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WISCONSIN NATURAL RESOURCES

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A smart start to kayaking



Create a Costa Rican connection

State of the sturgeon

Hunters share a land ethic

African savannas and Wisconsin state parks



Blue Mound State Park offers spectacular views and unique geology. A swimming pool is available in summer. Over 20 miles of scenic hiking and a family campground make the park a popular year-round destination.

Outdoor adventures with kids bring curious comparisons.

Story and photos by Diane Schwartz

"It looks like Africa," said 8-year-old Marjorie as we drove into Governor Nelson State Park on a cold March day.

I paused, a bit thrown by her thoughtful comment. I mean, I had never heard Wisconsin and Africa being linked geographically. And even if comparisons could be made, you'd think they'd be made during a blistering heat wave and not when the ground was still frozen.

Yet, she was right.

In March, the Wisconsin savanna does look like the African savanna, a sea of tan grass with a few trees dotting the landscape. I almost expected a lion to appear, the image was so vivid in my mind.

This 8-year-old girl made a deep connection between Wisconsin and Africa that can only be made by experience. This blew me away. I love being shown how to see something in an entirely new way and sometimes it takes a child to do it.

This experience is one of many I've had while taking kids on outings to state properties. Over the past three years, the Goodman Community Center has partnered with the Sierra Club's Inner City



Is there a better playground than a leaf pile?

Outings program to provide outdoor opportunities to more than 300 low-income kids and their families. Outings include hiking, geocaching, eagle watching on the Wisconsin River, cookouts in the middle of winter, Maple Syrup Days at MacKenzie Environmental Education Center and more.

The Goodman Community Center

provides the transportation and staff while the Sierra Club provides volunteer leadership, a healthy snack and admission fees. It's a great arrangement that has introduced many kids to the outdoors.

In the process, they're learning about the outdoors, having fun and gaining valuable life skills. Here are a few stories.

"Don't let it get me"

I grew up tromping around in Pheasant Branch Creek in Middleton and visiting my mom's childhood farm in Sauk County. I had secret hide-outs that I claimed as my own. I could get lost in play and spend hours in the outdoors unsupervised. Therefore, I thought that everyone knew how to hike and enjoy the outdoors.

Not so.

Kids today generally do not have such freedom. Their lives are more structured and free play is limited or nonexistent. Today, we have to take kids outdoors and teach them the basics.

For example, on that same, cold Africa-like trip to Governor Nelson State Park, I pointed out a red-tailed hawk to the group. Immediately, two girls covered their heads and screamed, "Don't let it get me!"

It never occurred to me that someone could fear a hawk. For me, hawks always

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WISCONSIN NATURAL RESOURCES

February 2012
Volume 36, Number 1



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FRONT COVER: Sea kayaking has become a very popular way to travel among the Apostle Islands and along the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore.

PHILIP SCHWARZ

BACK COVER: Camel’s Bluff at Mill Bluff State Natural Area. **INSET:** Crustose lichens cling to sandstone rock faces. For more information, or to order a guidebook to State Natural Areas for \$18.00 (postage and tax included) contact the State Natural Areas Program, Bureau of Endangered Resources, DNR, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707 or visit dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna

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Editor-in-chief Natasha Kassulke
Circulation Manager Karen Ecklund
Art Direction Thomas J. Senatori
Printing Schumann Printers



PUBL CE-012
ISSN-0736-2277

Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine (USPS #34625000) is published bimonthly in February, April, June, August, October and December by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 101 S. Webster St., Madison, WI 53702. The magazine is sustained through paid subscriptions. No tax money or license fees are used. Preferred Periodicals postage paid at Madison, WI. POSTMASTER and readers: subscription questions and address changes should be sent to Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine, P.O. Box 7191, Madison, WI 53707. Subscription rates are: \$8.97 for one year, \$15.97 for two years, \$21.97 for three years. Toll-free subscription inquiries will be answered at 1-800-678-9472.

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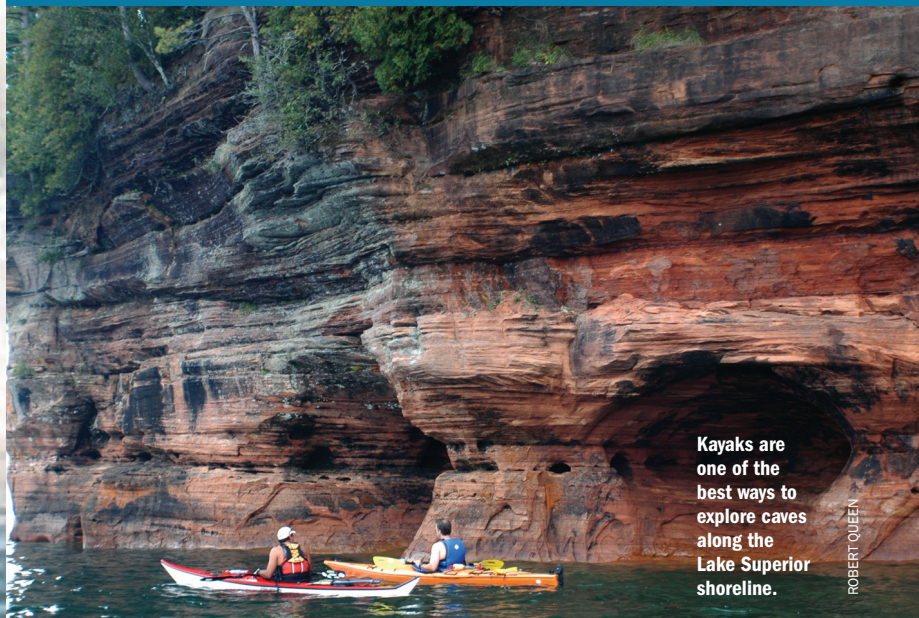
Kayakers love to paddle when "the surf's up" in Sheboygan on Lake Michigan.

KAYAK WISCONSIN:

A mainstream blast

**THRILLING,
ACCESSIBLE,
FAMILY FUN –
BUT BE PREPARED.**

DEAN KRUMASZ



Kayaks are one of the best ways to explore caves along the Lake Superior shoreline.

ROBERT QUEEN

Joanne M. Haas

Kayakers have discovered Wisconsin's jamming water playground of 15,000-plus lakes separated by more than 12,600 rivers and streams meandering through some of the nation's most stunning terrain — punctuated with some mighty spectacular public parks.

"Wisconsin has so much variety in the sort of water you can paddle," says Darren Bush, the "chief paddling evangelist" and owner of Rutabaga, the Madison-based business dedicated to outdoor sports and recreation. "From the tiny little streams of southwestern Wisconsin to Lake Superior to the scenic rivers like the Namekagon and Bois Brule and on to the sandy-bottomed Lower Wisconsin. Don't forget the Door County Peninsula — a kayaker's paradise. It's all here."



Kayaks are great ways to explore Sand Island and other islands along the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. The lighthouse on Sand Island is considered by many to be one of the most beautiful lighthouses on Lake Superior and the structure was built from sandstone quarried right at the building site.



FRANKIE FULLER

Kent Wahlberg enjoys paddling big waters but equally enjoys quiet river trips closer to his home in Fort Atkinson.

It is nearly impossible to say exactly how many kayakers use Wisconsin lakes or how many Wisconsin citizens are kayakers who use Wisconsin lakes. One big reason is Wisconsin does not have mandatory registration of these watercraft. However, there are some numbers out there to show how the sport is exploding.

The nonprofit Outdoor Foundation in April reported kayaking was among the adventure sports that enjoyed a nationwide increase in 2010 from participation levels in 2009. The foundation's 2011 *Outdoor Recreation Participation Top-Line Report* shows kayaking for all participants age 6 and older increased 34.6 percent — that's 473,000 kayakers.

Roughly 10 million nationwide enjoy kayaking out of the nearly 138 million Americans ages 6 and older who enjoy at least one outdoor activity. That's 10.1 billion outings and, according to the Washington, D.C.-based foundation's 2011 report, kayaking is among those sports that showed "significant increases" in the last year or so.

Need proof? Drive anywhere in Wisconsin during the open water months. Seeing a kayak tied to a car roof is about as common as seeing the family's bikes

secured to the rear bumper. Kayaking is one popular mainstream sport.

Makes you want to just grab any kayak, slide those hips in and join in the paddling fun, right? And that's the problem when something so accessible and fun attracts a lot of new participants. The good news is, it is an easily solved problem. The bad news is, if left unchecked, it can become a deadly problem.

Some kayakers are a bit too excited to get started. Sure, it looks easy enough to do, but there is a knowledge base and skill set all kayakers need.

Enter DNR Conservation Warden Supervisor Dave Oginski of Ashland and Bush, the owner of one of the best-known paddling shops around and the main force behind Canoeopia (visit canoeopia.com/canoeopia/ — the "world's largest paddling exposition" held in Madison every March).

Interested in joining the nationwide community of kayakers? Maybe you consider yourself an intermediate kayaker who, as Bush says, is a beginner with an attitude. Or, perhaps you've been kayaking and call yourself a veteran paddler. Whatever the case, read on for valuable

advice from these two experts. Each man approaches kayaking from a different angle. Both are passionate about the sport and about keeping it safe and fun for all.

Lake Superior – Wisconsin's toughest paddling

Days after a kayaker died when a group paddle was ambushed by the unpredictable waves of moody Lake Superior, a concerned paddler called the Department of Natural Resources with this sobering soliloquy: "It seems like Lake Superior is where kayakers go to die."

Warden Oginski, a kayaker himself who enjoys Lake Superior paddles, knew exactly what the caller meant. He understood it as a kayaker — and as a law enforcement officer who has responded to boaters in distress or worse.

"Lake Superior is beautiful. Our shorelines and sea caves are awe-inspiring," he says of the national scenic route that includes the Apostle Islands — a popular site for the increasingly popular sport. "The islands are uninhabited. This is wilderness at its best. You can launch anywhere. It is inexpensive and it is a great



ROBERT ROLLEY



ROBERT QUEEN

Paddle with buddies and practice life-saving skills.

thing to do."

Lake Superior offers exciting and exhilarating boating — no doubt about it. However, for the unprepared paddler, it can turn deadly and unmanageable for even the most experienced paddler in a matter of seconds. Still, Oginski says Lake Superior's reputation with some as the watery grave for kayakers doesn't have to be. But it will require preparation before tying the new kayak to the car roof and heading for the great lake.

"People develop some very good kayaking skills in other lakes and rivers. And they are confident in their abilities. But, it is a whole different world to tackle Lake Superior. You need to think about Lake Superior's environment — it's different!" Oginski says. "I don't know how to over-emphasize this — you must respect the lake. The locals respect the lake. They understand how quickly the lake can change."

Ever wonder why it's uncommon to see a local resident fishing or boating at night,

or even leaving their boats on the lake after sunset? "They know how Lake Superior creates its own weather — a single storm splits into two, or one forms right on the water."

And the sad thing for Oginski, he suspects the pre-paddle steps that could avoid a tragedy may not be on the radar of kayakers drawn to the internationally-known lake.

The Lake Superior wake-up call

The case of a June kayaker fatality that prompted the call was eerily similar to an October 2010 fatality — same beach launch site, good equipment, experienced paddlers.

Here's the wake-up call: the best equipment and hours of kayaking experience on rivers and inland lakes don't matter much when it comes to launching into Lake Superior — a stunningly beautiful lake that can unleash squalls without warning, fueling winds approaching 50 miles per hour with 6- to 12-foot seas.

"Even with the best training, many people should not be trying to tackle kayaking the sea caves or the distant islands. You can keep it close to shore or in the bay and still have a great time," says Oginski, a longtime canoeist who added kayaking on Lake Superior when he assumed his warden supervisor post in 2007. "And my hunch is a lot of the kayakers are not

as knowledgeable about the Lake Superior environment as they should be."

Oginski practices the steps and mindset he believes a kayaker should adopt as the routine preparation when planning a fun paddle in Lake Superior. (See Oginski's kayaking trip tips on page 10.)

He strongly urges the kayakers coming to Lake Superior to visit the National Park Service Apostle Islands office to talk with the rangers about conditions and grab a water map. Other options would be to check in with the local marinas and bait shops as well as some reliable weather websites.

"Even on the best days on Lake Superior the wind can switch. And if the forecast is for a wind switch, you need to be able to place yourself accordingly to be able to handle it," Oginski says. "It is so critical. It is life-threatening when you have a wind. Sometimes the wind forecast isn't exactly what you see. The waves could come from the tankers. You might be in your kayak and wonder, 'Where did these huge rollers come from?'"

Oginski enjoys the exercise and viewing the lake from the seat in his kayak. But it's all about safe outdoor fun. "I won't ever put myself in a situation where I put my life at risk."

And that may be the best advice of all.

Kayaking is paddling with the water

In 1990 Darren Bush went from being a dutiful state employee to a guy in pursuit of his passions. That meant working his way up from earning five bucks an hour selling canoes and kayaks evenings and weekends to becoming the outright owner of the independent family-owned Rutabaga Paddlesports several years ago.

"The line between work and life is pretty blurry if it exists at all," Bush says.

In addition to the mountain of retailer awards from various national outdoor magazines, Rutabaga also offers the Rutabaga Outdoor Programs — the largest flatwater paddling school nationwide with classes for all ages. Bush also has served on the Board of Directors of the American Canoe Association, the Professional Paddlesports Association and the Outdoor Industry Association Board.

Walk into Rutabaga on Madison's south side and, if you can find your way around the canoes, kayaks and every type of outdoor gear imaginable, you'll likely find Bush delivering a watersports primer of sorts to a customer.

"I love being out on the water in a kayak that fits me. It's like an extension of my body," Bush says. "After a while you begin to lose the distinction between where your body ends and your boat begins, sort of an aquatic centaur. You can really feel a connection to the water when you are so close to it."

"It's overly simplistic, but the way I put it is that you paddle on the water in a canoe...but you paddle *with* the water in a kayak."

Just like the rest of the country, Bush's business has seen an increase in kayak sales.

"The increase in sales in kayaks has been in the double digits every year for a decade," Bush says. "It has become a mainstream activity, not an extreme sport. That's easy to see when you consider the appearance of kayaking in mainstream advertising. It's considered normal."

How to pick your kayak

Twenty years ago there were two kinds of boats — the sea kayaks and whitewater boats. "As manufacturers realized that a middle ground was needed, the sport really took off," Bush says.

Those changes have led to a wide variety in materials, weights and prices.

"The most important factors in selecting a kayak concern the ability to lift it up. If you can't lift it, you won't use it," Bush says, adding the kayak also must be comfortable and fit your body. "Or, you won't last very long."

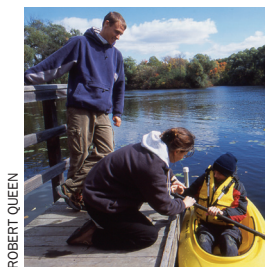
The first recreational kayaks were between 12 and 14 feet long and pretty Spartan," Bush says. "But that's where the growth is and manufacturers responded with very nice features that are comparable to larger, more expensive boats."

"Customers don't see a problem paying a few hundred dollars more for a seat that won't put their legs to sleep after half an hour," he says.

Bush says his customers include canoeists who also kayak, but the majority of his kayak customers are new to the sport. "We see groups of women who want to do something together, families, and folks who already cross-country ski or cycle and want to add kayaking to their repertoire."

Every kayak buyer at Rutabaga gets asked these kinds of questions:

- Where do you see yourself paddling? Rivers, lakes, ponds?
- How much gear do you plan on taking with you? Enough for a day trip,



ROBERT QUEEN

A MAZE

OF CHANNELS AND BACKWATERS AWAIT

Joanne M. Haas

GO WEST: LOWER ST. CROIX, LOWER WISCONSIN STATE RIVERWAY

Sure, Lake Superior is living large in a kayak. But how about launching into one of the state's 12,600 rivers and streams? Try the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway and the Lower St. Croix River for starters.

But, just like with Lake Superior, you have to do a bit of homework. Lucky for you, there are two DNR wardens who have done it for you: Conservation Warden Martin Stone at the Lower Wisconsin River and Conservation Warden Supervisor David Hausman stationed at the St. Croix River.

THE LOWER WISCONSIN STATE RIVERWAY: SOUTH OF THE PRAIRIE DU SAC DAM

The Lower Wisconsin State Riverway is appealing for those looking to try out their sea and recreational kayaks. But, Stone says, don't leave the canoes behind for what Stone calls the 92.3 "unimpeded miles" of riverway from the Prairie du Sac dam in Sauk County to where it meets the Mississippi River near Wyalusing State Park in Grant County.

"It contains a maze of channels and backwater areas for sea kayaks and recreational type kayaks," Stone says. "But kayakers need to be aware of conditions in these areas, as well as special regulations pertaining to the Lower Wisconsin River."

Here are Stone's special reminders and tips:

- A personal flotation device (a life jacket also called a PFD) is required for every person on board a boat, motorized and non-motorized;
- The PFD must be a Type 1, 2 or 3 (meaning a wearable type, and not a seat cushion);
- Must be U.S. Coast Guard approved; and
- Be of the correct size for the intended wearer.
- If you swim in the river, wearing your PFD is also recommended due to drop-offs and occasional swift currents.
- Lighting is required sunset to sunrise. A light must be carried on non-motorized boats and shown in time to avoid collisions.
- A special riverway law requires a waterproof container for trash in every boat/canoe and glass containers are prohibited within the riverway.
- Camping along the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway is available on islands and sandbars, two state parks, and several private and municipal campgrounds.

THE LOWER ST. CROIX RIVER: NORTH OF STILLWATER, MINN.

"The Lower St. Croix River appeals to many to try out their sea kayaks," Hausman says. "The lower end of this national scenic riverway contains large open waters suitable for sea kayaks." But, Hausman says, kayakers should note the following:

- The lower portion from north of Stillwater, Minn., to the confluence with the Mississippi River. This area appeals to large power boats, so stick to shorelines. If possible, go out in early mornings or on weekdays because weekend traffic can be heavy.
- Be prepared to deal with rough conditions due to boat wakes.
- Learn how to re-enter your boat if you capsize in rough water.
- Wear bright visible clothing and personal flotation devices (PFDs) so power boaters can spot you.
- Be aware of strong currents at narrow channels and bridges.
- Pick your area; the St. Croix River north of Stillwater and the Wis. Hwy. 64 bridge is quieter and more scenic.
- If you are camping, plan ahead. Most beaches are privately owned, but camping is available in some areas. The National Park Service requires a camping permit on properties they manage.



HYPOTHERMIA

OUTSMART A QUICK KILLER

Joanne M. Haas

Hypothermia is one of the greatest dangers for kayakers — and anyone who enjoys being out on the water. Usually considered a coldwater or cold-weather threat, the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary says the serious life-threatening condition can happen in water as warm as 80 degrees. Kayakers need to learn about hypothermia and how to keep it at bay.

HYPOTHERMIA

The condition occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it. This is a medical emergency. The Mayo Clinic defines hypothermia as occurring as your body temperature passes below 95 degrees Fahrenheit.

- **CAUSES:** Common causes for kayakers are exposure to cold weather or immersion into cold water.
- **SYMPTOMS:** Shivering is one of the first signs as it is your body's attempt to warm itself. Constant shivering is a sign of hypothermia. As the body continues to cool, the symptoms intensify gradually and often without the victim realizing it.
- **TIMELINE OF HYPOTHERMIA:** As the U.S. Coast Guard says, if you can't get out in 5 to 15 minutes, you might not get out on your own power. Here is their timeline of symptoms:
 - 0-2 minutes after sudden immersion: Cold shock response that includes hyperventilating, rapid heart beat, increased blood pressure and gasp reflex.
 - 2-30 minutes: Functional disability. This can include constant shivering, slurred speech, mumbling, confusion, drowsiness, very low energy, apathy, poor decision-making, shallow breathing, weak pulse and progressive loss of consciousness.
 - 30 minutes and longer: Hypothermia cools body to the state of unconsciousness.
 - If your head goes under, drowning occurs in 30 to 120 minutes.
 - If your head remains above water, cardiac arrest and death occurs in 90 to 180 minutes or more depending upon water temperature, body size and more specific factors.

PREVENT HYPOTHERMIA

Here are tips from the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary:

- Dress for possible immersion.
- Wear your personal flotation device — known as a PFD.
- Fuel up. Eat healthy foods such as nuts so you have the energy to react to the situation.
- Do not drink alcoholic beverages prior to or during your paddle. In addition to the impaired judgment you will have, alcohol makes blood vessels dilate and lose heat even faster.

WHAT TO DO IN AN EMERGENCY

More tips from the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary:

- If you can't get to shore or back in your kayak, **DO NOT SWIM** as you will lose body heat even faster. Floating in your PFD is your best bet.
 - In 70-degree water, you can survive for about 18 hours while floating with a PFD.
 - In 70-degree water, you can survive for about 13 hours treading water.
 - In 70-degree water, your survival rate is about 10 hours swimming.
 - In 55-degree water, the survival window is 3.5 hours floating in a PFD, three hours treading water and two hours swimming.
 - In 35-degree water, the survival window is less than two hours floating in a PFD, one hour and 25 minutes treading water and about 45 minutes swimming.
- If you are wearing a PFD, bring your knees to your chest to try to contain body heat. If you are with others, huddle together to save heat. If you are wearing a Type 3 life vest, do not draw up your knees. Instead, keep your legs together and arms at your side while leaning back to keep your face out of the water.
- Keep your head above water.
- Get medical care as quickly as possible once you are out of the water.

GET INFORMED, BE PREPARED, AND YOU CAN ENJOY EVERY PADDLE.

- overnight, a longer trip?
- No kayak can do everything, so would you rather have a kayak that's more stable and slower, or more efficient and a little less stable?
 - Do you want a kayak that goes straight as an arrow, maneuvers like a sports car, or somewhere in between?
 - How important is the weight of the kayak? Are you putting it on top of your car? On a trailer? Leaving it at your cottage on the lake?

Based upon the answers, Bush and his staff work to match the appropriate kayak with the paddler. "The seat comfort is way more important than subtleties in hull design," he says. "You can't realize the benefits of a design if you can't stand the seatback."

A little instruction goes a long way

Commandment number one from Bush: get instruction. "It's the best way to learn quickly some of the basics — and do it before you develop bad habits."

And instruction will rapidly increase your comfort in the kayak.

As far as places to paddle, Bush says it is up to the paddler but he suggests going where you plan to paddle the most to build those vital skills.

"That said, the bigger and swifter the water, the more you need instruction AND guidance," Bush says. "Practicing whitewater paddling in a slow river will not prepare you for a swifter current. Practicing self-rescue in a swimming pool will not prepare you for rescuing yourself in wind and waves."

There are several kayak symposia in the Midwest designed for beginners and novices to expert paddlers. It's a great way to get a jump on a skill set that might take you a year or two to develop on your own. Rutabaga presents the Door County Sea Kayak Symposium every July that is designed for beginners through intermediate paddlers, though there are a few advanced classes as well. The beginner classes, he says, are the most fun to teach.

"Paddling is my passion. My wife once asked me what I'd do if I couldn't paddle anymore. I told her I'd keep teaching, because that would continue to increase the number of people learning to love the water."



Joanne M. Haas is the public affairs manager for DNR's Division of Enforcement and Science.

ROBERT QUEEN



OGINSKI'S KAYAKING TRIP TIPS: THEY'RE LIFE SAVERS

Joanne M. Haas

DNR Conservation Warden Supervisor Dave Oginski offers tips and websites to make your kayaking trip to Lake Superior one you'll recall for a long time.

- 1 **Use the right kayak and get a bold color:** There are different types for swift water, inland lakes and big water. Go to a reputable outfitter and work with a knowledgeable salesperson. Purchase or rent a kayak that will be easy to spot on the water. There will be other watercraft and kayaks low in the water, making them harder to spot.
- 2 **Take a course:** You'll learn stroke and rescue techniques, as well as other cool stuff about the sport. Ask a reputable outfitter in your area or check out the list of websites below. Also, consider an introductory, four-hour course, Paddlesports America, which has been approved by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators and is the official course for the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. Then, practice what you've learned again and again — see #3.
- 3 **Practice life-saving skills:** The biggest fear in kayaking is flipping over. Master the skills to get yourself back up, pump out the kayak or help a buddy out of an emergency situation. Practice in a shallow area or even a pool.
- 4 **Kayak skirt will not save you:** The kayak skirt is made to prevent water from entering your craft but it's not fail-safe in turbulent seas. It offers limited protection. Revisit tip #3.
- 5 **Paddle with buddies:** You're safer and it's more fun. Tell someone your trip plan so they can contact help if you fail to report.
- 6 **Wear a colorful life vest:** There are comfortable personal flotation vests made specifically for paddlers. Do not paddle without wearing one. And go for a bright color or bright pattern that will make you easier to see while on the water — red and yellow are good choices.
- 7 **Your trip gear bag items:** Take a dry bag and pack smart. Here are some valuable items: a cell phone, dry clothes in the event you do get wet and need to stay warm, a hand pump should you flip and need to empty the craft, water shoes, and a compass or GPS so you know where you are.
Lake Superior is known for fog. Another valuable item is a portable marine radio, known to have saved a few kayakers' lives. Other good items to include: towline, waterproof matches, food and water, an extra paddle, first-aid and repair kits, signaling device (flare kit), whistle and maps. Wear a hat and sunscreen.
- 8 **Wet suit or dry suit:** Pack one. Lake Superior stays chilly, making the chances of hypothermia great. Again, talk with a reputable outfitter.
- 9 **Register your kayak:** It is mandatory in Minnesota but voluntary in Wisconsin. Chances of you getting your kayak back should it be lost are better if those who find your kayak can find you.
- 10 **Valuable websites:**
 - For wind and weather: tidesandcurrents.noaa.gov/ofs/Isofs/fore_wind.shtml
www.crh.noaa.gov/greatlakes/?c=obs&l=ls&p=a
 - National Park Service — Apostle Islands: nps.gov/apis/planyourvisit/kayaking.htm
 - Bayfield Chamber of Commerce: bayfield.org/lake_superior_activities_kayaking.php
 - Where-to-go pages showing state-by-state kayak clubs, schools and training centers: kayakonline.com
 - The National Association of State Boating Law Administrators: nasbla.org
 - The American Red Cross can teach you CPR, swimming, lifesaving and more: redcross.org
 - The U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary offers online courses. (Click on "boating education") cgaux.org

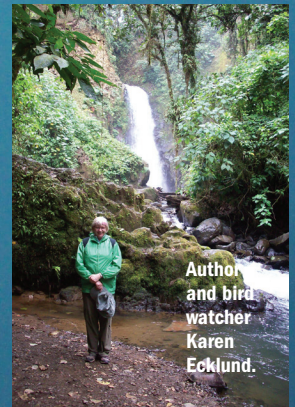
“Our” birds

Karen Ecklund

Making a Costa Rican connection.

What began as a spring 2011 trip to Costa Rica with my son, turned into a mission.

Five years ago, on my first trip to Costa Rica, I visited the cloud forest near Montverde and the lowland jungle on the Caribbean coast. This time I wanted to spend time on the Osa Peninsula in southwestern Costa Rica on the Pacific Coast.



Author and bird watcher Karen Ecklund.

LARS ECKLUND-MITCHELL



Arriving at the Osa Peninsula.

KAREN ECKLUND



A view from the lodge.

KAREN ECKLUND

Great kiskadee.

ELEANOR BRICCETTI

According to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, *osa* means “bear” in Spanish and the peninsula hosts some of the richest biodiversity in all of Central America, plus the last remaining old growth rain forest on the western flank of Central America. My son was game; this would be his first trip to this part of the world.

My colleagues at the magazine office suggested I try to spot Wisconsin birds in the Osa. The foundation reports that the Osa Peninsula provides wintering habitat for 55 species of Wisconsin birds — at last count — 20 percent of our state’s breeding birds, including 19 considered conservation priorities. I became determined to see a few. Wouldn’t it be great to snap a photo of a Wisconsin bird posing in a palm tree?

My interest in birds began as a child in north central Wisconsin. Neighbor boy Tommy sent away for special items from the Audubon Society and we became charter members of the Medford Junior Audubon Club. Of course, Tommy was President, but he declared me VP.

NATURAL RESOURCES FOUNDATION OF WISCONSIN



NATURAL RESOURCES FOUNDATION OF WISCONSIN



Chestnut-mandibled toucan.

JACK JORDAN

I remember having only one formal meeting at the picnic table but together in the field we spotted chipping sparrows, wrens, flickers, red-headed woodpeckers, rose-breasted grosbeaks and cedar waxwings, still some of my favorite birds. Today, the spring call of the eastern meadowlark is a nostalgic reminder of the grassy fields that seemed to go on forever behind my childhood home on the edge of town.

As part of my trip planning, I met with

Charlie Luthin of the Natural Resources Foundation. He filled me in on how the foundation is working to preserve valuable migratory bird habitat on the Osa Peninsula. According to Luthin, "The importance of the Osa Peninsula for both Wisconsin birds and indigenous flora and fauna cannot be overestimated. With the massive loss of forest cover in Central America in recent years, refuges like what is found on the Osa Peninsula play a critical role in harboring our winter-

ing avifauna. The need to conserve intact habitat in Costa Rica and neighboring countries is imperative if we hope to preserve our summer songbird populations in Wisconsin."

Luthin also suggested I contact Craig Thompson, a DNR district land program manager in La Crosse and a keen birder. I'm glad I did. Thompson sent me a list of the 55 species of Wisconsin birds I might see on my trip to the Osa and a bit of advice, "Be prepared to be overwhelmed. The Osa is brimming with birds and other wildlife. You're about to immerse yourselves in one of the world's most magnificent rain forests," Thompson told me.

I was committed to the mission.

Upon arriving in Costa Rica and after spending the night at an airport hotel, we took a 45-minute domestic flight to the Osa. Aerial views transformed from San Jose cityscape to small towns to mountains with thick jungle and finally the aquamarine ocean as we arrived in Puerto Jimenez on the Gulf of Dulce. We then "puddle jumped" to the Drake Bay airstrip, on the northern Pacific side of the peninsula. From here we rode in a four-wheel drive vehicle for half an hour on dirt roads, crossing streams along the way to the coast where we boarded a small boat and motored for 20 minutes down the west side of the peninsula. After a wet landing and a 15-minute hike, we arrived at the eco-lodge where we had five nights reserved.

The lodge arranged interesting adventures for us including a local festival, canoeing to and swimming beneath waterfalls, and a medicinal plant tour. I tested my endurance on a strenuous hike through a local jungle preserve. A slick, red clay trail led steeply down to the river and just as steeply back up through dense rain forest. Our guide was mostly "into plants," but he did identify some calling birds, along with strangler figs and spider monkeys. My son was impressed when our guide used his machete to slice open a passion fruit we found on the forest floor near a waterfall. Other edible plants we sampled that day were sugar cane, cashew fruit and ice cream beans.

Lesson learned: Do not sit in grassy or sandy areas. Chiggers live there and will remind you of your hike for days afterward.

Back at the lodge, I wandered the grounds observing birds in the manicured bushes and trees. A pair of great



In-flight scarlet macaws.

© TONY RATH/TONYRATH.COM



Northern waterthrush.

KAREN ECKLUND



Cherrie's tanager.

PAOLO NATALE

kiskadees mobbed a chestnut-mandibled toucan as it eyed their bower-like nest on the lodge roof. Numerous Cherrie's tanagers flew about and a stunning golden-hooded tanager caught my eye. I even spotted a colorful orange-billed sparrow. Scarlet macaws flew overhead every day. Still no Wisconsin birds...

The lodge staff was interested in my list of 55 Wisconsin birds that also call the Osa home. However, they had no suggestions on where to find them. Looking back, if I had hired a professional bird guide I perhaps would have had more success.

Tiny lizards scurried around on the patio where we took our meals with other lodge guests. My eye caught movement along the patio border. I saw a small brown bird moving in short bursts, bobbing its tail and making a chipping sound. I followed it with my binoculars as it hurried in and out of the sunny spots mottling the patio. I snapped a series of blurry photos and later identified the bird as a northern waterthrush.

I'll also need a better camera if I plan to take more photos of birds.

On bird tours in Wisconsin when I've encountered the northern waterthrush I've been in rather deep woods near

running water, patiently searching for the well-camouflaged bird as it scurried among the rocks and water plants.

A species of wood warbler, according to my Peterson field guide, *Eastern Birds*, the northern waterthrush often *walks* along the water's edge and teeters in the manner of a spotted sandpiper. Brown-backed, with a creamy, pale yellow, or buff eyebrow stripe; underparts striped, often yellowish. Its note is a sharp *chip*. Its song a vigorous, rapid *twit twit twit sweet sweet sweet chew chew chew* (*chew's* drop in pitch). My Costa Rican field guide, *The Birds of Costa Rica*, describes its note as a metallic *tsink*. No waterthrushes were singing in Costa Rica. Was this bird on vacation hanging out on the patio?

When I told the lodge manager about my discovery he responded, "Oh those? We see them all the time." I thought to myself, "Hmmm, I bet they don't see them in the summer."


According to Andy Paulios, DNR wildlife biologist and coordinator of the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, we just borrow these birds. "Neo-tropical migrants really belong in the tropics. They migrate north to have families and spend time with the kids," Paulios says. The quality of their habitat in Cen-



Golden-hooded tanager.

MARK IGLESKI

tral America is just as important as the habitat where they breed, if we want to continue thinking of them as "Wisconsin birds."

I loved the time we spent in Costa Rica on the Osa Peninsula and I want to return to the jungle some day. But I also look forward to welcoming our migrants back to Wisconsin in the spring. "Our birds," local and migratory, are worth watching all year round. 

Karen Ecklund is Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine's business and circulation manager.

THE NATURAL RESOURCES FOUNDATION'S BIRD PROTECTION

FUND is supporting protection of important wintering habitat on Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula. Enormous trees, some more than 1,000 years old, provide critical habitat for hundreds of bird species. Troops of monkeys share the leafy canopy with their feathered neighbors, while jaguars prowl the dimly lit forest floor.

The Osa is still a wild place, but due to population growth, clear cutting, agriculture expansion, and biofuel production, the future of valuable bird habitat is threatened. Visit wisconservation.org to find out more about special projects of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin.

- Adapted from an article in the NRF's "Bridges" newsletter.

WISCONSIN BREEDING BIRDS

(55 SPECIES) DOCUMENTED ON THE OSA PENINSULA, COSTA RICA

- Birds listed in **bold** are the 19 species considered conservation priorities (based on Wisconsin's Wildlife Action Plan).
- Two species are listed as endangered (**E**).
- Three species are listed as threatened (**T**).

Blue-winged teal

Osprey

Northern harrier

Sharp-shinned hawk

Cooper's hawk

Broad-winged hawk

Merlin

Peregrine falcon - E

Spotted sandpiper

Black-billed cuckoo

Yellow-billed cuckoo

Common nighthawk

Whip-poor-will

Olive-sided flycatcher

Eastern wood-pewee

Acadian flycatcher - T

Willow flycatcher

Yellow-bellied flycatcher

Least flycatcher

Great crested flycatcher

Eastern kingbird

Philadelphia vireo

Yellow-throated vireo

Red-eyed vireo

Northern rough-winged swallow

Cliff swallow

Barn swallow

Swainson's thrush

Wood thrush

Gray catbird

Cedar waxwing

Golden-winged warbler

Tennessee warbler

Yellow warbler

Magnolia warbler

Chestnut-sided warbler

Prairie warbler

Black-and-white warbler

American redstart

Prothonotary warbler

Ovenbird

Northern waterthrush

Louisiana waterthrush

Kentucky warbler - T

Worm-eating warbler - E

Mourning warbler

Connecticut warbler

Common yellowthroat

Hooded warbler - T

Canada warbler

Wilson's warbler

Yellow-breasted chat

Scarlet tanager

Orchard oriole

Baltimore oriole

- List compiled by Craig Thompson, Wisconsin
Bird Conservation Initiative



Wisconsin snow birds

Friends of feathers flock together.

Connie and Peter Roop

"Pit-see, pit-see, pit-see."

"Black-and-white warbler," identified Jen.

"Good ear!" complimented our guide Nito.

"Good eye!" Uli, another guide, whispered as Eric pointed to this Wisconsin warbler in the dense foliage of a Costa Rican rain forest.

Jen and Eric gave each other an enthusiastic but silent high five.

Twelve pairs of binoculars focused on the warbler. These Wisconsin "snow birds" had flocked to Costa Rica's Osa Peninsula in February 2011, not to escape Wisconsin's winter but for a chance to see "our" Wisconsin summer birds.

"If our birds spoke, they would speak Spanish," joked group leader Craig Thompson.



Black-and-white warbler.



A hike takes bird watchers along a river, looking in all directions.

PATRICK CONNOLLY

JENNIFER WENZEL

Thompson organizes and leads trips that are sponsored by the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative International Program. While he also works for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, these trips are conducted on his own time.

"Spanish-speaking Costa Rica is critical to Wisconsin bird survival," Thompson explains. "Protection of these birds' breeding habitats in Wisconsin is only half the story. The other half is in Latin American countries, like Costa Rica. Without protection of winter habitat, our Wisconsin woodlands and backyards will become increasingly quiet," Thompson warns.

"I became a birder in Costa Rica," commented one reluctant birder. "I want to continue to hear our Wisconsin birds sing every spring. I am an Amigo de Osa now, a Friend of the Osa."

Such statements reinforce Thompson's mission: to create flocks of Wisconsin birders devoted to protecting the Osa Peninsula.

Every February, Thompson takes a group to Osa Conservation scientific research stations adjacent to Corcovado, one of Costa Rica's largest national parks. Mantled howler monkeys are these birders' alarm clocks. Last year's participants birded with local experts, Nito and Uli,

accumulating an impressive list of over 200 species in seven days: Baltimore orioles, black-and-white warblers, scarlet macaws, chestnut-billed toucans, piratic flycatchers and white-crested coquettes.

During lunch the chatter of red-backed squirrel monkeys and the rustle of white-faced Capuchin monkeys hopping from branch to branch is an audible backdrop.

Twelve pairs of binoculars swing into action. Food is forgotten to glimpse a rose-breasted grosbeak, another Wisconsin feathered friend.

"When you save a Wisconsin oriole, you will save a jaguar," explains researcher Ricardo Moreno.

"You will help save endangered turtles and yellow-billed cotingas, too," joined in Karen Leavelle, another researcher with whom the Wisconsin birders worked.

Through these researchers, Wisconsin snow birders learned that the Osa Peninsula supports an immense diversity of endangered and threatened wildlife.

Hooting owls lured the birders out at night. Armed with binoculars, spotting scopes, and flashlights, the snow birds discovered camouflaged insects, flat frogs and ruby-eyed spiders.

These beautiful birds enhance our lives in countless ways. Hate mosquitoes? Grow corn? Many bird species eat massive quantities of insects that threaten Wisconsin crops and make our lives less comfortable. Ruby-throated hummingbirds and sapphire blue buntings are feathered jewels that may visit your feeder.

Preserving the Osa Peninsula is critical, but the clock is ticking. Costa Rica's population is growing rapidly and these

people need food, shelter and jobs just like you and me. The birds we share need food and shelter, too. Logging and agriculture, especially beef and palm oil, threaten to replace Osa's rain forest. By hiring guides, like Uli and Nito, the Osa Peninsula generates income and can be valued and conserved by the local community.

Wisconsin is a leader in the large partnership working to save the Osa Peninsula rain forest. The Wisconsin partnership has raised over \$100,000 in donations. Each trip participant donates \$500 to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin to support Osa. A sister park relationship is being established between St. Croix National Scenic Riverway and Corcovado National Park.

"Wisconsin and Costa Rica share birds, but we will now share expertise in conservation, outreach and education," notes Robin Maercklein, National Park Ranger from St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

What can you do to help Wisconsin birds?

- Put decals in your windows in spring and fall to reduce the death of millions of migratory birds that crash into windows.
- "Naturally" feed our feathered friends by planting native plants in your yard.
- Keep our birds flying by keeping your pet cat inside. Each year 40 million Wisconsin birds are killed by Wisconsin cats.
- Drink shade grown coffee, which provides habitat for hundreds of birds and other rain forest animals.
- Avoid consuming palm oil and reduce your beef consumption.
- Reduce or eliminate your use of pesticides.
- Of course, you can keep our birds flying from Wisconsin to Costa Rica by sending a tax-deductible donation to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin – Osa Project, P.O. Box 2317, Madison, WI 53701 or online at wisconservation.org. Indicate your donation is for Osa Project.



Connie and Peter Roop are Wisconsin authors of over 100 published books including *Seasons of the Cranes*. Watch for *Tales of Famous Animals* to be published this year.

To learn more about the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative International Program and its trips visit osaconservation.org or wisconservation.org

Fix a Leak Week

Most leaky showerheads can be fixed by ensuring a tight connection using pipe tape and a wrench.

Every drop counts.

Fix a Leak Week 2012

Mark the dates: March 12-18

Shaili Pfeiffer



Check. Twist. Replace.

Celebrate Fix a Leak Week by checking your home fixtures for leaks.

Winter months are the prime time to check water use and see if you may have a leak in your home plumbing system. If a family of four exceeds 12,000 gallons per month in the winter, you probably have leaks! Those leaks are costing you money and wasting water resources.

To help save water for future gen-

erations, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is asking consumers to check, twist and replace:


Check for leaks.

Look for dripping faucets, showerheads and fixture connections. Also check for toilets with silent leaks by putting a few drops of food coloring into the tank and seeing if it appears in the bowl before you flush. Don't forget to check irrigation systems and spigots, too.

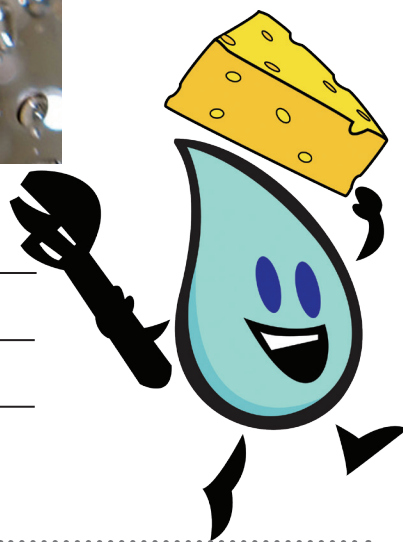
Twist and tighten pipe connections.

To save more water without a noticeable difference in flow, twist on a WaterSenseSM-labeled faucet aerator.

Replace the fixture if necessary.

Look for WaterSenseSM-labeled models, which are independently tested and certified to use 20 percent less water and perform as well as or better than standard models. 

Shaili Pfeiffer works for the DNR's Water Division.



To learn more and sign up for the Fix a Leak Week Challenge, visit the DNR website at dnr.wi.gov and search "Fix a Leak Week." Have a school group interested in Fix a Leak Week activities? Educational materials are available, too. Visit the DNR website and search "EEK! Fix a Leak Week." Find more tips at epa.gov/watersense/our_water/fix_a_leak.html

A STATE FOR Sturgeon

Lisa Gaumnitz

SUPERIOR —The inch-long lake sturgeon are not much to look at — all head and bulbous eyes — but they are small wonders.

Scooped up in a fine mesh net in July 2011 on the St. Louis River forming the Wisconsin-Minnesota border, the fish are the first documented offspring of lake sturgeon stocked in the 1980s and 1990s by the two states.

The four sturgeon followed nature's clock and beat cruel odds to wind up in the net. Female sturgeon don't reproduce until they are in their 20s or 30s, spawn only every three to five years, and lay up to 500,000 eggs at a time, only

eight to 12 of which will make it through their first growing season.

"There are many more years ahead before we know if these young sturgeon can survive, reproduce and help build a self-sustaining population," says Peter Stevens, Wisconsin DNR's fish supervisor in Bayfield.

"But this is a monumental first step. So many people worked so hard a long time to get us to this day."

RESTORING AN
ANCIENT FISH
SPECIES TO ITS
ANCESTRAL
WATERS.



Documenting stocked sturgeon offspring is a monumental first step.

BRIAN BORKHOLDER



DNR fisheries staff works below the Prairie du Sac dam to estimate the number of sturgeon in the 92-mile river stretch. That estimate will help them understand next fall if the fish harvested during the hook-and-line season are under the safe 5 percent limit.

MICHAEL KIENTZ



Sturgeon netted on the Wolf River near Shiocton are measured and counted. The public works with the Department of Natural Resources to help survey sturgeon populations and is critical to the success of the sturgeon management program.

MICHAEL KIENITZ

It's hard not to get excited about this discovery, or about efforts elsewhere in Wisconsin to restore this ancient species to its ancestral waters.

While other states' sturgeon stocks dwindle, the state supports in Lake Winnebago the world's largest self-sustaining population of lake sturgeon and a unique winter spear fishery; offers a hook-and-line season on major inland waters with small but stable populations; and, as on the St. Louis River, works to rebuild sturgeon populations from scratch on other waters.

Several factors mesh to make the 21st century one of the most promising for a species that's been cruising Wisconsin waters for tens of millions of years and whose continued existence depends on humans successfully managing their populations within razor thin margins. Harvesting just 5 percent of an adult population is regarded as safe, compared to the 35 percent typical for walleye and other shorter-lived species.

"It's a good time to be a sturgeon in Wisconsin," says Ron Bruch, a DNR fish supervisor, lead sturgeon scientist on the Winnebago system for the last 20 years, and co-leader of the agency's sturgeon team.

"We have the information, the public

interest and understanding, and the agency commitment to managing restoration but also maintaining local fisheries to keep public interest and support high. That's what's needed to see the fruition 30 years down the road of efforts to restore the population and allow local fisheries to develop."

It's good to be a sturgeon in Wisconsin

The state has long been regarded as a national and international leader in sturgeon protection, restoration and research, a reputation built since Wisconsin started regulating sturgeon harvest on the Winnebago system in 1903.

"You ladies and gents have done such a good job that you're helping other states restore their populations," says Ed Scott, a volunteer from the Tennessee Valley Authority who came to Lake Winnebago last spring as part of a multi-state



Microchips, called PIT tags, are used to estimate population size and harvest rates.

MICHAEL KIENITZ



Sturgeon carrying PIT tags can be scanned for information when caught during DNR surveys.

MICHAEL KIENITZ

and federal effort to collect eggs to jump start their reintroduction programs. "It wouldn't be possible otherwise."

The research and leadership coming out of Wisconsin has only grown in the last decade as the Winnebago system gained a dedicated and growing funding source. State law now directs sturgeon spearing license fees back to the Winnebago system. Conservation groups like Sturgeon for Tomorrow and Shadows on

the Wolf have also poured in money and labor, leading to an information explosion.

Radio transmitters surgically implanted into hundreds of fish revealed that fish move out of Lake Winnebago in the fall and into the rivers where they'll make their spawning runs the next spring. Those findings helped propel a 60-inch minimum length limit for the hook-and-line season statewide and a shortened season to protect potential spawners.

New techniques of aging fish revealed that the longtime practice of counting rings on fish fin bones consistently underestimated true age by as much as 10 to 30 years. So now DNR biologists apply a correction factor in their calculations, allowing them to continue using fin bones to age fish and to draw on older information gleaned that way. That's particularly important because the newer technique, counting rings in the fish's ear bone, or otolith, requires killing the fish.

Individual electronic microchips called PIT tags are injected with a needle into fish DNR collects during surveys, a pro-

management question in the system, we try to design our studies to give insight into sturgeon population dynamics in fisheries elsewhere in the state," Bruch says.

A new project with a University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Freshwater Institute geneticist seeks to develop a test that will determine sturgeon sex and age by looking for DNA protein sequences in fluids in the fish. Now, it's very difficult to determine that information except when the fish are spawning or after they've been harvested and cut to have their internal organs examined.

Another new project seeks to use the sound male sturgeon make during spawning season to get a more accurate count in waters where sturgeon populations are low.

"Males make a sound when they spawn to attract females that sounds like a grouse drumming," Bruch says. University of Wisconsin-Madison audiotechnicians have analyzed that sound and the Department of Natural Resources hopes to be able to use acoustic equipment to listen for spawning fish and document spawning activity without seeing the fish.

This technology would have widespread application for documenting successful spawning activity, especially in small recovering populations. That recent research is now driving efforts to update Wisconsin's statewide sturgeon management plan, says Karl Scheidegger, who co-leads DNR's sturgeon team with Bruch. "It's a total overhaul (of the previous plan) because the information we gained in the last 10 years is so amazing."

"Where the old plan was a bit of pie in the sky — this is what we'd like to do — the new plan is more practical. This will give our biologists and other states a lot of good information on the best stocking, assessment, evaluation and other methods to use."

The Department of Natural Resources has made other changes that are benefiting sturgeon, and ultimately anglers. The statewide 60-inch minimum limit and shorter hook-and-line season has helped protect potential spawning adults. Harvest has dropped from about 225 fish statewide every year to one-tenth that level.

The Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery renovations have greatly increased the capacity for restoration through stocking using artificial propagation techniques developed in the late 1970s in Wisconsin

by the Department of Natural Resources and Fred Binkowski of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee WATER Institute. Streamside rearing facilities along the Kewaunee and Milwaukee rivers are helping supply sturgeon for those areas and, biologists hope, will help the fish imprint to their native waters so they will one day return to spawn there.

Plans are underway to help sturgeon get over dams on the Lower Wisconsin River and the Menominee River to allow sturgeon to reach potential spawning grounds.

"Ultimately, the goal of all the sturgeon restoration work in Wisconsin and the Great Lakes is to produce viable fisheries," Bruch says. "We're very positive that will happen. We just have to have the commitment and patience over time."

Three waters — the St. Louis River, the Lower Wisconsin River, and the Winnebago system — represent the different status of sturgeon populations in the state, how the Department of Natural Resources and partners are using the new information to maintain or build populations, and some of their key challenges.

Starting from scratch on the St. Louis River

Lake sturgeon originally inhabited the St. Louis River in western Lake Superior, but the population disappeared, along with other species, during the early 1900s due to overharvest, water pollution and habitat changes, says Steve Schram, a retired DNR fisheries supervisor stationed in Bayfield and a driving force behind restoring lake sturgeon to the St. Louis River.

Starting in the 1970s, federal Clean Water Act regulations forced wastewater dischargers to meet tougher standards and poured money into upgrading municipal treatment plants. The Western Lake Superior Sanitary District went online in 1979 and water quality improved significantly in the St. Louis River.

"After water quality improved, fish could stay in the estuary year around instead of being forced out to Lake Superior just to stay alive," Schram says. "I have always felt the real credit for the success of this program belongs to the people that pushed for passage of the 1972 Clean Water Act and the people that were instrumental in establishing the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District."

With the water quality improving so much, Schram and colleagues knew



Renovations at the Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery have increased the capacity for restoration through stocking using artificial propagation.

RICH KLETT

cess that eliminates the loss of tags that used to occur with traditional external tags. These tags, the same microchip technology people now use to permanently mark their dogs and cats, carry individual numbers, and when the fish are subsequently caught during DNR surveys, staff can run a scanner over the fish to detect its number. The information gathered through this modern tagging technique allows DNR to more easily and accurately track individual fish and their age, key information to calculate growth, mortality and exploitation rates, and other vital information for sound management.

"Although the sturgeon research we do on Winnebago addresses an important

the time was right to begin a long-term project to re-establish native species such as lake sturgeon in the St. Louis River. From 1983 through 2000, the Wisconsin and Minnesota DNRs stocked 762,000 fry, 143,000 fingerlings and 500 yearling lake sturgeon into the St. Louis River and set no-kill regulations to prevent anglers from harvesting the stocked fish.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has been monitoring adult abundance below the Fond du Lac dam (Minn.) on the St. Louis River during spawning time since the early 2000s. They have documented good numbers of fish, an increase in spawning numbers and fish as large as 59 inches, Schram says. Until this year, however, no offspring were found there.

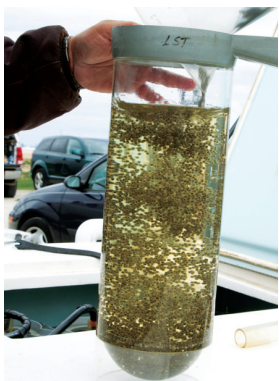
Biologists with the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa found the four inch-long survivors while sampling for such tiny, larval fish.

Wisconsin and Minnesota will continue monitoring in the river and Lake Superior to follow abundance of naturally produced fish. Schram says that the current no-kill regulation on the St. Louis will likely remain in effect until successful reproduction by parents produced naturally is documented.

Schram calls the discovery of the young sturgeon “wonderful news” but cautions against declaring victory. “We need to keep in mind it’s just another step in the long process of rehabilitating a degraded river system and managing a long-lived species,” he says. “So we need to keep the Clean Water Act intact and continue to educate the public about the value of clean water and the value of a healthy St. Louis River ecosystem.”

Sustaining fishing on the Lower Wisconsin River

On the Lower Wisconsin River, the inland water with the highest hook-and-line fishing pressure and harvests, the challenge is to keep the population stable while continuing to allow fishing for sturgeon.



Sturgeon roe is collected for artificial propagation in hatcheries throughout the United States and Canada within lake sturgeon range.

MICHAEL KIENITZ



MICHAEL KIENITZ

Female sturgeons spawn only every three to five years.

That’s why DNR Fish Supervisor Dave Rowe and technicians Mike Rennie and Dan Fuller from the Poynette office launch their boats on the river below the Prairie du Sac dam on a crisp, sunny October day. They’re here to collect information to estimate the number of sturgeon in the 92-mile river stretch so they can understand next fall if the fish harvested during the hook-and-line season are under the safe 5 percent limit.

In 2005, anglers harvested 75 sturgeon below the dam — 26 percent of the estimated population, and well over the safe level. Since the 60-inch minimum length limit and the shorter season started in 2006, harvest of large fish has dropped to just under eight sturgeon, for a 4.8 percent harvest rate.

They set four gill nets below the Prairie

du Sac dam and, 90 minutes later, check them with Kate Strom Hiorns, a fisheries analyst from Madison recruited to help out that day. Hand over hand they haul in the nets, carefully remove fish caught in the widely spaced mesh and place them in an aerated tank until they can reset the nets and motor back to shore to process the fish.

There, they lift a sturgeon out of the tank, hold it down along a measuring board on the floor to check its length, run a microchip reader over the fish to detect an electronic tag, and then put the fish in a net. Rennie hoists it onto a hanging scale and Fuller records the information. Rennie gently returns the sturgeon to the water.

“One of the biggest challenges is trying to define what the entire Lower Wisconsin



One of the biggest questions is if sturgeon are naturally reproducing below the Prairie du Sac dam.

MICHAEL KIENZ

sin River population is," says Rennie. "It's a continuous process of building up the database and getting more confident in the numbers."

Getting solid numbers is literally a moving target. Fish move into and out of the Lower Wisconsin from the Mississippi River; Wisconsin research shows some sturgeon swimming up to 30 miles a day on the river.

So every fall they capture more fish and conduct other research to better understand this population. In recent years, Rennie and others have implanted 16 adult sturgeon with radio tags to help them understand fish movement, critical spawning habitat and other important information. They've also done spine age estimates for nearly 200 fish, and last spring started surveys to detect larval fish, evidence of natural reproduction.

One of the biggest questions is whether natural reproduction is occurring below the dam, Rowe says. We know that fish come over the dam from Lake Wisconsin when water levels are high. Are they the source of fish that is keeping the population stable, or are the fish that live below the dam naturally reproducing, or both?

The answer won't matter as much in coming years when Alliant Energy is required to build a fish passage at their Prairie du Sac dam. The design calls for an elevator to lift fish that migrate upstream to get over the dam. Biologists will raise the tank to the top of the dam and sort through the fish, sending any native fish on their way upstream. A downstream passage is also being built to make sure the fish can pass safely back to the lower river as well.

"You have these systems that over time developed to be a connected thread

so the organisms evolved to utilize the best spawning habitat at one time of the year and feeding and resting habitat at other times of the year," Rowe says. "The whole point of the elevator is we want fish interested in swimming up the river to spawn to be able to do so while keeping invasives out."

Maintaining enthusiasm on the Winnebago system

On a cold, windy April day, a crowd gathers at Bamboo Bend on the Wolf River near Shiocton. Men, women and children, many of them with cameras, a local TV crew, and a Discovery Channel TV crew swarm as DNR staff carry a writhing sturgeon up from the rocks in a big net.

"Somebody, get the head," Bruch yells as he helps wrestle the fish out of the net and onto the measuring board on the ground below him. "Oh, is he huge! Look at that guy. It's a nice big male. He's bigger than you, Jack (Bruch says to one of the fisheries technicians at his side) 71.8 (inches)."

Though the crowds can slow the work, Bruch is glad to see them. Later he says, "Key to our success is not only effective control of harvest, but also proactively involving the public in our sturgeon management program — the public has great ownership and pride in this program."

Regulation changes developed since 1993 through a joint Department of Natural Resources and Winnebago Citizens Sturgeon Advisory Committee effort have led to an increase in the Winnebago lake sturgeon stock and the number of trophy-size fish in the population.

Trophy lake sturgeon are typically considered to be any fish 100 pounds or larger, and historically fish this size have

made up less than 1 percent of the total annual harvest. In the last decade, the percentage of trophy fish has gradually increased to 6 percent in 2011.

License sales for the 2012 season set a new record at 12,860, up 48 percent since 2007, reflecting the growing interest in recent years by a wider range of people attracted by the big fish, the growing success of spearers and the Winnebago sturgeon program.

Despite this growing popularity, Bruch considers one of the biggest challenges to be "maintaining the enthusiasm for the fishery that results in the license sales that keep the whole thing running," he says.

"If you look at the trends in outdoors activity, the proportion of people who fish has stayed steady or gone down a little in Wisconsin. We're always aware we're not just in this business for the fish.

"Whenever I give a sturgeon presentation, the last slide I show stresses the two things we're trying to do on the Winnebago system," he says. "One is to keep the sturgeon population healthy and flourishing. The second is to keep Winnebago sturgeon spearing a vibrant part of our Wisconsin outdoor culture." ❧

Lisa Gaumnitz is the public affairs manager for the DNR's Water Division.

SIGN UP TO GUARD STURGEON

Each spring, hundreds of volunteers guard sturgeon at their spawning sites on the Wolf River and protect the fish from poaching. When the sturgeon spawn along the rocky shorelines of the Wolf, they are fairly oblivious to nearby human activity and are very susceptible to illegal harvest.

The volunteers of the "Sturgeon Patrol" guard the spawning fish 24 hours a day throughout the spawning season which is typically in late April and early May. While it is impossible to predict the exact dates that spawning will occur, guards are routinely scheduled from April 15 through May 5. Spawning generally occurs over a seven- to 10-day period within that time window.

If you would like to sign up, contact the DNR sturgeon guard coordinator at the DNR Oshkosh Service Center at DNRSturgeonGuard@wisconsin.gov or call (920) 303-5444. A representative will call you to schedule a day.



The face of Wisconsin hunters

COURTING A LAND ETHIC.

Lee Fahrney

A recent article and sidebar in *Wisconsin Natural Resources* magazine tripped the trigger of several of the state's big game, waterfowl, upland game bird and small game hunters. The informative article by staff writer Kathryn Kahler reported on a brown bag lecture at UW-Madison entitled "Shifting paradigms in hunting and conservation: How will Wisconsin respond?" presented by Keith Warnke, hunting and shooting sports coordinator with the Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Law Enforcement.

The first entry of the Question and Answer sidebar caught the attention of several readers who consider themselves not only hunters but protectors of the land that they either own or hunt. The question is as follows:

Q: How do we reconcile the fact that there is a perception that most hunters have not yet embraced Aldo Leopold's views of the importance of developing a land ethic?

A: "That's a valid observation," Warnke responded, "but the converse is also true, and a lot of hunters are 'eco-rednecks' and have embraced the land ethic."



Iowa County Conservation Warden David Youngquist assists novice hunters through a Learn to Hunt turkey program.

LEE FAHRNEY

While use of the term “eco-redneck” is unfortunate, Warnke is correct regarding the notion that hunters are fully absorbed in not only practicing a land ethic, but passing it on to future generations. This article will attempt to capsulize the attitudes and contributions that Wisconsin’s hunters make to the conservation of our natural resources.

First, however, we must attempt to define a land ethic. Leopold discusses at some length the relationship between land and people. He is particularly interested in reconciling the thrust of economic development with the need to respect what he refers to as a “biotic pyramid.”

“Plants absorb energy from the sun,” Leopold writes. “This energy flows through a circuit called the biota, which may be represented by a pyramid consisting of layers.

“The bottom layer is the soil. A plant layer rests on the soil, an insect layer on the plants, a bird and rodent layer on the insects, and so on up through various animal groups to the apex layer, which

consists of the larger carnivores. Each successive layer depends on those below it for food,” Leopold maintains.

Al Shook of Oconomowoc is a life-long hunter, former Air Force pilot and now a supervising inspector for the City of Waukesha. Having absorbed Leopold’s message in his approach to land management, he takes it a step further by suggesting that Leopold is not the only source of an understanding of what constitutes a land ethic. “It’s not a fair question,” he asserts.

He submits that many hunters who have never read Leopold’s reflections have learned respect for the land from family members or other mentors. “I was taught by my dad and the farmer I worked for to look around and remember what lived where, before I ever read Leopold’s work.”

Shook goes on to say a land ethic is different for almost everyone. “My connection to the land I hunt is complete,” he explains. “I can close my eyes right now and see the land in great detail — downed trees, slopes, holes.”

Mark Noll of Alma in Buffalo County views his responsibility for the land through the eyes of four generations of family members who have owned the property. “We have very deep bonds with our land,” Noll says. “We truly believe that if you take care of your land, your

land will take care of you.”

“Working and hunting on our property also brings great enjoyment and satisfaction to our entire family,” Noll maintains. “It gives us a perspective of how we tie into and impact the natural world around us.”

A land ethic also involves caring about the creatures that inhabit the land and the laws and administrative rules that govern their protection. Consider William “Bill” Howe of Prairie Du Chien, a delegate to the Wisconsin Conservation Congress for more than 50 years. Howe offers a walking, talking history of conservation leadership.

Howe was an acquaintance of Ernie Swift, former secretary of the Conservation Commission (now DNR). Swift would come to the area to hunt ducks with Howe’s kinfolk, as did cartoonist “Ding” Darling of the Des Moines Register, Howe said. Darling was also a wildlife artist, who sketched the first federal duck stamp. In those days, Howe’s family published a small newspaper, *The Courier*, covering Grant and Crawford counties.

Howe became a “river rat” at a young age, fishing and hunting year in, year out along the Mississippi. His commitment to resource protection went beyond the river, however. Howe describes traveling to northern Wisconsin to chase starving deer out of over-browsed areas so that both deer and forest understory would have a chance to survive.

“We had people from the Conservation Commission, Parks and the Conservation Congress all involved,” he says. Unfortunately, the operation, conducted near Rhinelander and Eagle River, failed. “They went right back,” Howe ruefully adds.

Hunters recognize the urgency of keeping this “biotic” in balance. They understand the relationship between predator and prey, that an abundance of cottontails this year will lead to an increase in coyotes and other predators the next.

Likewise, Leopold understood the relationship between predator and pursued, soil, water and sun, flora and fauna. In addition to his enduring reputation as a wildlife ecologist, Leopold was also a hunter who brought his breathtaking prose to the pursuit of wild game across much of the country and abroad.

Among his writings, Leopold reflects on loosing an arrow at a buck harbored by the branches of a “great oak” — only to whiff. Without remorse, Leopold says, “It was appropriate that I missed, for when a



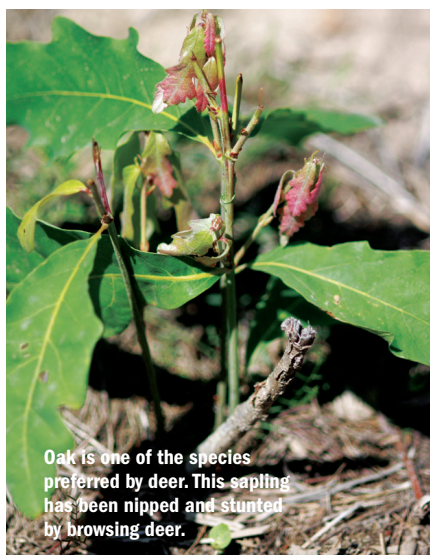
Major, a yellow Lab belonging to writer Lee Fahrney, shows intense gratitude to the shooter after harvesting his first ring-necked pheasant near Hollandale in Iowa County.

LEE FAHRNEY

DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp and Executive Assistant Scott Gunderson joined forces with others at the Five Oaks deer camp on opening day of the 2011 gun deer season. Sec. Stepp was successful in harvesting a doe, her first deer ever. Also shooting a 10-point buck deer was Jason Fahrney, a teacher and basketball coach at Oshkosh West High School. Standing from left: Aaron Marty, an architect with Irgins Development LLC, Milwaukee; Gunderson; Brian Fahrney, a partner at the law firm of Sidley Austin, Chicago; Lee Fahrney. Kneeling: Jason Fahrney, Sec. Stepp.



LEE FAHRNEY



Oak is one of the species preferred by deer. This sapling has been nipped and stunted by browsing deer.

DNR FILE PHOTO

great oak grows in what is now my garden, I hope there will be bucks to bed in its fallen leaves, and hunters to stalk and miss and wonder who built the garden wall.

Leopold understands the inevitable fate of the buck, however. "Someday my buck will get a .30-30 in his glossy ribs. A clumsy steer will appropriate his bed under the oak, and will munch the golden grama until it is replaced by weeds."

The present day hunter often expresses the same sentiment about a great stag that slipped away unharmed. Other times, a wounded animal challenges the strength and endurance of the dedicated hunter whose ethical standards demand an all-out effort to recover the animal — no matter what it takes.

There are other environmental challenges for which hunters will bear great responsibility. This is especially true with regard to white-tailed deer management. As the urban/suburban landscape continues to expand, a more sophisticated approach will be required.

Laura Wyatt is the Urban Forestry

Another reader, Fred Steinbrecher, had this response to Kahler's article on Warnke's presentation, "Shifting paradigms in hunting and conservation: How will Wisconsin respond?"

I own 50 acres of vacant land in Langlade County. I am not a hunter. The only reason I would kill a creature larger than a horsefly is to stay alive. I do enjoy catch-and-release fishing (perch and walleye being the exceptions). And I would never consider posting my land. I do not feel that I have the right to impose my personal attitude on people who enjoy the art of hunting. Wisconsin has a long, strong hunting tradition, and I understand and appreciate that. And I occasionally get a tasty stick of sausage from an appreciative friend.

Fred Steinbrecher
Cambridge, Wis.



Council liaison and partnership specialist with the Department of Natural Resources. Her job is to facilitate cooperative efforts to manage forests within Wisconsin's urban areas containing 27 million trees and where 80 percent of Wisconsin's population lives. She recognizes both the complexity of the urban biota and the threat to its stability from invasive plants and species, particularly deer.

White-tailed deer now inhabit many urban and suburban areas where hunting often finds little support from either a social or a public safety perspective. Without control measures, however, deer populations typically proliferate until action is taken to protect other sectors of Leopold's pyramid.

The same threat of overpopulation exists in rural areas. Efforts to control deer herds include liberal hunting seasons and damage abatement programs involving not only deer but other species such as turkey and bear.

Most tree growers in Wisconsin rely on some form of damage control to safeguard their investment. Fences, deer repellants and protective tubes to guard against antler rubs, all work to safeguard forests. The most significant control measure, however, derives from the hundreds of thousands of hunters who step up each year to harvest adequate numbers of deer.




Aaron Marty (right), a Milwaukee architect, and Darin Fahrney, vice principal at the Singapore American School, harvested these bucks on private land in Iowa County.

LEE FAHRNEY

Wyatt understands the issue from both a personal and a professional perspective. A small herd of deer have taken up residence in her neighborhood in the Madison area. "They follow the railroad track," she explained. "They even eat our bird seed," she said with a laugh.

The former manager of an arboretum in Illinois, Wyatt said control efforts there got into the issue of sharpshooters and the donation of venison to food pantries. Collaborating with all stake-

holders is necessary to solve problems of encroachment from deer or other species, she asserts.

"If we have a problem, we need to come together to solve it," she urges. "We're all in this together." 

Lee Fahrney is a freelance outdoors writer, hunter and landowner from Iowa County. He is a delegate to the Wisconsin Conservation Congress where he serves as secretary on its three-person Executive Committee. Fahrney and his wife, Marilyn, own 160 acres of land near Hollandale where the couple has restored wetlands, planted thousands of trees and initiated several wildlife habitat projects.

ONE MAN'S MOTIVATIONS FOR DECIDING TO HUNT

Reviewing *The Mindful Carnivore*

Kathryn A. Kahler

Our story about the growing locavore movement in the October issue of *Wisconsin Natural Resources* prompted a request from author Tovar Cerulli to review his new book, *The Mindful Carnivore* (Pegasus Books, New York). His brief description sounded intriguing so we agreed, and I'm awfully glad we did.

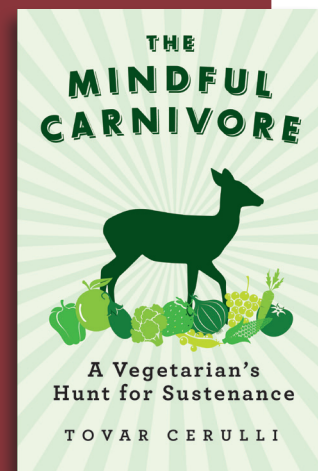
Cerulli is a 40-something logger/carpenter/freelance writer who grew up in southern New Hampshire. As a boy he filled his spare time with outdoor pursuits that both cultivated his natural curiosity and satisfied his appetite. He was as adept at coaxing a trout to take his lure as he was catching bullfrogs in the quarry near his home. But with age came a growing consciousness, and his love for such luscious meals became guilty pleasures he could no longer justify. Killing for flesh became abhorrent. By the time he graduated from college, he had learned enough about factory farming and studied philosophies that questioned meat-eating to know he could "never consume a fellow creature" again. He became a strict vegan.

Over the course of the next decade however, things gradually changed. Cerulli became aware that an agrarian lifestyle has its own issues with how it impacts the land. Even the protein-rich soybean products like tofu and soy milk he consumed became a concern when he learned that soybean farmers are issued special permits to kill deer that damage their crops. And he found that organic farmers who want to stay in business must use means, usually deadly, to control deer, woodchucks, insects and other creatures. As he put it, he "didn't want Bambi and Chuckie getting plugged and bombed as part of my 'personal ecology.'"

A warning from his doctor and Cerulli's evolution of thought eventually led him to reconsider fishing, and then hunting for food. The book culminates in a wonderful telling of his first deer hunt.

Cerulli's story is a pleasure to read, absorbing and well-researched. It is a thoughtful account of one man's motivations for deciding to hunt. As a hunter myself, who has often found it difficult to describe my motives, I appreciated his clear yet profound reasoning. In his words as he considered taking up hunting, "I knew that my own motives could not be neatly divided and compartmentalized. I would be hunting to confront the death of fellow vertebrates, yes. And I would be hunting to learn about myself and the place I inhabited, to be nourished by the land and participate in its rhythms, and to answer a call for which I had no name. I could not separate these things. Together, my reasons formed a complex web. Why should other hunters' motives be any different, any simpler?"

Kathryn A. Kahler is a staff writer for *Wisconsin Natural Resources* magazine.



A teen hunter's story

Luke Hickey



SUBMITTED BY LUKE HICKEY

Luke is an avid hunter and student at Appleton North High School.

It's the first day of a two-day youth gun deer hunt. We have just arrived at the land where we are going to hunt and I am rushing to get my blaze orange on and get to my stand so I can settle in before the opening...

Giving thanks to grandpa and the hunting heritage.

My hunting chaperone for the day is my grandfather, Pat Hickey. I spray myself with scent blocker, pull on my backpack, throw my .30-30 rifle with iron sights on my shoulder and begin the short walk to my stand.

I am silent as a mouse, moving without a sound on the pine needles covering the forest floor. I look ahead and can make out the silhouette of my tripod stand 15 feet in the air amongst a thin layer of fog. I walk up to the stand and find the rope I will use to lift my gun into the stand.

I am greeted by cold metal on my bare hands as I begin to climb the stand's ladder. When I reach the top of the stand I arrange my backpack on the floor, pull up my gun, load it with seven bullets and take a seat in the swivel chair located in the center of the tripod platform.

My attention is focused on a thick area of small pine trees located to the west. During past hunts, I have had my back to this area and deer have appeared out of the area and then disappeared back into the thickness before I had a shot so this is why I am mainly focused on this area for this hunt. The area around me is covered with large pine trees. Some have been uprooted due to a recent wind storm. Since there are a lot of obstacles to shoot around, I only have a few small shooting lanes.

It is now shooting hours and the sun is rising rapidly, but there is still a darkness in my wooded area. As I sit, I begin to hear the forest come to life. Squirrels, birds and bugs are playing all around me. I search anxiously for any sign of deer. I look to my left over the top of a fallen pine tree and down a walking trail leading to a small field. I see nothing and focus my attention back to the thickness 30 yards to the west.

Twenty minutes after opening I look back down the trail to my left. This time I freeze. Every muscle in my body is tense and I begin to shake. Down the trail 70 yards walking straight at me is a pair of large antlers and underneath them is the silhouette of a large white-tailed deer. I get the chance to see it for about five seconds before it disappears behind the large fallen pine tree blocking the trail. It appeared at my last glimpse that the large buck had turned off the trail and was now walking west.

I estimated that the deer would reappear behind the fallen tree. I cocked the hammer of my rifle with my shak-

ing hand, and waited for a good shot. It seemed like I had been waiting forever and there was still no sign of the buck. I quickly glanced back down the trail on which I first saw the deer. There he was. This time at about 70 yards away again, but walking away from me so that his tail was facing towards me.

I instantly realized two things: one, I had seconds before the buck disappeared around the corner of the trail; two, if I took the shot I would have to be very accurate in order to make a clean kill. I decided right away that I would take the now 75- to 80-yard shot. Resting my rifle on the side rail of the stand, I took my time, lined up the sights, held my breath and fired.

*The deer froze,
looking as if it was
an exhibit in a
museum, motionless
not moving a single
muscle.*

I missed, but quickly pumped the lever action and with a new bullet in the chamber took aim once more. This time I was much more careful. I did everything exactly the way my grandfather had taught me. I held my breath and very slowly squeezed the trigger.

This time I did not miss. By the time I pumped the lever of my rifle, the deer already lay still, not moving an inch from the place he was when I fired.

My heart was racing! I was shaking uncontrollably because I was so excited. My grandfather, who was positioned less than 100 yards from my stand, arrived quickly to the bottom of my stand. As I explained where the deer was, he climbed into my stand and looked through my binoculars at the large animal.

Grandpa seemed to be more excited than me. After congratulating me, we climbed down from the stand and approached the buck. I raised my gun and set my sights on the animal, which was growing larger every step closer we came. We quickly jumped over downed trees and silently approached the buck.

As I was less than a yard from the ani-


mal I touched it with the tip of my rifle making sure it was dead. It did not move so I set my rifle down, grabbed the deer by the antlers, and counted the points. It was nine points and had a 20-inch spread measured on the inside!

My grandfather and I quickly field dressed the animal. As we were field dressing it we discovered a broadhead arrow sticking out of the left hind quarter. We could tell the arrow was recently shot. We decided it was a good thing I bagged this deer, because it would eventually die from its injury and was suffering. After we finished dressing out the animal, we were able to back our vehicle right up to the buck and with a struggle, loaded him up, registered him and headed home.

Everything had gone exactly as I hoped for this hunt. It was the perfect hunt and I am very happy I had the chance to go on the youth hunt.

Wisconsin's youth hunt programs are very good opportunities to get out and enjoy some great hunts. I have taken part in the Wisconsin youth turkey, duck and deer hunts and have enjoyed all of these great opportunities.

Not only did I bag trophy animals, but I also grew a love for the outdoors while participating in these hunts. The youth hunt program is a prime opportunity to grow a love for hunting, the outdoors in general, along with an understanding of conservation.

If we can teach our youth about the importance of conservation of the outdoors, we will be able to have great hunting and a beautiful outdoor system for many generations to come. I am a youth. I am aware of the importance of these things, but being a youth I also know that many kids do not know the importance of these issues. Hunters give so much back to the environment through conservation and education programs. We must continue to educate our youth about these issues or hunting and the great outdoors will perish. 

Luke Hickey is a 15-year-old sophomore at Appleton North High School. He lives in Appleton and has lived in Wisconsin his entire life. He says he loves to hunt and hunting is what he does whenever he has a free day and it is the season to hunt. His favorite game is waterfowl, but he also enjoys hunting deer, turkey and upland birds. His family hunts and he says that he has been hunting with his dad, grandparents, uncles and other relatives since he was 5 years old. During the off season he enjoys fishing, scouting out new hunting spots and playing baseball.

CORMORANT UPDATE

What's the story on cormorants attacking many small fish (perch and walleye) in Leach Lake in the northern part of Minnesota? The state game department had to stop the birds. Did any lake in Wisconsin have the same problem?

Richard Kortsch
Rice Lake and Milwaukee

We carried a story in February 2008 ("Cormorant conundrum") about the problems the once-endangered double-crested cormorants were causing on the Lake Michigan shores along Green Bay and isolated islands off the Door County peninsula. At the time, managers were concerned not only for the potential losses of panfish and game fish the birds feed on, but the hazards their increasing numbers posed to island vegetation and habitat important to other birds (like herons, egrets and other colonial waterbirds) and migrating songbirds.

Control efforts — including removal of adult birds and egg oiling — over the last few years appear to be working as cormorant populations in the area showed an 18 percent decline from the 2009 peak of 15,227 nests to 12,534 nests in 2011. DNR fisheries surveys documented strong year classes of yellow perch during the last eight years, though the adult perch population has not rebounded as expected. Declines in Green Bay brown trout harvest also coincide with increasing cormorant numbers, prompting DNR to modify stocking strategies to reduce post-stocking mortality. Fisheries biologists are hopeful a combination of fewer cormorants, more forage fish such as alewives in recent years, and adjustments to stocking strategies will result in improved harvest number for brown trout.

LET'S TALK HUNTING

I don't buy a Wisconsin deer, small game, turkey or fishing license. The reason for not buying these licenses is simple.

I know some people that have received two bear kill permits. I have received none for all the years I applied. Last year (2010) I hunted whitetail in Canada. I was impressed and shot a very large buck. This year (2011) I received a bear kill permit in Canada. I don't care if I receive the Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine. I purchased Big Buck Magazine from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. I purchased my last Wisconsin black bear permit in September 2011.

Greg Sebold
Dorchester

I am a native of Wisconsin who has hunted deer there for more than 50 years. For the last 40 years, I have hunted as a non-resident. I have become very disappointed with my hunting experience and am not at all sure I will continue hunting there. Until approximately 10 years

ago, my family and I had seen a lot of deer and been reasonably successful. However, for the last 10 years, we have not only bagged few bucks, we have seen few deer. We have also noted access to numerous "logging roads" in the area we hunt east of Mountain — closed, according to the signs — in an effort to provide "non-motorized recreational experiences." Those closures are inexplicable to us but certainly have adversely affected our hunting experience and success.

In any event, we read the DNR's assessments of the herd and the hunt, but we find them self-serving and disingenuous. Frankly, we don't believe them. There is no doubt that the herd is much diminished from years past. Whether that is due

to the issuance of too many doe permits — to satisfy the insurance industry we hear — or too many wolves, we don't know. But in our opinion, the herd is not being managed as well today as in the past and we hunters are not being told the truth about it.

Michael G. Hron
Scottsdale, Arizona

COMMENT ON A STORY?

Send your letters to: Readers Write, WNR magazine, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707. Or email letters to dnrmagazine@wisconsin.gov. Limit letters to 250 words and include your name and the community from which you are writing.



BIG FISH TALE

I am attaching photos of a nice-sized walleye caught October 25, 2011. It was a dreary gusty day, and I was about to give up after over two hours of shore fishing in the rain without a single bite. Instead, I warmed up in my vehicle, then threw my 8-inch sucker back into the water. No sooner did it hit the water, when my bobber went two feet below surface and began "traveling" rapidly before plummeting down to the dark, murky river bottom. I could barely let line out fast enough. Finally, I set the hook and it was "game on!" The walleye leaped out of the water and thrust his head trying to shake me. But I wasn't letting this one get away! After about a 10-minute fight, I was able to bring him in and net him myself. What a surprise to see he was 29 inches long and weighed 9.6 pounds!

Tammy M. Lawson
Wausau



SUBMITTED BY TAMMY LAWSON

NO ACCESS TO THE WEB?

Don't have access to a link we mention in a story? Let us know when you want to follow a link we list. We'll do what we can to get you a copy of the material if it is available free of charge and is relatively short in length.

African savannas and Wisconsin state parks

meant good luck. The kids also didn't know how to walk quietly in the woods and listen for animals. On our first outing, they all ran down the path as if on a race.

Turns out, hiking in a state park is cultural. Looking for animals, being quiet and relishing the sights and sounds of the outdoors are taught by doing.

Some kids also need permission to play. I can't tell you how many kids ask permission to do what appears to be obvious.

On a trip to Blue Mound State Park, the kids asked permission to play in huge piles of oak leaves. I can't shake the questioning look on their faces when we got to the leaves. They needed permission. It's as if kids are so conditioned by school that they don't know how to explore. Outdoor adventures give kids opportunities to leave school rules behind and have fun.

Doing so, kids learn so much: they overcome fears, they learn self-reliance and perseverance, they learn how to listen and observe, they learn to recognize plants and animals, and how to stay warm when it's cold and cool when it's hot. They simply learn to love the outdoors.

While the kids are learning, their parents are learning, too. Parent participation for our trips doubled last year and we expect more parents to participate this year. Outdoor activity is contagious.

Multiple studies have shown that kids who spend time outdoors do better in school and have less stress. I would further argue that outdoor skills enhance real self esteem.

"I saw that"

"Look carefully, you might see a turkey."

Or a deer or a snake or a sandhill crane. Just fill in the blank. There's nothing better than seeing an animal for the first time. It's exciting and fun and makes kids happy. I think it helps kids do better in school, especially kids who struggle with academics.

I have a group of boys who consistently attend my trips. These kids have enviable energy levels that can test even the best of teachers. Outside, however, they are stimulated and respectful...most of the time. I believe it's because they're always "looking for a turkey." Outside, they never know what's going to happen. They're a little bit anxious and a little bit excited. That's a good mix. It keeps kids on their toes.

The boys saw a dizzying array of birds last spring at Governor Nelson State Park: sandhill cranes, catbird, hummingbird,

geese, swallows and lots more.

Do you think the next time they see a crane or a hummingbird in a book, they'll know what they are? No doubt. Do you think they'll be proud of themselves? Confident? You bet. They'll have the satisfaction of knowing something deep down and that could make all the difference.

"I saw that. I really did."

I can hear it now.

"I did it"

"Do we really get to shoot a gun?" squealed 8-year-old Gavin.

Yes, yes you can.

In July, I took a group to Outdoor Skills Day at the MacKenzie Environmental Education Center in Poynette. It's a day when kids learn how to do normally forbidden things like throw a hatchet and shoot a pellet gun among other "dangerous" outdoor skills.

Naturally, the kids couldn't wait.

Outdoor skills are perfect for kids with high energy. I could see their confidence grow as the day went on. They loved using their minds and their bodies to succeed.

"I hit it," beamed 5-year-old Ebrahim after hitting the target with a hatchet — just one of 50 kids who did.

Five-year-old Maria, hesitant at first about using a gun, quickly found her inner sharpshooter and racked up a string of bulls-eyes. I swear she grew two inches taller, her confidence soaring in the wake of her accomplishment.

This is real self-esteem that comes from doing something the child didn't think she could do, not the fake self-esteem that comes from meaningless praise.

We tend to forget that even young kids can accomplish great things if given a chance.

"Can my kid go?"

Three years ago, a distraught mother asked me if 8-year-old John could come on an outing.

John's behavior was out of control at school. I told her that the trips are meant for kids like John. He came along and he did well, very well.

Since then, John has attended more trips than any other child with no meltdowns, tantrums or outbursts. His mother shared his success with his class-




Getting kids outdoors gives them an adventure and sets the stage for making friends and lifelong learning.

room teachers and the positive feedback helped John turn the corner for the better. He's now in fifth grade and succeeding on all levels.

I have no doubt that these trips helped John get through a difficult year, just like nature helped me get through my dad's death when I was 10 years old.

Nature heals, soothes and inspires, which is a primary reason why I do this work.

My hope is that exposing young kids to our beautiful state properties will lay a foundation for lifelong learning and happiness. At the very least, the kids get an adventure full of wonder, fun, and perhaps even a little learning. 

Diane Schwartz is a consultant, writer and outdoor education teacher at Goodman Community Center in Madison. She writes a blog at getkidsoutsidenow.com. She is also the site coordinator at Schumacher Farm Park in Waunakee. You can contact her at getkidsoutside@gmail.com

To learn more about environmental education for kids, visit the DNR's EEK! website at dnr.wi.gov/EEK/

The Wisconsin State Park System has a new initiative aimed at getting children and families to spend more time outdoors with nature. It's fun, and it's good for you! To learn more visit Get Outdoors! Wisconsin at dnr.wi.gov/org/land/parks/interp/getoutdoors/

To donate to the Outdoor Education Fund, send tax deductible contributions to: Goodman Community Center, 149 Waubesa Street, Madison, WI 53704 Attn: Diane Schwartz.



Comforts

When cats do more than think outside the box

Johanna Schroeder

After smoothly writing my last Creature Comforts column, I found myself struggling with some serious writer's block. What should I focus on for this issue's column? After a series of unfortunate feline fiascoes recently at my house, the answer was obvious. What do you do when your cat chooses to pee outside the box?

A common problem with cats is urination in places other than their litter boxes. This "out of the box" behavior can be caused by several factors including an infection or other illness, improper litter training or bad behavior. If your cat is not sick, figure out what is causing the problem and, most importantly, treat the stained area immediately so the behavior does not continue.

If your feline is a kitten and not properly litter box trained, my vet suggested a simple solution: put it in an empty bathtub. Cats, like puppies, do not like to go to the bathroom



Really, a car seat? Not even close.

I have never tried this with an older cat, though.

An older cat is more likely to be peeing elsewhere due to a behavior issue. One element actually could be the litter box.

Ask yourself these questions:

Do you have enough litter boxes? I was told to have one litter box per cat.

Are you cleaning the litter box frequently enough?

Humans don't want to go to the bathroom in a toilet that is never cleaned, neither does a cat.

Is the litter box located in an area the cat feels comfortable using? Yes — some felines are prone to experiencing stage fright, and will not use litter boxes they feel are too public or noisy.

Is the type of litter you are using upsetting your cat? Cats can have issues with scents and

textures, just like people.

Another factor to consider is stress. Significant changes in your pet's life (such as a new pet or baby, a move, or even a sudden switch in food) can cause a great deal of stress for a cat. Slowly introducing new family members, or foods, can help ease the transition period for your cat. Obviously a cat's personality, like a person's, can vary. Be ready for several trials and errors before discovering what is causing the problem and what the solution may be.

After you are able to pinpoint the problem, you need to conquer the tricky odor of cat urine. Although a human nose may not be able to detect

cat urine scent, a cat's keen nose can. If they smell an area that has been urinated on or "marked," they will continue to pee there, eventually causing serious damage.

For items that can be thrown in the washer, adding white vinegar with detergent can help get the scent out. The vinegar smell is not detectable after the items are laundered. Vinegar can also be used to treat other soiled areas without leaving stains. I suggest putting a solution of 3/4 cup vinegar and 1/4 cup water into some type of spray bottle to make application easier. There are also enzyme-killing solutions available, but may contain harsh chemical ingredients. If the problem persists, ask your vet for other possible solutions, because an untreated rug or piece of furniture will need to be disposed of if the urination continues.

Keeping your cat happy and healthy, and their litter box clean, is the best way to ensure that life's little feline fiascoes won't happen to you!



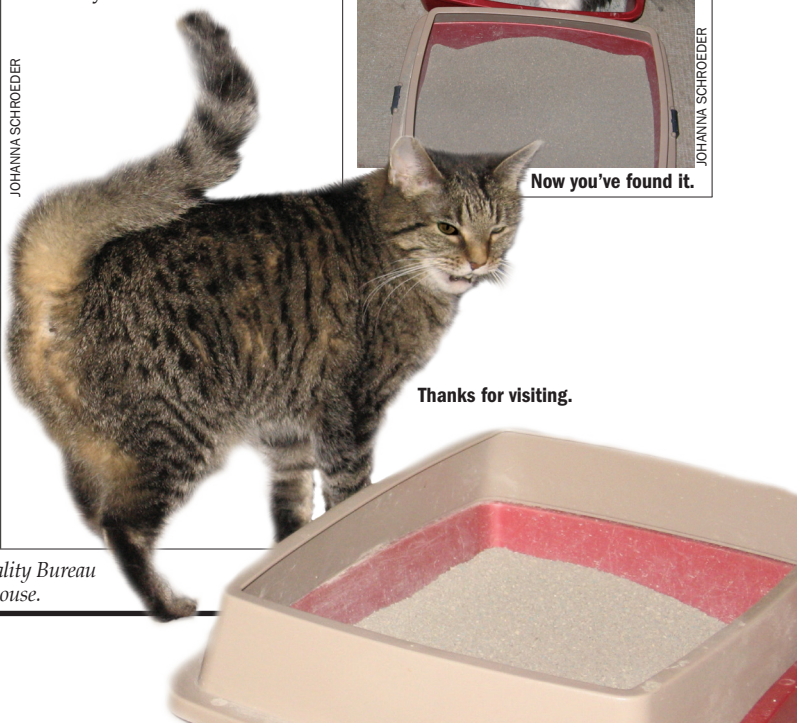
This box is not the litter box — but you are getting closer.

where they sleep. Place a large pan of litter, food, water, a comfortable place for them to sleep and plenty of toys in the tub. Make sure every space is taken up with something. The cat will learn that the place to go potty is the place they don't sleep, eat or play. Since they are too small at that age to scale the bathtub wall, they can't escape and find other areas to potty.

Johanna Schroeder works at the Department of Natural Resources in the Water Quality Bureau and shares a home with four kids and two cats, one of which is currently in the doghouse.



This is not the litter box.



Thanks for visiting.



Now you've found it.

Traveler

Day tripping

Kathryn A. Kahler

Traveler realizes each of our readers has unique interests. What some find stuffy, others find stimulating. So rather than picking a theme, we've chosen a mix of events and exhibits we hope will satisfy your diverse interests — a veritable smorgasbord of day trips and junkets to brighten the midwinter doldrums.



KENOSHA PUBLIC MUSEUM



HUDSON HOT AIR AFFAIR

You who like exhilarating outdoor fun will find Hudson's **Hot Air Affair** (February 4-6) to your liking. The Midwest's premier winter ballooning event features a torchlight parade with kazoo marching band, volleyball in the snow, geocaching, kite-flying and — smooch-boarding? That's right — foursomes anchor their left feet to one snowboard and their right feet to another and "race" around the course. After dark, there's a fireworks display over the St. Croix River and the breathtaking "Field of Fire" where balloons light up the night sky. Visit hudsonhotairaffair.com for a complete listing

of events, or call (800) 657-6775.

Do you love to watch figure skating and can't wait another two years for the Olympics? Just head to Beaver Dam for the **Swan City Ice-skaters SynchroSkate** (February 11-12). Teams of up to 20 elegantly costumed skaters from Wisconsin and other states take to the ice in competition that features complicated footwork and steps, lifts, jumps, and spins set to a musical program. Visit swancityice.skaters.com or call (920) 885-9816 for more information.

The Bubolz Preserve (4815 N. Lyndale Dr., Appleton) invites families to **Adopt A Bucket** (March 3, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.) and

help make ready for the 2012 sap season. Participants will decorate pails with their favorite designs, have their pictures taken

with the buckets and watch demonstrations on how to tap a maple tree. Then the buckets will be hung in the Preserve's sugar bush. You'll take home an 8-ounce jar of maple syrup and the picture of you and your bucket. Visit bubolzpreserve.com.



ROGER LUDWIG



JEFF SOKOLOV

or call (920) 731-6041 for more information.

Decoy collectors will convene in Oshkosh, March 9-10 (8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.) for the **Wisconsin Decoy & Sporting Collectibles Show** at the Hilton Garden Inn (off Interstate 43). This mid-winter gathering has outgrown its humble beginning in a small tavern in Fond du Lac but has kept its friendly atmosphere and hospitality. Visitors will see exhibits of old and new decoys, duck calls, hunting knives, animal traps, wildlife art, cartridges and fishing tackle. Collectors can buy, sell, trade and get free appraisals. For more information, call Roger Ludwig at (920) 233-0349, or email rogfuzz@charter.net

Participate in culinary history at a **Hearthside Dinner** at Wade House, W7824 Center Rd., Greenbush, on March 17, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Guests prepare 19th-century dishes on a wood-burning stove and open hearth fire just as Mrs. Wade did more than 150 years ago, then enjoy the fruits of their labor in the lovely Wade House dining room. At the day's conclusion, everyone pitches in to clear the table, wash the dishes (19th-century style), and sweep the hearth to end a satisfying encounter with central Wisconsin's past. Cost is \$45 per person and registration is required. Visit wadehouse.org or call (920) 526-3271 to register.

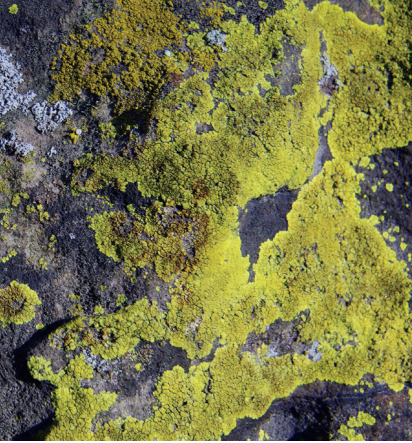
Get new insights into **Wolves and Wild Lands** at the Kenosha Public Museum (5500 First Avenue) through March 25, in the West Gallery. Learn the cultural and economic pressures that continue to shape the wolf's existence on the North American continent. Visit kenoshapublicmuseum.org or call (262) 653-4140 for more information. Winter hours are Sunday noon to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., and closed Monday and holidays.

Just in time for spring turkey season, you'll find the latest equipment, accessories, clothing and anything else to fit your outdoor lifestyle, at the **2012 Wisconsin Deer & Turkey Expo**, March 30-April 1, at the Alliant Energy Center, Madison. More than 500 product exhibits, 50 seminars on a dozen topics, demonstrations and activities traditionally attract thousands of outdoor enthusiasts to this annual three-day event. New this year is a trail camera demonstration, information on aquatic food plots and ponds, a special emphasis on women's hunting apparel and gear, and seminars on "Blood-tracking Dogs for Deer Recovery." Visit deerinfo.com or call (608) 267-3976.

ROBERT QUEEN



Kathryn A. Kahler is a staff writer for Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.



Wisconsin, naturally

MILL BLUFF STATE NATURAL AREA

Notable:

This geological site, tucked within Mill Bluff State Park, highlights unusual butte-like hills, pinnacles, and spires composed of Cambrian sandstone that is 490 to 543 million years old. Rising above the sandy, level bed of extinct glacial Lake Wisconsin, the formations display prominent stratification lines shaped eons ago in the shifting sands of ancient river floodplains. Several bluffs contain petroglyphs — rock carvings — dating back to the Upper Mississippian Indian culture. Vegetation on and surrounding the rock outcrops is dominated by xeric forest species, including Hill's oak, jack pine, red pine, white pine and white oak. Low blueberry, huckleberry, sweet gale, bracken fern and Pennsylvania sedge, along with prairie grasses, comprise the ground layer. The rock substrate also provides habitat for a variety of lichens, including the (barely) edible rock tripe along with colorful crustose forms.

How to get there:

Within Mill Bluff State Park, Juneau and Monroe counties. From the intersection of Interstate 90/94 and Highway 12 in Camp Douglas, go west on 12 about 3 miles, then north on Highway W to the entrance to Mill Bluff State Park. Request a park map at the contact station. Hiking trails provide access to Mill Bluff and Camel's Bluff. Visit dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna/index.asp?SNA=359 for information and a map of the site. A state park admission sticker is required.

