reopening of several trails that had suffered extensive damage from flooding during a June 2018 storm. "Our newly opened trails will be spectacular in the winter," park supervisor Kevin Feind said. The park's already impressive waterfalls — Big Manitou and Little Manitou (left) — are uniquely scenic when frozen.

#### HARRINGTON BEACH STATE PARK

#### Location: Ozaukee County, on Lake Michigan

**Highlights:** Who says hitting the beach is just a summer thing? At Harrington Beach, more than a mile of Lake Michigan shoreline turns into a near fantasy world of icescapes and snow when January and February arrive. But be sure to bundle up those cold winds certainly know how to whip across the ice-crusted lakeshore in winter!





#### KOHLER-ANDRAE STATE PARK

#### Location: Just south of Sheboygan, on Lake Michigan

**Highlights:** Just up the Lake Michigan shoreline from Harrington Beach, this park also features fantastic frigid lakeside landscapes in winter. Hit the beach for a rugged winter walk. Or hike and snowshoe on a moderate 1-mile trail through the wooded campground area or the longer 2.5-mile Black River Trail and elsewhere around the park.

#### BEAVER BROOK WILDLIFE AREA

#### Location: Washburn County, near Spooner

Highlights: Don't forget state wildlife areas when looking for a place to hike in winter. They can be less crowded but just as scenic as state parks. Beaver Brook in northwest Wisconsin offers nearly 2,000 acres to explore. A premier Class I brown and brook trout stream, Beaver Brook, flows through the property and into the Yellow River, with a large lake on each end of the property. The Wild River Recreation Trail runs parallel to the wildlife area on the west.





#### WYALUSING STATE PARK

Location: Southwest Wisconsin, near Prairie du Chien

Highlights: Candlelight events have been a popular winter pastime at state parks, but with things looking a little different these days, be sure to get updated information about winter events before heading out. Otherwise, you can explore Wyalusing, one of Wisconsin's oldest state parks, on foot or snowshoe anytime. Its picturesque location at the confluence of the Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers makes it special, with miles of trails rewarding hikers with frozen waterfalls and fantastic views.





#### MACKENZIE CENTER

Location: Columbia County, near Poynette

**Highlights:** The Nature Trail Loop is perfect for winter bird and wildlife watching. Visit the outdoor wildlife exhibit to see and learn about native Wisconsin wildlife. In early March, you may even see tapped maple trees dripping sap for the production of maple syrup. For the winter hiker seeking quiet solitude, this is a wonderful place to find it.



#### POTAWATOMI STATE PARK

#### Location: On Sturgeon Bay, in southern Door County

Highlights: A trio of short trails are designated for winter hiking and snowshoeing — and just right for beginners. Try the half-mile nature trail or 1-mile south shore picnic area loop. Or follow the shoreline just north of the campground on a 1-mile section of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. Explore elsewhere, too, as long as you stay off groomed ski trails.

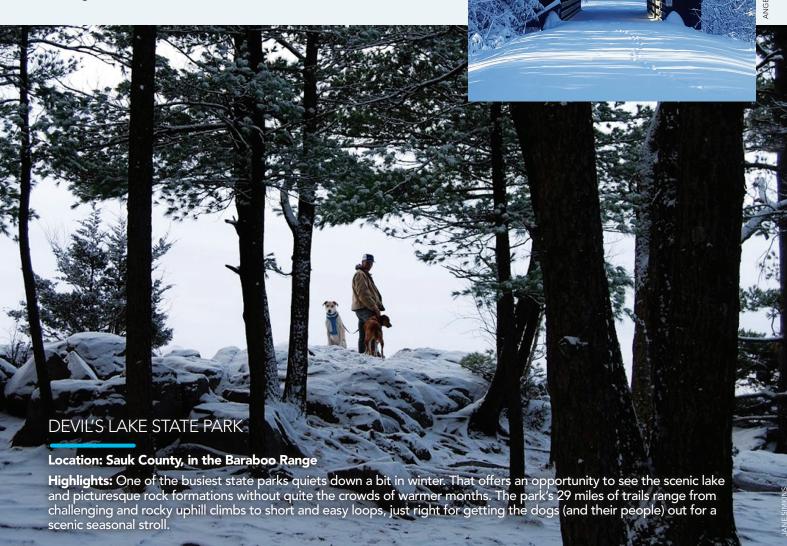
#### MOUNTAIN BAY STATE TRAIL

#### Location: Runs from just east of Wausau to Green Bay

**Highlights:** One of the state's longest rail-trails, Mountain Bay stretches 83 miles through Marathon, Shawano and Brown counties, which operate and maintain the trail. It is named for the two geologic features found on either end — Rib Mountain and Green Bay. Forests, farmlands, wetlands, rivers and streams create scenic views along the way. A 2-mile stretch in Marathon County follows the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. The flat and easy Mountain Bay State Trail is open for hiking and snowshoeing in winter, with users sharing with skiers and snowmobilers in some areas.







Andrea Zani is managing editor of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine. The DNR's Lisa Gaumnitz and Christopher Tall contributed to this story.



#### MOLLY MEISTER

"The freedom was incredible. I could walk through the marsh, I could go places, I could be alone in nature and not have to be watched or worried."

That's how Monica Spaeni felt while operating an outdoor all-terrain wheelchair for the first time back in 2012.

Nearly 20 years ago, Spaeni suffered a spinal cord injury while chaperoning her son's 6th grade skiing field trip, a devastating blow to her independence. In the years following the ski accident, Spaeni yearned to enjoy Wisconsin's outdoors like she used to. She could still go outside in her standard wheelchair, but doing so was more stressful than stress-relieving.

"Normally, if I'm outdoors in a standard wheelchair, I have to be with my husband who is watching everything, kicking rocks away and making sure I'm not going too fast," she said. "He's very loving and caring and doesn't want me to fall out because I have, many times."

As she adapted to a life of mobility constraints, she befriended a man who also has a spinal cord injury - and who happened to sell outdoor all-terrain wheelchairs. When she took one out for a

Monica Spaeni, left, founded Access Abilit Wisconsin to provide opportunities for tho with physical challenges to enjoy Wisconsin's outdoors. One beneficiary has been Gary Stott, above right, now on the nonprofit's board of directors.

spin on that spring day more than eight years ago, she was hooked.

"I remember thinking this is nice. I get to go where I want to go, I'm not missing the moment because I'm worried about uneven terrain or looking down at acorns or twigs, which can be very exhausting," Spaeni recalled."My husband was relieved because he saw me riding through cornfields without any issues.

"He can walk next to me and feel like how we would if I were just a walking person and not a person with a mobility issue."

#### **OPPORTUNITIES TO SHARE**

This chair had it all, but at a significant cost — from \$13,500 for a sitting model to \$18,000 for a standing

model. Getting one for herself seemed unrealistic to Spaeni, not to mention the headaches it would create for her and her husband to store it and transport it.

That's when she came up with the idea of raising money to buy one that several people could share.

Now, Spaeni is president of Access Ability Wisconsin, a nonprofit she founded with a mission to provide recreational opportunities for physically challenged people, including wheelchair users, who want to enjoy Wisconsin's outdoors.

She founded AAW with the support of her husband, Steve, along with Ray Anderson and other certified hunter education instructors in the Madison area. They collaborate with

numerous organizations, including the Department of Natural Resources, to purchase and store their fleet and make events and public lands accessible for people with mobility issues.

From their first chair in Dane County in 2014 to 20 chairs and trailers at 11 host locations around the state this year, Spaeni and her team are transforming the way people with mobility issues can engage with nature across the state.

Outdoor all-terrain wheelchairs are a great option for people with mobility issues to use year-round. OWCs are designed with safety in mind and can easily take on snow, mud and other obstacles that could otherwise pose a threat during the hard winter months.

#### **FREEDOM RESTORED**

Thousands of Wisconsinites have benefited from using OWCs over the years, including John Kilian and Gary Stott, both of whom are now involved with AAW.

"Back in 2006, I was in a motorcycle accident in which I lost my leg," Kilian said. "I wondered how I would be able to do things outdoors again.

"When I use one of these wheelchairs, I can go to different holes while ice fishing. Instead of waiting to get picked up, it gives me my freedom back."

Stott, a veteran with a spinal cord injury, said he first became aware of AAW about four years ago when he used an OWC for an annual camping trip with his wife and friends.

"After that I became a volunteer and shortly after joined their board of



directors," he said. "I have always been an outdoors person, but for the first few years after my injury that seemed to be something we could not do anymore other than perhaps a walk in the woods on a very developed trail.

"Now, we are able to get out into the deep woods and go on hikes and camp as we did before. In our retirement years, there is virtually nowhere that we will not try to explore and to do the things we had planned to do in these years before my injury."

The chance to bring those same opportunities to others is why he enjoys working with AAW, Stott added.

"That's why I volunteer for AAW today," he said, "so people with mobility issues can do what they used to before their mobility problem or get out into nature if they were born with a disability."

#### **EASIER TO EXPLORE**

Reserving a chair through AAW is easy and free by filling out a simple online form at accessabilitywi.org. Picking up the OWC and trailer does require access to a vehicle that can tow more than 1,150 pounds.

Reservations are recommended a week or two in advance for the best chance of being able to secure one when needed. The OWC can be kept up to two weeks, as long as there are not others waiting to use the same chair.

To make things even easier, the DNR recently stopped requiring special permits for these types of vehicles on public lands.

"There are more than 500,000 people with disabilities just in Wisconsin, and nearly 6 million acres of public lands to explore," Spaeni said. "If we can get people outdoors, it decreases depression, increases independence and social interaction and improves overall well-being."

The chairs also are a win for the environment, she said, allowing more access to nature with less disruption.

"If we wanted to make nature totally accessible without these chairs, we'd need to have paved paths and have people constantly picking up debris and removing snow," Spaeni said. "The chairs are quiet and safe and leave virtually no trace. Users are able to go into nature and experience it just like everyone else."

Molly Meister is a public information officer in the DNR's Office of Communications.

## OTHER ACCESSIBLE WAYS TO ENJOY THE OUTDOORS

Winter in Wisconsin is a difficult time for many people with disabilities to get outdoors, but the DNR is committed to providing exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities for people of all abilities in all seasons.

Ice fishing is a great option for people with mobility issues because it's generally easier to get out on the ice than it is to access water in a boat, and there is usually no casting involved. For regular fishing, people with disabilities may secure a permit to fish while trolling with an electric motor.

Cross-country sit skis offer an opportunity for people with mobility impairments to savor the peace and solitude of winter on snowy trails. Sit skis are available for free use at six state properties: Buckhorn, Governor Nelson, Harrington Beach and Mirror Lake state parks; Richard Bong State Recreation Area; and Kettle Moraine State Forest-Lapham Peak Unit.

Several state properties have accessible cabins available for people with disabilities and their guests, with reservations required. Accessible canoe campsites can be found at the Chippewa Flowage and Turtle-Flambeau Scenic Waters Area. Adaptive kayaks are available at Buckhhorn, Council Grounds, Devil's Lake, Mirror Lake and Perrot state parks.

And each fall, special dates are set for the Gun Deer Hunt for Hunters with Disabilities. Permits are needed for activities such as hunting from a stationary vehicle, using a laser sight or employing an adaptive device to facilitate firearm use.

The DNR's Open the Outdoors webpage has information on all of these opportunities and other resources to enable enjoyment of the state's outdoors: dnr.wi.gov/topic/OpenOutdoors.

- DNR STAFF

#### INFORMATION

To learn more about Access Ability Wisconsin, including details on outdoor all-terrain wheelchairs, how to make reservations and ways to volunteer or offer financial support for the organization, check accessabilitywi.org.



Black Men Northwoods Retreat forges adventure and new experiences

STORY AND PHOTOS BY JAMES EDWARD MILLS











## Immediately after breakfast, our little group sat discussing what would happen next.

A steady rain had been falling since late the night before, and the prospects of the hike we had planned appeared grim. Holding up my iPad, I showed everyone an image of the local weather radar map.

"As you can see, there's a bit of a window opening up," I said, pointing to a clear spot in a mass of swirling colors ranging from yellow/orange to deep red. "If we start now, we should be OK for a little while, but I'm pretty sure eventually we're going to get wet."

An uncertain silence settled over everyone as we each quietly weighed our options. Finally, the youngest member

of the crew shared his thoughts.

"I think we should just go," said 12-year-old Cornell Davidson. "That's why we're here."

The National Forest Foundation asked me to develop a storytelling project on issues of diversity, equity and inclusion on our public lands as part of the "It's All Yours" campaign, launched in 2015 with the U.S. Forest Service. Of course, I jumped at the opportunity.

But travel restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic added more than a few logistical challenges to a project that was already going to be a bit complicated. Air transportation to a remote national forest location near the Rocky Mountains in Colorado or the Cascade Range of the Pacific Northwest would have been difficult at best.

The natural alternative was simply to stay close to home. Though I have traveled throughout much of the wooded backcountry of northern Wisconsin, I had never before made a concerted effort to explore the vast area around the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, just a few hours' drive from where I live in Madison.

And what better way to see this amazing wilderness than to walk along the Ice Age National Scenic Trail?

#### PLANNING DURING A PANDEMIC

As it turned out, the biggest obstacle to the successful completion of this project was how to assemble a group of enthusiastic participants.

My goal was to introduce both the forest and the trail to a community of people we seldom see enjoying these beautiful tracts of public land. Nationally, Black Americans represent 13.1% of the United States' population, but among visitors to national parks and forests, our numbers include only between 2% and 7% of recreational users across the country.

In a state like Wisconsin, whose residents are mostly white, rates of participation in activities like camping and hiking within communities of color are lower still. This begged the question: How could I possibly create an authentic and worthwhile experience for this underrepresented group of people who may have never ventured into the outdoors before?

Ironically, the global pandemic seemed to have created a unique opportunity to do just that.

For more than eight months, people of color have been disproportionately impacted by infections of the novel coronavirus. Nationally, Black people make up a little more than 13% of the population but had accounted for nearly 20% of U.S. deaths from the virus through November.

"It's as if this disease is stalking us," said Aaron Perry, founder of the Rebalanced Life Wellness Association, based in Madison. "Black people need to find a way to escape."

#### SAFETY AND WELLNESS

This horrible disease has put into sharp relief the deep disparities of health and wellness within the Black community. Many of the same medical conditions that disproportionately impact people of color, like heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and obesity, leave this population vulnerable to a variety of different ailments, including the coronavirus.

A new study published in the International Journal of Environmental Health Research reveals that even a short time spent in the outdoors can reduce emotional stress, lower heart rates and blood pressure and provide a sense of physical well-being.

I believe that if precautions can be taken to minimize exposure to the virus, through limited public engagement, physical distancing, the wearing of face



masks and persistent hand sanitizing, it is possible to create a safe and healthy environment where a group of conscientious individuals can enjoy a restful retreat into the natural world.

At the Rebalanced Life Wellness Association, Perry specializes in efforts to improve the health outcomes of Black men in southern Wisconsin. He provides basic monitoring and education services to encourage positive lifestyle choices including a healthy diet and regular physical exercise.

Having taken part in his community programs to introduce local men of color to recreational running and cycling, I figured he would be the perfect person with whom to partner to create a hiking trip for Black men.

"You need to know though," he told me, "not many of them would be interested in camping."

#### **FATHERS, SONS, FRIENDS**

With the support of a small grant from the National Forest Foundation and the Schlecht Family Foundation, we were able to provide lodging, food and transportation for nine participants for our adventure in mid-September. We stayed at a modest motel in Rib Lake, which happens to lie directly in the path of the Ice Age Trail on the edge

of the Chequamegon-Nicolet National

The group consisted of three fathers and their sons, plus Perry and my friend Christopher Kilgour, an educator at UW-Madison and a lifelong outdoors enthusiast. Everyone had a private room, with fathers and sons together, and no contact with the motel staff.

Kilgour and I prepared meals for everyone in a large, well-ventilated kitchen. And in a central meeting area, we were able to provide the group with basic skills training in hiking safely through the woods.

The idea was to give these men and their sons an opportunity to experience the outdoors in ways they might not have been able to before.

"I remember my maternal grandfather was a Boy Scout leader in the 1930s and '40s at a time when scouting wasn't for us," said Darryl Davidson, a public health professional from Milwaukee."He used to have to get the books and materials from the library or church groups and not let the other leaders know he was Black.'

Today, Davidson's son Cornell is a Boy Scout working toward a merit badge in hiking. Our little outing through the Northwoods gave this young man the chance to make some progress on his goal during the pandemic, when limited travel and home confinement has made getting outside difficult.

Despite the rain, he was perhaps more excited than any of us to start walking.

#### **MUCH-NEEDED RESPITE**

A little before 11 a.m., we boarded our passenger van and drove about 10 miles to a trailhead just off a county road near a farm field. Though the rain continued to fall, a thick canopy of trees overhead offered a good amount of protection that made for a very pleasant walk.

At a steady pace, we hiked along the trail, watching for the flash of yellow markers every 50 feet or so. The path was more than a little muddy and sodden in some spots that threatened to suck our shoes right off our feet.

On our 8-mile round trip, there were stream crossings here and there. But for the most part, the way was flat and easy. It was a good time for everyone, especially as many of us had been cooped up indoors or putting in long hours of work during the pandemic.

"I've got young kids at home, and I'm on the job 12 hours a day, six days a week," said Selwyn Skinner-Roy, an automobile mechanic. "It's been a great trip. I really, really needed this."

#### **BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS**

The main purpose of our experience in the woods was to demonstrate how accessible the forest can be.

When I give a public talk, I am often asked: "What can we do to encourage more people of color to experience the outdoors?" The exact answer to that question certainly varies from one community to the next.

But in general, by removing many of the barriers to access for our trip, we were able to create a pleasant, safe, stress-free environment that gave each participant the opportunity to relax and truly enjoy themselves.

With the support of knowledgeable leaders and just a little bit of guidance, it is possible to show the people we most want to reach that they can create similar experiences for themselves — and perhaps in the future bring their family and friends with them.

"I never really knew the menu of things to do," said Norman Davis. "Now that I have a better idea, I'd like to try something like this again."

At its core, the Black Men North-woods Retreat was meant to give all those involved a much-needed escape from the ever-present stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic. But it also was our intention to reveal the heal-

ing power of the natural environment for those members of our community who need it most.

From their time spent in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, I hope they and others with relatively limited access to nature will find solace and comfort in the green spaces all around them. I also hope those interested in creating similar opportunities will realize that by making these experiences fun, safe and socially relevant to the people they aim to serve, we can effectively work to shrink the divide between those who spend time in nature for recreation and those who don't.

It's possible each participant will come away from events like this eager to discover the natural areas not too far from their homes. And with a little luck, they may one day even become environmental advocates who work to protect the public lands they have come to love.

James Edward Mills of Madison is a freelance journalist who created the digital community The Joy Trip Project: Story Sharing for a Sustainable World. He also is author of "The Adventure Gap: Changing the Face of the Outdoors."

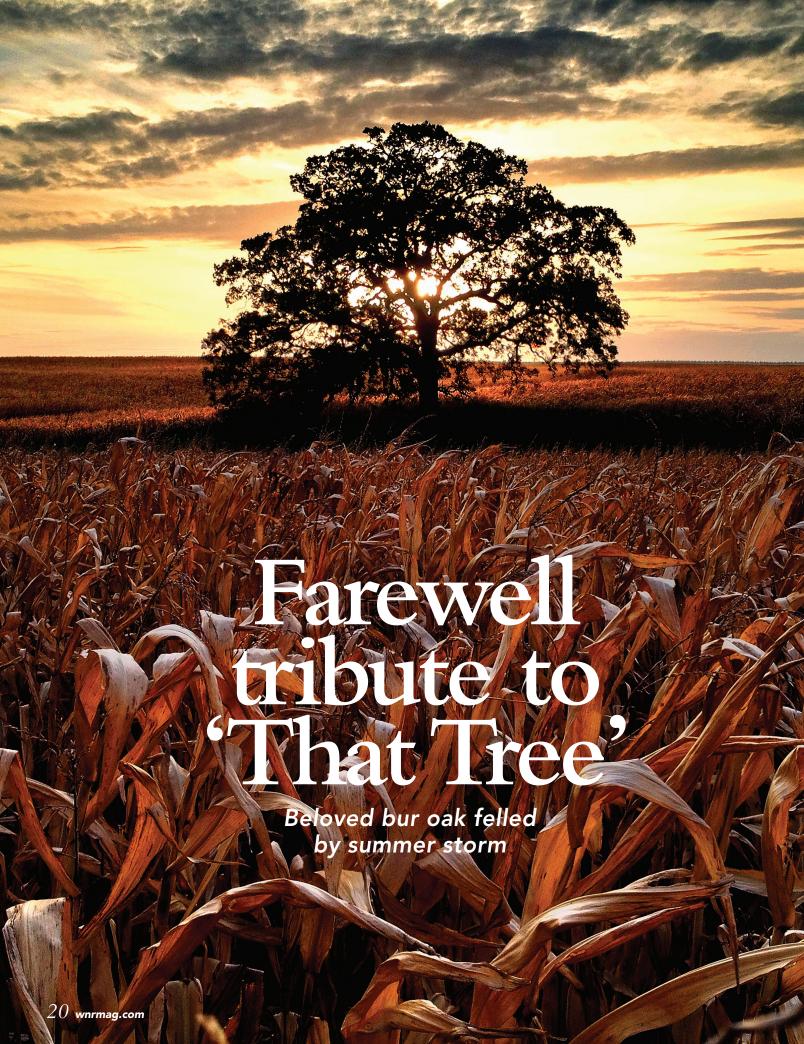
#### INFORMATION

Several partners provided support for the Black Men Northwoods Retreat including the National Forest Foundation, Schlecht Family Foundation, Ice Age Trail Alliance and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. James Yach, DNR secretary's director for northern Wisconsin, and staff based at the Rhinelander Service Center helped with logistics.

The retreat was arranged as part of the "It's All Yours" campaign, launched in 2015 by the National Forest Foundation and U.S. Forest Service. The initiative aims to build awareness about outdoor opportunities on National Forests and Grasslands and encourage responsible recreation and stewardship. Learn more at nationalforests.org/our-forests/its-all-yours.

The Joy Trip Project digital community shares stories of outdoor recreation, conservation and sustainable living. To read and share stories, listen to podcasts and follow on social media, check joytripproject.com.









## What could really be the measure of how much a man can love a tree?

If it's Mark Hirsch and one particular bur oak, the answer is:

As strong as its roots and solid, sturdy trunk awaiting another spring.

As deep as the verdant green of the tree's leaves in summer.

As full as its colorful canopy, offering shady refuge from an autumn sun.

As high as the tree's tallest branch, stretching undaunted toward winter's cerulean sky.

And as great as the beauty of that immense oak, standing resolute and steadfast in every season, year after year after year.

That's why, for Hirsch, the loss of the majestic tree, his tree — "That Tree" — was such a devastating event. The decades-old Grant County oak was

felled in August during a fierce 80-mph windstorm known as a derecho.

"She was just reduced to rubble in the field," Hirsch told Susan Lampert Smith of Up North News shortly after the Aug. 10 storm. "It was a torrential downpour, and I'm resting my head against her trunk."

Hirsch's connection to the tree began when he was rehabbing from an auto accident in 2012. A professional photographer, he'd just gotten an iPhone and found comfort in experimenting with it to photograph the bur oak, a lone sentinel in a corn field near Platteville.

The effort was therapeutic for Hirsch, who beyond the car accident also was coping with a recent divorce, a recurrent battle against prostate cancer and loss of his job as a news photographer.

A few photos of the tree turned into dozens, then hundreds as Hirsch visited



Images from Mark Hirsch's book "That Tree" capture the beauty of his special bur oak in all seasons.







the tree every day to make new images.

"She inspired me to have this incredible journey," he told Up North News. "My career became communicating about trees, whole fragility of life, the things I get anxious and wound up about. It was the wisdom of the tree, the people she introduced me to.'

Eventually, Hirsch's photo collection became a book — "That Tree: An iPhone Photo Journal Documenting a Year in the Life of a Lonely Bur Oak." The project also generated a Facebook site, which grew to 40,000 followers.

It was on Facebook that Hirsch shared news of the fallen tree, in a heartfelt post reprinted here. Though he'd made so many photos of the tree in all its glory, he couldn't bring himself to photograph it crumpled to the ground.

"She taught me that life is beautiful but tenuous, you might not have another tomorrow," he said of his extraordinary tree. "So tell the people you love that you love them today."

Andrea Zani is managing editor of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine. Mark Hirsch is a photographer and artist in Platteville.

#### **ABOUT** 'THAT TREE'

Check thattree.net for information about Mark Hirsch and "That Tree," his book featuring daily photos of the standout bur oak in southern Wisconsin. The site includes links to order the book and prints of its many images. Check facebook.com/photosofthattree for additional images and reflections from Hirsch about the project.



Today I am saddened and heartbroken. My dear friend That Tree was brutalized and blown down by the winds of a derecho that passed through southwestern Wisconsin. I never imagined in my lifetime that I would lose my dear friend, but I have. While the storm was still raging, I stood there leaning with my head against her crumpled form, crying, picturing her majestic form standing as she always has, stately against the far horizon. This is one of the last photos I made of her in late June. Life challenges and health issues have kept me from my frequent visits to my forest friend. On my last few visits, I did not even make pictures but instead, enjoyed the contemplative nature of her quiet company. I sat beneath her branches, observed her form against sunset skies, and always hugged her savoring the unique pattern of her bark by resting my hands on her textured trunk before departing with a last appreciative gaze. I will miss her terribly.













## **PROTECT WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU** FROM COVID-19

Taking steps to stop the spread of COVID-19 can help us all get back to the places and activities we love, safely. Learn how to protect yourself and others so everyone in Wisconsin can have a better 2021.





Wear a mask in public



Keep 6 feet apart



Stay home if you can



**Wash your** hands



**Symptoms? Get tested** 



Never mind the cold...

# PLAN NOW TO PUT NATIVE PLANTS TO WORK IN YOUR GARDEN

ANDREA ZANI

There's no time like the often dreary days of winter to entertain warm thoughts of next year's garden. If you're inclined to give this season the cold shoulder and plan now for spring, consider native plants.

"There are just so many different, interesting ways you can incorporate native plants into your home landscape," DNR conservation biologist Amy Staffen said.

Staffen gave that and a wealth of other advice about Wisconsin's native plants during a Facebook Live "Garden Tour" presentation. That video and another similar tour — both featuring beautiful native plants in Staffen's own Madison home garden — are found on the DNR's native plants page.

Also on that webpage is an informative handout by Staffen, "Native Plants for Beginners," and another from DNR conservation biologist Ryan Brady suggesting native plants, shrubs and trees to benefit birds. A third handout from Madison Audubon and the Wisconsin Monarch Collaborative focuses on native plants for monarch butterflies.

All three handouts are reprinted on the following pages and can be downloaded in electronic form online.

Wisconsin's native plants are ideal for gardeners because they have evolved to suit the state's climate, Staffen said. "So they're low-maintenance and will survive better after becoming established."

They're also better at supporting native wildlife, because those species also have evolved in the state along with these native plants.

One of the first things to do when thinking of adding native plants, Staffen advised, is to study the area to be planted to determine "light regime and soil type." There are native plants for a variety of light conditions and soils.

There also are plants for every season. Diversify plants to allow for different bloom times, Staffen said. That makes a more attractive garden all year and is better for wildlife.

#### WHY NOT NATIVES?

Native plants are versatile and can be melded to any garden preference, from lush overflowing lots to neat and orderly landscapes. Gardeners also can get down in the weeds, so to speak, with plant details, such as which specific pollinators are attracted to which native plants.

Staffen has any number of favorites, many in her own garden. Jacob's





ladder, for example, is a spring and early summer bloomer that tolerates many soil conditions. It provides both nectar and pollen and "even the leaves provide food for some moths."

Prairie smoke, in the rose family, is one of the groundcover plants Staffen grows. "Groundcovers can help us capture a lot of space so that we don't have to do a lot of weeding, and they prevent the soil from eroding," she said.

Creating a rain garden with native plants also is a great way to support wildlife while reducing flooding, she added. "It serves as a great sponge" to soak up excess water from heavier rains.

Native planting projects can be large scale "out in the country," Staffen said — prairie restorations, for example — and the DNR has resources to help in planning and site preparation. Or one can add just a few native stems to beautify any small garden space and help pollinators in the process.

"Whether you plant a huge diversity of plants ... or if you just have two or three, you're going to make a difference in promoting habitat for native pollinators and other wildlife," she said.

"If you're thinking of putting any perennial beds in at your home landscape, why not plant natives? Let's all do our part to help promote habitat for our native wildlife."

Andrea Zani is managing editor of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.

#### INFORMATION

The DNR's native plants webpage has resources on where to buy native plants, landscaping recommendations and pollinator news, plus "Garden Tour" video links and downloadable copies of the plant handouts printed here. Go to dnr.wi.gov and search "native plants."

#### Wild geranium

(Geranium maculatum) This lavender-flowered plant grows in most soils and light regimes but will need to be watered if in full sun. Supports bees and is the host plant for several moth species.



**Columbine** 

(Aquilegia canadensis) Bright red flowers make this plant a hummingbird favorite! Successful in most soils and light regimes. Also supports pollinators.



#### Solomon's seal

(Polygonatum biflorum) The tall arching stems of this plant have little white flowers that turn into pretty blue berries in late summer. ;Tolerates a variety of soils with partial sun to shade. Supports pollinators and birds.

## Help nature, plant natives!

## **NATIVE PLANTS FOR BEGINNERS**

Want to get your feet wet with introducing native plants into your yard? Here is a list of species that are easy to grow throughout Wisconsin and help provide food and shelter for native wildlife. Try to have at least one species that blooms during spring, summer and fall to maximize benefits for wildlife and the beauty of your yard. Unless otherwise noted, these plants tolerate a broad range of soil types.



Deer resistant plants



#### Common milkweed

(Asclepias syriaca)

This monarch caterpillar host needs full to partial sun but can grow in almost any soils and produces lavender flowers. Also supports birds and other pollinators.



(Monarda fistulosa)

This lavender-flowered member of the mint family tolerates a broad range of soils with full to partial sun. Supports hawk moth's, hummingbirds and bees (endangered rusty patched bumble bee shown



#### Culver's root

(Veronicastrum virginicum) This attractive plant produces white spikes of flowers and grows in most soils and light regimes. Supports bees and butterflies.



#### Maidenhair fern

(Adiantum pedatum) A perfect accent plant throughout the seasons with delicate fronds arranged in a graceful arc. Prefers medium to moist soils in the shade.

# Fall Bloomers



#### **Heart-leaved aster** (Aster cordifolius) This plant has bright blue flowers and

heart-shaped leaves, and tolerates most soils with partial sun to shade. Benefits birds and pollinators.



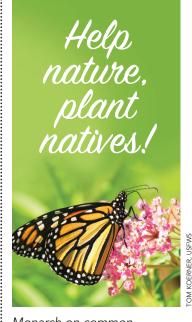
#### Little bluestem

(Schizacyrium scoparium) This bunch-forming prairie grass has blue-green leaves that turn red in the fall; fluffy seeds add additional interest and are food for birds. Requires dry to medium moisture with full sun.



#### **New England aster**

(Aster novae-angliae) An orange center surrounded by purple rays describes this lovely plant that grows in a range of soil types with full to partial sun. Supports birds and pollinators.



Monarch on common milkweed.

Find more comprehensive plant guides at dnr.wi.gov search "native plants."

Learn more ways to get involved in conserving Wisconsin's natural heritage. Go to dnr.wi.gov and search "NHC.





Natural Heritage Conservation Program (PUB-NH-532)

## Help nature, plant natives!

### **GREAT NATIVE TREES, SHRUBS** AND PLANTS FOR BIRDS

Turn your yard into a year-round feeding station for Wisconsin birds by planting native trees, shrubs and plants. By adding one or more of these bird-friendly natives, you'll attract more birds and give them the food and shelter they need to raise a family, survive a Wisconsin winter or make the long migration south. A win-win for you and the birds!



Examples of native species for birds



- Oak trees (Quercus species) support over 530 species of butterflies and moth caterpillars, more than any other woody plant.
- Many migrating and nesting birds rely on these caterpillars for food, including such favorites as warblers, tanagers and orioles.
- Acorns are eaten by blue jays, red-headed woodpeckers and other wildlife.



- white oak (Q. alba)
- red oak (Q. rubra)
- bur oak (Q. macrocarpa)

- Ranging in size from small shrubs to large trees, cherries (Prunus species) host over 450 species of caterpillars that provide food for birds. Fruits attract birds from mid-summer to fall,
- including red-headed woodpecker, rosebreasted grosbeak, bluebirds and dozens more.



- chokecherry (P. virginia)
- black cherry (P. serotina)
- pin cherry (P. pensylvanica)

- highbush cranberry (V. trilobum)
- nannyberry (V. lentago)

• Viburnums (Viburnum species) are

during migration and nesting.

spring attract robins, waxwings,

Fruits in fall, winter and early

bluebirds, thrushes, catbirds

fruit-bearing shrubs whose dense

structure provides excellent cover

downy arrowwood (V. rafinesquianum)



#### Dogwood

 Dogwoods (Cornus species) provide good cover and ample clusters of fruit during fall that attract vireos, thrushes, waxwings, sparrows and others.



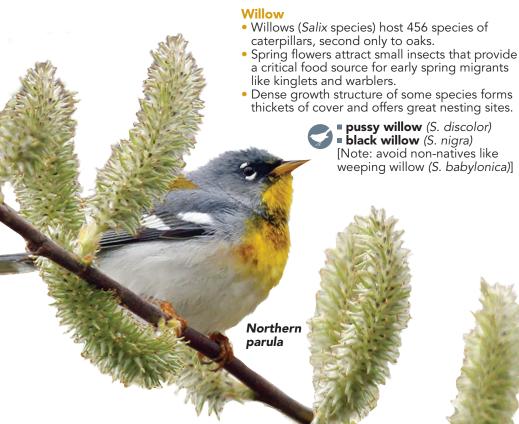
- pagoda dogwood (C. alternifolia)
- gray dogwood (C. racemosa)
- red-osier dogwood
- (C. sericea) 

  Silky dogwood (C. amomum) 

  Silky dogwood (C. amomum)



Viburnum







- Serviceberries (Amelanchier species) are among the first flowering woody plants in spring and provide fruit by early to mid-summer when few other fruit sources are available.
- In spring and summer, these shrubs and small trees attract bird species such as waxwings, flickers, thrushes, vireos, tanagers and warblers.



- Allegheny serviceberry (A. laevis) **downy serviceberry** (A. arborea)
- inland serviceberry (A. interior)



#### Flowers for hummingbirds

Many colorful, native wildflowers attract hummingbirds and other pollinators like bees and butterflies.



- **columbine** (Aquilegia canadensis)
- butterfly milkweed (Asclepias tuberosa)
- cardinal flower (Lobelia cardinalis)
- wild bergamot (Monarda fistulosa)
- spotted jewelweed (Impatiens capensis)



- Seeds of native grasses provide food for birds in fall and winter like juncos, sparrows, finches and turkeys.
- Their structure provides cover and potential nesting sites for ground-dwelling birds, including upland game species, meadowlarks, sparrows and others.



- big bluestem (Andropogon gerardii)
- little bluestem (Schizachyrium scoparium)
- indiangrass (Sorghastrum nutans)



 Birches (Betula species) host over 400 species of butterfly and moth caterpillars, making them fantastic trees for migrating and resident birds.

 Their seeds are beloved by sparrows and finches, including redpolls and siskins in fall and winter.

 Loose bark hosts insects for woodpeckers, creepers, nuthatches and chickadees, especially in winter.



- paper birch (B. papyrifera) yellow birch (B. alleghaniensis) in the north
- river birch (B. nigra) in the south





Pine siskin

white pine (Pinus strobus) ■ N. white cedar (Thuja occidentalis) in the north ■ Eastern red cedar (Juniperus virginia) in the south

## Help nature, plant natives!



Learn more ways to get involved in conserving Wisconsin's natural heritage. Go to **dnr.wi.gov** and search "NHC."



Natural Heritage Conservation Program (PUB-NH-533)

#### SUPPORTING OUR MONARCHS

Turn your yard into a monarch oasis! These 12 species are some of monarchs' absolute favorites. Three species of milkweed, a plant on which monarchs 100% depend (denoted by \*), are included. Learn how you can help monarchs at **wimonarchs.org**.



Many of these flowers need a period of freezing in order to germinate. Scatter seeds in your yard just before a snowfall, or cold stratify and germinate them indoors to give them a jump-start in spring!

Bloom times provided by Wisconsin State Herbarium, UW-Madison.

Learn more about how you can create monarch-friendly habitat in your yard and community at **wimonarchs.org**.



Designed by Madison Audubon, WMC Member & Supporter



#### SARA MEANEY

When the snow starts to fall, excitement builds in our household, and I quickly begin checking the Wisconsin Snow Report on TravelWisconsin.com for trail conditions.

You see, I recently rekindled my joy for cross-country skiing and chal-

lenged myself to participate in the American Birkebeiner last winter. The anticipation of joining thousands of other skiers to take part in North America's largest ski race reinvigorated my appreciation for getting outside and enjoying the beauty and amenities of Wisconsin winters.

I raced the 15-kilometer Prince Haakon on a beautiful Wisconsin winter day. Spirits were high among my fellow skiers and the trails pristine. I inched my way across the finish line with mixed feelings of exhaustion and pride for participating in a global tradition that has grown to be such a large event right here in my home state.

With adrenaline still coursing, I entered the finish chute. Never did a bowl of hot homemade chili and a cold Wisconsin beer taste so good!

As I joined my family at the finish, I looked around to see so many happy families partaking in the festivities, enjoying the local cuisine and attractions, and sharing family time — with every cottage, cabin and hotel booked within

miles of Cable and Hayward.

Our family represented just six of the nearly 40,000 people drawn to the area for the annual Birkebeiner events. Collectively, spending on lodging, dining and entertainment during the extended Birkie weekend injects an estimated \$4 million into the northwest Wisconsin economy, according to race organizers.

Even in the winter, outdoor recreation is a boon to tourism and generates economic impact for Wisconsin communities — from cross-country skiing and snowshoeing to snowmobiling and ice fishing.

A recent report by Headwaters Economics shows outdoor recreation is a top driver of Wisconsin's economy year-round. It contributes \$7.8 billion to the state's gross domestic product.

From the manufacture and sale of goods, to services rendered by guides and outfitters, to outdoor festivals, events and sports such as golf and tennis, outdoor recreation is a diverse sector in Wisconsin. Its impact is amplified by the spending on gas, food and lodging that happens when outdoorists travel to partake in these activities.

#### **AWE-INSPIRING ASSETS**

In fact, outdoor recreation is a top reason for traveling in Wisconsin, thanks in large part to our state's abundant natural spaces. The Department of Tourism works with Longwoods International to collect traveler data. In 2016 and 2017, the outdoors was the No. 1 reason, other than to visit family or friends, that travelers cited for visiting Wisconsin.

While I may be biased, it's no surprise to me. Our natural resources offer aweinspiring views at every turn, and they





are accessible and spectacular because Wisconsin has invested in them for generations.

In recognition of these natural assets, our plentiful outdoor recreation offerings and their economic value to the state, the Office of Outdoor Recreation was established within the Department of Tourism in 2019, gaining bipartisan legislative support. The office works with stakeholders, connecting the activities of outdoor recreation to the businesses and organizations that rely on them.

Director Mary Monroe Brown, a fellow Nordic skier, sums it up well: "Outdoor recreation has always been a way of life for Wisconsinites," she said. "We're here to leverage its economic impact for the benefit of all."

When people participate in outdoor recreation in Wisconsin, it's not just about enjoying a day on the ski trails, a

camping trip or a bike ride. These outings drive economic activity and boost several economic sectors.

On our way to the Birkie, our family supported local farmers and a grocery store when we stocked up on snacks and drinks. A local restaurant supplied a warm cup of hot cocoa after a day in the cold.

Our skis and gear were purchased from a specialty retail shop, and my warm wool socks from a Wisconsin-based manufacturer. And a trail organization comprised of dedicated supporters and volunteers built and maintained the path I traversed with thousands of others.

Perhaps most important of all, Wisconsin's outdoors are vast and welcoming. The Birkie trails, managed by the nonprofit American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation, are open to the public year-round. And the Wisconsin State Park System, where I trained, comprises 1.5 million acres and is a true gem, providing a myriad of opportunities for skiers, bikers and snowmobilers alike.

Our natural places are the bedrock of Wisconsin's outdoor recreation economy, offering countless opportunities for outdoors lovers and travelers to make memories outside.

Sara Meaney was secretary-designee of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. Look for more Travel Resources in coming issues of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.



#### WISCONSIN SNOW REPORT

Wisconsin's outdoor offerings don't end when the snow flies. In fact, snowmobiling, snowboarding, cross-country and downhill skiing are just a sampling of the fun found when the white powder coats the landscape.

If you're planning to take to the hill or the trails, check out the Wisconsin Snow Report from Travel Wisconsin for the latest conditions and information on things to do, see and eat in the area: travelwisconsin.com/ snowreport.

Here are three of our favorite Wisconsin state park destinations for winter fun.

- Bearskin State Trail
   This 21.5-mile rail trail from Minocqua to Tomahawk connects to numerous miles of county snowmobile trails.
   Check Minocqua Area and
- Brule River State Forest
   The Afterhours Ski Trail System in northwest Wisconsin offers more than 16 miles of classic-groomed and skate-ski trails, and the forest has 30 miles of snowmobile trails. Check Douglas County snow reports.

Tomahawk Area snow reports.

Mirror Lake State Park
 The park near Wisconsin Dells
 offers 18 miles of combination
 skate- and classic-groomed ski
 trails. Check Mirror Lake State
 Park snow report.

— WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM



## Wisconsin's Northwoods provide perfect backdrop for seasonal scenes

KATHRYN A. KAHLER

Readers of this magazine often tell us how much they love photos we share from around Wisconsin. Since one of our go-to freelance photographers hails from none other than Winter — Wisconsin, that is — we thought it only fitting to highlight some of her seasonal photos and tell you a little about her.



#### **MEET LINDA FRESHWATERS ARNOT**

Like many outdoor enthusiasts, Arndt developed her interest in wildlife photography as a kid, vacationing at her grandparents' home in Three Lakes.

"I loved catching frogs and exploring," she said. "My grandparents raised an orphaned baby raccoon, Ringo, and I adored him. My grandfather took Kodachrome slides, and I loved the colors of the 'miniature pictures."

She also recalled being "fascinated by a picture of my dad and co-worker holding up a pheasant in a gorgeous fall hunting scene." Arndt's eye for photography developed over time, and she relied on her own intuitions and natural abilities.

"I never liked fluorescent lighting and, with time, became aware of the nuances of light," she said. "In high school, I took a black-and-white photography class and learned to develop film and print my images, but other than that, I've never taken an art course.

"I'm pretty much self-taught and learned photography from books and YouTube videos."

#### **RELOCATING TO PARADISE**

Arndt earned an accounting degree from UW-Milwaukee and spent about 10 years managing 75 people for a



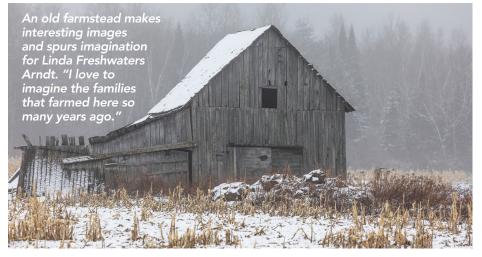




Trumpeter swans like this one pictured on the Chippewa River are "an incredibly beautiful bird," photographer Linda Freshwaters Arndt said. "So large, they make a Canada goose look small!" She also noted the bird's reintroduction and recovery in Wisconsin, from extirpation 30 years ago to thriving today. "Such a great success story."

These twin red cabins await visitors at Fishtrap Cove Resort in Winter. "Some of my earliest childhood memories are of vacationing in a cabin much like these," Arndt said.





chemical firm in the city. The hectic life left little time for her husband and daughter, so they made some life changes and moved to the Northwoods.

Winter is located 35 miles southeast of Hayward, in the heart of northern Wisconsin's vacationland, with boundless access to public lands, recreational trails, lakes, rivers and streams. The Chippewa Flowage and Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest are a few miles to the northwest, and the Tuscobia State Trail runs directly through the village. Winter and its surroundings were

the perfect setting for the Arndts and became the backdrop for Linda's



Photography and hunting go hand-in-hand for Linda Freshwaters Arndt and her husband, Al, each shooting in their own way. "Over the years, he's put up so many photography blinds for me that I've lost count," she said. "Needless to say, he's a huge supporter of my photography."

"I sat in the bottom of a canoe to get this shot of a muskrat," Arndt said.
"Animals are usually less skittish when they can't see the whole human outline."

photographic skills.

"My husband, Al, built our home in Winter," she said. "I was hired as a business instructor for Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe College in Hayward."

She worked there for 15 years, balancing teaching with her pursuit of freelance wildlife photography. Fortunate to have a large property of her own to explore, Linda has found plenty of picturesque inspiration close to home.

"Most of my work is freelance and 90% of my photos are shot within 100 miles of my home," she said. "Our 230 acres include a mix of habitat — woods, river, lake, swamp and meadow. Shoot-

ing close to home allows me to take full advantage of morning or evening light and beautiful weather conditions such as fog and hoarfrost.

"I've photographed sharp-tailed grouse at Namekagon Barrens, sandhill cranes at Crex Meadows and grosbeaks at Sax-Zim Bog (Minnesota), but most of my time is spent on our own land."

#### WHAT'S IN HER GEAR BAG?

Just how does Arndt manage to capture those perfect shots of deer gazing into the camera, nursing their fawns or nibbling on white pine branches? It's not as easy as it looks.

"I started out with a Sigma 50-500

mm lens on a heavy tripod. The image quality was good, but the autofocus was too slow, causing me to miss a lot of action shots. Now, many of my photos are taken at 1200 mm — 600 mm lens with a 2X teleconverter — using a monopod."

She likes to get out on the water to capture images, a technique that brings added challenges but better photos.

"I often shoot from a boat, which increases the difficulty," she said. "Most photographers don't shoot at such extremes but, with improved technology, I've had excellent results."

Linda's love for the outdoors is a family trait. Her brother, Mark, hitchhiked to Alaska after high school, she noted. He has trapped, worked on the Alaska oil pipeline, guided grizzly bear hunts and run the Iditarod sled dog race — twice.

"Our parents held pretty traditional jobs," she said, "so I'm not quite sure how we both turned out so adventurous. But people often find it interesting!"

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

#### **MORE IMAGES**

Contributions from Linda Freshwaters Arndt have appeared in numerous issues of *Wisconsin Natural Resources* magazine over the past decade. To see more of her photos, visit her website at freshwaters-arndt.com.

## TASTE OF WISCONSIN

## Rabbit pursuit helps hunters hop from winter to spring

**KYLE CHEREK** 

My brother-in-law, Joe, who grew up on a modest farm in Mukwonago, can hunt and trap anything in the state — and probably has at some point.

"I could feed them that way if I had to," he has said to me enough times that it stuck, referring to his family and his ability to find food within our state's natural resources.

A seasoned forager, too, he once bestowed me with more wild watercress than the whole bottom shelf of our refrigerator could handle. Chefs all around me gained the benefit of that gift.

It was through Joe that I first came to taste and enjoy wild rabbit, and it is my firm belief that more of Wisconsin's hunters should take advantage of the spectacular rabbit hunt available to them over the winter.

I grew up with a family that embraced the whole endeavor. Hunting wed them closer to the land, the seasons, the wildlife and the weather. Hunting was as much ritual as recreation, camaraderie as contemplation.

I always recall a grim drop-off in their demeanor as the deer hunt faded to winter's grip. Gun gone to muzzleloader then to antlerless. With each advancing date, they would acquire a faraway look in their eyes until there was nothing to do but wait until spring arrived — and with it, turkey hunting.

It took a few years for me to realize that the more well-adjusted hunters in my circle had found something to bridge winter with spring and still keep them in

the hunt and on the land: rabbit hunting.

Technically, the state has only one type of rabbit and two manner of hare. The eastern cottontail rabbit (Sylvilagus floridanus) is the one most folks are familiar with, as it is exceptionally abundant. If the cottontail were a condiment, it would be ketchup.

The snowshoe hare (Lepus americanus) packs a bit more meat, fat and flavor and is a touch bigger. It seems to have an unspoken agreement with the cottontail regarding overlapping territory, mostly sticking to the northern part of the state. They favor Canada and the American mountain ranges otherwise.

Last and least is the white-tailed

jackrabbit (Lepus townsendii), released in Wisconsin in the early 1900s to give a boost to the hunt. Several other types of hares not found here actually fall under

**RABBIT VS. HARE** 







the name jackrabbit, reportedly bestowed by American humorist Mark Twain. Having seen their enormous ears, he created the portmanteau out of "jackass" (the donkey) and "rabbit."

The white-tailed jackrabbit started disappearing from Wisconsin around the 1950s, and no state hunters have reported seeing one in a good while. But that doesn't mean they're not still out there; it wouldn't be the first time nature has surprised us.

If you do see one, don't shoot! Hunting this protected species is prohibited. Call the DNR and go buy a lottery ticket — in that order.

#### **RABBIT HUNTING HOW-TO**

In Wisconsin, you can hunt rabbits from September or October (depending on whether you are in the northern or southern zone) through the end of

> February. With a daily threerabbit bag limit, you've got potential for a pretty good hunt.

A good sized snowshoe will feed one person with some leftovers. My brother-in-law is of the opinion that any time after November is better.

"They've got some good fat on them because of the cold, as good as a rabbit will get at least, and so they taste better," Joe has advised me. Thanks to the uptick in cooking shows over the last 20 years, even a kid will tell you fat equals flavor.

If your love of hunting involves a stand, a rifle and a wait, rabbit hunting is not for you. Thick brush, deadfalls and closely packed tangled groundcover are their safest spots, and that's where you have to flush them out.

The cover keeps them hidden from predators. Nearly everything that flies with talons in Wisconsin's skies is hunting them, too. That said, they are fun to flush, and it makes for a great day out in Wisconsin's thinner woods and rushes.

#### **PREP AND SERVE**

Skinning a rabbit is one of the most fluid and gratifying affairs at the conclusion of any hunt out there. Three cuts is all it takes: at breast, head and hips. Break off the legs at the knee joints,

remove the guts from the heart to the entrails, and you've got an animal you can easily cut up into back legs and haunches, forelegs and shoulders, and saddle, for whatever style you wish to cook them.

"The Joy of Cooking," that endless resource of American cookery by Irma S. Rombauer (charmingly first published in 1936 as "The Joy of Cooking: A Compilation of Reliable Recipes with a Casual Culinary Chat") has a fantastic illustration of how to skin and clean a rabbit under its section on game.

A caution though: Check the liver every time. Tularemia, otherwise known as rabbit fever, is present if the liver is spotted with white or entirely white. It is nothing to mess with and easily transferable to humans. For this reason, a lot of hunters skinning rabbits now heed the advice and wear latex gloves.

A general rule in the kitchen is to cook rabbit like you would chicken with one difference: Always leave the bones in, unless you are making a stew. The meat will reward you with more flavor, and it holds together better.

Joe prefers rabbit in a stew, the most famous being hasenpfeffer, which came into vogue with Wisconsin's influx of Germans in the mid-1800s. Another option is lightly breaded and fried.

The former is how I first had rabbit, courtesy of Joe's cast iron. Succulent and toothsome, the rabbit ate well all the way through. Not a dry or knotted bite in the whole meal.

As the days grow shorter and colder with winter officially just 'round the bend, a good bunch of our hunters may find their cabin fever cure out on our state's exceptional land with a rabbit hunt. Many will stretch their heels through thicket and wood the better part of the winter.

I hope more hunters will add to that number. Getting out for rabbit is a great partner hunt and helps fill in the weeks until the warmth returns again.

Kyle Cherek is a culinary historian, food essayist and former host of the Emmy Award-winning TV show "Wisconsin Foodie"

on PBS. He and his wife own Amuse Bouche Entertainment Productions and together create unique culinary events including presentations, cooking demonstrations and storytelling dinners.



## Wild Rabbit with Cherry Tomatoes and Polenta

Morningchores.com has a tremendous selection of recipes to prepare rabbit once you've hunted them. For my part, I enjoy a simple browning in a screaming hot pan, which is then put in an oven to cook. Serve accented by a few vegetables and a side dish. A wild rabbit will have a clean "of the land" flavor, and I am an advocate of accentuating what nature has given us.

#### **INGREDIENTS**

One 3-4 pound rabbit

2 cups cherry tomatoes

2 tablespoons olive oil or grapeseed oil

Salt and pepper to taste

2 tablespoons butter

#### For the polenta:

6 cups water

2 cups yellow cornmeal

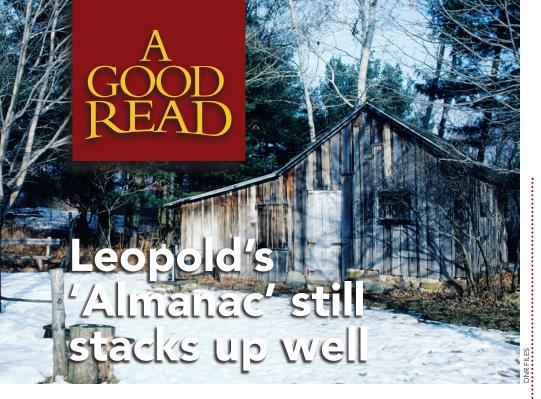
3-4 tablespoons salted butter (to taste and texture)

### INSTRUCTIONS

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Rinse cherry tomatoes, toss in oil and set aside. Cut rabbit into five to eight pieces as desired and clean of buckshot. Wash and dry the rabbit, then salt and pepper moderately.
- Preheat a cast iron or stainless steel pan until screaming hot. Add olive oil or, preferably, grapeseed oil or another high-heat oil to the pan, with a quarter stick of butter added after the oil is hot. Melt the butter into the oil and then add the rabbit. Brown each side, about five to 10 minutes, based on rabbit
- Sprinkle salt over the cherry tomatoes and add them in and around the sides of the rabbit pieces. Put the pan with rabbit and cherry tomatoes in the preheated oven for about 20 minutes.
- Meanwhile to make the polenta, bring 6 cups of water to a boil and gradually whisk in cornmeal. Reduce heat to low and cook until mixture thickens and the cornmeal is tender, stirring often, about 15 minutes. Turn off the heat, add the butter and stir until melted to texture and taste.
- When rabbit is cooked all the way through, nestle it on a serving plate into a bed of polenta. Top with cherry tomatoes and serve hot.



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Earth Day anniversary edition brings his nature writing to a new generation

DAVID HORST

All of the books in the tallest stack in my bookcase have a single name in common: Aldo Leopold.

Some were written by him, others about him. The seminal biography of Leopold by Curt Meine is there. So are some pretty technical tomes on managing wildlife.

A greater number than most people would think prudent are various editions of "A Sand County Almanac," Leopold's conservation classic first published in 1949. Recently, that stack got just a little taller with the addition of a special Earth Day 50th anniversary version available through the Aldo Leopold Foundation in Baraboo.

Leopold's essays combine a deep and searching knowledge of the workings of nature with a poetic and endearing writing style. This is the one book everyone who cares about and seeks to understand nature should have in their own bookcase.

If you are from Wisconsin and like the outdoors, you are remiss if you don't have it. The 2020 edition is your chance. "A Sand County Almanac" is a book to be read — to savor, really - many times.

Read "Thinking Like a Mountain,"

a moving description from a wolf hunt participated in by Leopold. We can imagine the moment he watched the "green fire" drain from the mother wolf as being the spark that led to his understanding of our place in all of this — the land ethic.

This book is the perfect read following the 50th anniversary of Earth Day earlier this year.

#### **ALWAYS IN MIND**

For me, the "Almanac" plays like something resembling a "best of" reel. The descriptions in Leopold's essays linger in the back of my mind and come forward when a relevant situation presents itself.

Cutting firewood, my mind shouts, "Rest, cried the chief sawyer," as "Good Oak" is conjured up from my memory. The brilliant concept of this essay is a saw cutting through natural history one tree growth ring at a time, with Leopold's knowledge able to fill in the events of those life rings.

Last spring, when a combination of snow melt and heavy rains pushed our little creek barely over the driveway, my mind filled with visions of "Come High Water." Leopold's clearly jubilant essay retells how the rising Wisconsin River prevented him from

Aldo Leopold's weathered shack and surrounding land in Baraboo served as his writing inspiration.

leaving The Shack, his Baraboo retreat on the river, to return to teaching at UW-Madison.

Standing in our yard and hearing the honking of geese, the gargling of tundra swans or the squawk of sandhill cranes, I listen and then have to grab the "Almanac" to read "The Geese Return." I am warned once again by Leopold not to be like the educated woman who had never noticed the V-shapes of geese passing over her head twice a year.

Each of his stories is my favorite, all for different reasons. More than 70 years after it was first published, "A Sand County Almanac" is worth having, still serving us with its wisdom.

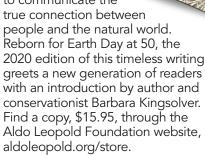
You need this book, or you need it again.

David Horst is a former nature columnist who now does environmental grantmaking for a Fox Valley nonprofit.

#### ABOUT THE BOOK

Published posthumously a year after Aldo Leopold's death in 1948, "A Sand County Almanac" achieved prominence around the first Earth Day in 1970 and has enjoyed

enduring success, selling several million copies and translated into 14 languages. Through science, history and humor, Leopold uses "A Sand County Almanac" and its call for a land ethic to communicate the



## READERS WRITE



#### **BE OUR GUEST**

I have let milkweed grow on the side of my house for a few years now. I start watching it intently for signs of caterpillars around the middle of May, just as soon as it starts popping up. It seemed to take longer than usual this year but by mid-June, these guys started showing up along with milkweed beetles. With just a handful of plants, I counted seven little guests all at the same time — even in the middle of town.

Pete Jaeger Madison



#### SEVERAL HAVE A GROUSE STORY TO SHARE

I was reading your article about a man who was hunting and was surprised a ruffled grouse came and sat with him. I was reminded of the ruffed grouse that befriended us the spring and summer of 2015. We named him "Nerd Bird." He even sat on my husband Kerry's lap when he was on the tractor planting.

Our uncommon friendship started when Nerd Bird followed us because of his, we assumed, attraction to the sound of our four-wheeler as we drove past him, almost the same sound the ruffed grouse makes. Slowly, we were able to get him to trust us, sit on our hand, and the rest is history.

Jody Smith Loyal

I read with great interest the story about the friendly grouse in the Fall issue. For the past three spring maple syrup seasons, I have been greeted and accompanied from tree to tree by "my" grouse. From its behavior, it could only be the same bird year after year.

It joined me each season when I began tapping trees and grew more fearless with each encounter. For the past two years, it would fly over my shoulder, knocking my hat off, landed on my shoulder, landed on the rack of my four-wheeler and ate wild bird seed from my hand multiple times with each visit.

Alan White Superior Finally, a long-awaited revelation when I read Tom Prijic's encounter with the flirty ruffed grouse while at his Amherst Junction deer stand! On a gorgeous fall day in 1992, my family and I were biking on the Root River Trail in southern Minnesota. My sons had surged well ahead of my wife and I, and eventually they stopped along a wooded segment of the trail to rehydrate.

As they awaited us, a ruffed grouse emerged from the entanglement, evaluated them and promptly roosted on one of their front tires. The grouse held fast even when the bike was rolled back and forth in frail attempts to dislodge it.

Being a veterinarian, I mentally began to formulate a list of differential diagnoses that might explain this strange, yet amazing behavior. Was there some form of neurological disease? Had this bird imprinted as someone's pet? It sure did look healthy.

Eventually, we all went our separate ways, but I always wondered. Maybe these experiences indicate ruffed grouse have advanced their people skills as a means toward self-preservation and making the world a better and less foul place!

Arlynn Schwanke, DVM Sun Prairie

Thanks to everyone inspired by the Fall "Your Outdoors" column to share their own tales of ruffed grouse adventures. Such "grouse encounters" seem to keep quite a few folks on their toes.

#### SNAPPER SNAPSHOTS



We walked into our driveway that had recently been re-stoned and saw a snapping turtle making a nest. We live on Huron Lake in Oasis, in Waushara County. I tried to photograph the actual depositing of eggs, but she was very private. We fenced off the area to keep predators away. We will see in two to three months if she was successful.

Rich and Nancy Macia **Oasis** 



I wanted to share this picture of the huge turtle — a snapping turtle, I believe — which I caught sunning itself on a log at Zeloski Marsh, Lake Mills Wildlife Area. My husband and I had been hiking there almost once a week since 2012, when we moved out toward that area. It was one of our favorite places to see lots of wildlife. ... In all the years of hiking, we'd seen lots of turtles, but never one this big. It was amazing.

Sue Varco Sun Prairie

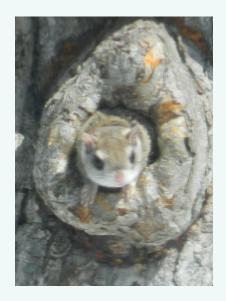
DNR conservation biologist Rori Paloski replies: "You are correct, this is a snapping turtle (Chelydra serpentina). Snapping turtles have a reputation for being very aggressive turtles, which they can be if you get too close, but there is a reason why they act like this. The plastron, or lower shell, on a snapping turtle is very small. So unlike other turtles, they can't pull their head and limbs into their shell for protection. Therefore, they often resort to aggression, which is their only defense mechanism when they are threatened or feel their life is in danger. Best to keep your distance, like you did, and get a photo!"

#### **SQUIRREL SURPRISE**

My dad, Jack Hayek, living in Polk County near Amery, took several photos in 2018. He says he's never seen any photos of flying squirrels in your DNR magazine over the years he has subscribed. If you'd like to print any of them, he'd be particularly pleased and also surprised, as he has been asking me for almost two years to send them to you.

He built a house for flying squirrels several years ago and has a pair who lodge there who he named Squirrelly and Shirley. Thanks, and wishing you

Anne Hayek Amery



#### YOUNG HUNTERS CARRY ON WISCONSIN TRADITIONS

Ava is an incredible girl, and I am so proud of her story and her father who got her to her first 100% natural, no corn kill with a crossbow. Just check out that smile! She practiced, shot, killed, tracked, gutted and processed this beautiful deer with the help of family and friends. True grit in these Northwoods, Girls rule.

Jen Young Hazelhurst



I'm originally from Ridgeland. I live in Rice Lake and hunt on my parents' acreage. My father-in-law and I took my two oldest, Gabriel and Madaline, hunting this year for the first time.

George Handorf Rice Lake

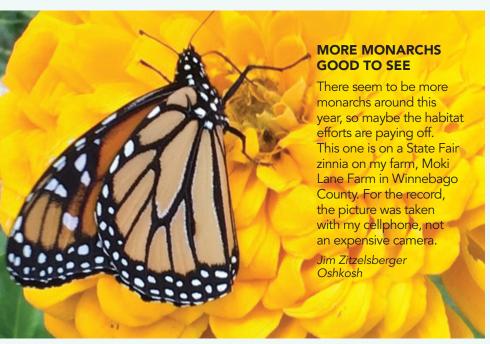
Last year, I took two grandsons out hunting. Nick and Nathan, both 12, were able to get two bucks on the standard nine-day hunt in November. This year, I took two more grandkids out on the youth hunt — Rachel, 14, and Joe, 11. Rachel was able to get a nice eight-point buck. I am proud of my four grandkids. We hunt in Walworth County on private property.

Todd N. Hitzeman La Grange Park, Illinois













#### **RIDING HIGH FROM READER PRAISE**

I've enjoyed Wisconsin Natural Resources for many years, and the Fall 2020 issue is a terrific example of the unique service the magazine provides to Wisconsin citizens. The Fall issue contained interesting articles and photographs featuring the different ways Wisconsin residents enjoy the outdoors — hunting, running, photography and more.

Further, the issue had several articles thoughtfully addressing scientific issues in the outdoors — e.g., several articles on water plants and several more on declining bird populations — that simply cannot be found anywhere else. Thanks for all you do, and keep up the good work.

Tim O'Shea Madison

Loved the Fall 2020 issue! I really appreciated the recommendations in Good Reads; I hope you can do that again.

Rita Schmidt Madison



We got our Fall

2020 issue today in the mail. I LOVE the enclosed bookmark in this issue. I hope this is something you will include in every issue. In this day and age of e-books, I prefer the feel of a hardcover book and a beautiful bookmark, which you have provided. Thanks again.

Joyce Rasmussen Waukesha

I think the Fall 2020 issue of the magazine is the best ever! I loved the articles about the women hunters, especially. I started bird hunting with my husband, Jim, the year I turned 40 and have had some great times. We have gone to South Dakota pheasant hunting every year since 2002.

We have hunted with guys from all over the country and in all that time, I have been the only woman hunting there. Our group agreed to cancel this year due to the virus. Keep up the good work!

Jane Leverance Brooklyn

Thanks to so many readers who offered such kind feedback. We'll continue trying to bring you the best magazine we can every quarter, with bonus items and special inserts when possible. Enjoy the NHC Field Notes and Friends of Wisconsin State Parks calendar in this issue, and happy 2021!

#### STORY AND PHOTO BY PHIL PORTER

It was Oct. 14, 2016, the penultimate day of the newly extended trout season in Wisconsin.

I had commitments to four sons that would preclude me from fishing the final day, which turned out to be hampered by miserable weather anyway. Sometimes the fishing gods have a way of consoling one mourning the end of something even before it officially ends.

This day proved to be one of those rare, spiritual, ethereal fishing days on which the forces of the universe seemed to align. It was the kind of day we all yearn for every time we go out but which, by the nature of its rarity, makes it all the more soul-pleasing.

The weather was partly cloudy, air temperature mid-50s, water low and easily

navigable. Periodic brisk autumn winds blew through the mixed coniferous and deciduous forest, making leaf litter and pine needles in the water an issue.

Because of that, I didn't expect great fishing. I changed my original plan of fishing my favorite stretch of creek in its entirety to one where I would fish part of that length but then go upstream.

I was heading farther than I ever had, using my rapidly fading time to explore uncharted territory for next season. A single vague comment during a chance encounter with a veteran of this creek gave me high

"Ever been beyond that bridge? Some nice holes up there," he said, nonchalantly.

Coming up to the new territory, I was already doing well, with a number of sizeable browns caught and released. The upstream extension accelerated the pace of the action, in addition to being very beautiful scenery once I got beyond the large bridge where the highway crossed over.



Maple, birch, oak and pine danced in the breeze, cascading leaves and needles along sheer rock walls trickling with miniature waterfalls into the gurgling creek below. The stinging nettles lining the banks were mercifully dying back.

My plan was to stop at an even dozen fish. My 12th was a smallish but lively beautiful trout. As I started to pack up, I asked myself, "Why turn back now?"

It was a gorgeous autumn afternoon. I wasn't at work. Weather and water conditions were near ideal. I was experiencing an eye-pleasing new stretch of the creek, and the fish were on, better than average in size and number.

I decided to press on, just "around the next bend," I said to myself, hoping for one more sizeable fish to cap off the season.

#### **SAVING THE BEST FOR LAST**

When I rounded the next turn in the creek, I was met with the most spectacular pool I had ever seen on any of the half dozen sections of this creek I had waded. The water took a sharp

turn against a rock wall then cascaded over a large, fallen hardwood tree to create a small waterfall into a large, deep pool with complex current patterns over and under the log.

The approach on the right bank was ideal — knee-deep water with firm sand, not the mushy silt plaguing the creek's slacker waters in some spots. It allowed numerous casting

I approached silently and methodically, with reverence and anticipation. Two-thirds of the way through my first retrieve, a large brown charged out of the depths and struck.

Just as he did, I saw a second trout, at least as large, in hot pursuit. That one turned away with a silvery flash as the first trout took the hook ferociously.

I set the hook and played the trout a number of minutes, working him slightly downstream and out of the current. I had him. A quick measurement against landmarks I'd memorized on my pole — 17 inches — and he was back in the creek, bolting off to the

depths for a rest.

It is against conventional wisdom to expect a second fish from the same pool immediately, especially with the turmoil that had just occurred. However, I knew there was another big one in there. What would a few casts

I tossed back in a slightly different trajectory — nothing. Then I cast in the exact spot I had for the first fish and was hit promptly by a strike more typical of a larger game fish.

Another battle ensued, this time resulting in landing a thick, 18½-inch brown trout with gorgeous colors and a strong, mature jaw bone holding the hook. Again, he was released quickly and without harm.

That was it, my season was over. It couldn't get any better than this. Man, was I glad I went around the next bend that day! I put my pole over my shoulder and headed downstream.

Phil Porter is a longtime reader and angler and first-time magazine contributor — from Eau Claire.

## BACK IN THE DAY

## There's plenty of life in dead of winter

#### KATHRYN A. KAHLER

The idea of winter walks, highlighted in this issue's cover story, is nothing new.

George Knudsen was DNR's chief naturalist and the author of countless articles and DNR publications. His short nature notes were a regular feature on the inside front cover of this magazine until he retired in the early 1980s.

In his book, "Nature Theme Hikes," a compilation of 70 ideas for naturalist-led hikes,

he cautioned naturalists against lecturing hikers, instead promoting a conversational approach to instilling an appreciation for nature.



George Knudsen

One of his hikes, "Nature in Winter," offers tips for identifying trees and shrubs by bark, buds, twigs and leaf scars; observing hibernating insects



Blue jays withstand Wisconsin winters.

beneath loose bark on a rotten log; and how to find skunk cabbage fruits, liverworts, mosses and evergreen ferns on hillside seepages and in unfrozen swamps.

"When snow is exceptionally deep, as in drifts," he wrote in that book entry, "try to explain how glaciers form and discuss how they actually moved by 'plastic action."

Knudsen wrote another winter-themed piece for the January 1979 issue of Wisconsin Natural Resources, inviting readers to get out for "the fresh air, exercise and mental relaxation" of a winter nature hike. Excerpted here, it's as timely now as it was then.

# Cmon, take a winter nature nike

GEORGE J. KNUDSEN

Chief naturalist, DNR

inter is here! The ground is covered with snow and it's cold outside, so the only thing to do is to stay in your house, watch TV and wait for spring, right?

Wrong! You can take an eye-opening, invigorating winter nature hike. If you are observant, you will be surprised at all the interesting, even exciting, things revealed by the winter landscape.

Most people hike on foot and that's great, but cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are two excellent, quiet and increasingly popular ways to "hike," too. And you snowmobilers can give your mechanical steeds a well-deserved rest while you hike awhile, warm up a bit and look around a lot.

State parks, state forests and other public lands are only a short drive for most Wisconsin folks. Some of you can hike on your own land and enjoy its winter offerings. Other private lands can also be used when permission is given by landowners.

No matter how short your hike will be, check the weather, dress warmly, wear waterproof footwear and a warm hat and gloves, and know where you're going.

You can hike just for the fresh air, exercise and mental relaxation, or you can take a more specialized hike to see birds, animal signs, plants in winter or to take photographs. Or you can mix 'em all together and look for anything and everything.

Planning your route through a number of habitat types will greatly increase chances to see animals and their signs or to hear bird calls.

Dozens of species of resident and visiting birds inhabit Wisconsin in winter. They include: majestic bald eagles that can be seen flying or perched along open water stretches of the Wisconsin and Mississippi rivers; soaring red-tailed hawks; big chisel-billed, fiery-crested pileated woodpeckers; noisy, ever-alert blue jays; and tiny, sassy, scolding chickadees.

Mammals are generally more difficult to see than birds, but gray foxes and red squirrels are common exceptions, along with bounding cottontail rabbits. If you're lucky, and quiet, you may see a deer, mink or weasel.

If you want to be an animal detective, look for the signs left by animals in freshly fallen, soft snow. Look for tracks of single animals, well-worn game trails, feathers, hair, droppings, tree dens, burrows in the snow and "forms" where animals have rested.

Where animals have fed is evidenced by gnawed, nibbled and nipped plants; empty nut shells and pine cone scales; wood chips on the snow below fresh holes made by woodpeckers; predator-killed animals, etc.

Follow a set of animal tracks and try to figure out what kind of animal made them, what it did along the way. If you see the tracks of "Bigfoot," go home and watch TV.

Leafless but not lifeless trees and shrubs offer dandy silhouettes, bark colors and textures. Pines, cedars, spruces and firs, evergreen ferns, lichens and green mosses contrast nicely against the pure white snow.

The sea of snow itself and its snowdrift "tidal waves," hoarfrost on trees, icicles, cold sparkling streams and fantastic sunsets (and sunrises, if you can get up) will add much to your adventures in Wisconsin's snowy landscapes.

One final thought: When your fingers, toes, cheeks and nose are stinging from the cold, just remember that under that cold, cold snow lie the crisply frozen dead bodies of billions of mosquitoes. You'll feel better instantly!

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#### ICE FISHING — STATEWIDE



With generally fewer people recreating outdoors in winter, the season is well-suited to social distancing. Hardy souls making the effort to bundle up and brave the elements may find but a few like-minded hikers or occasional fellow skiers to skirt on the trails. They call these "silent sports" for a reason, suggesting an ambience of solitude all the more apparent on frigid February days.

If there's one winter activity where it's possible to enjoy both cold-weather camaraderie and enough elbow room for comfort, it's ice fishing. Once the sled is loaded, the trek onto the frozen sheet made, the spot staked out, hole drilled and tip-up in place, there's only the waiting and watching left — with an occasional wave at a fellow angler out on the ice as well.

Throughout Wisconsin, state properties offer abundant opportunities to take to the ice with fishing gear in gloved hand. Tim Sweet of Appleton captured this scene overlooking Sawyer Harbor at Potawatomi State Park in Sturgeon Bay, submitting it for last year's Friends of Wisconsin State Parks photo contest.

Learn more about the sport at dnr.wi.gov/topic/Fishing/icefishing and find a park to partake at dnr.wi.gov/topic/Parks. And don't forget about Free Fishing Weekend, Jan. 16-17. All state waters are open to free fishing, no license required — warm boots, coat and hat highly advisable.

