

BUFFALO COUNTY OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN



2021 - 2025



PREPARED BY:
Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission



Buffalo County Outdoor Recreation Plan 2021-2025

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1. Introduction

Outdoor recreation aids citizens' physical health, as well as the health of the economy, as high-quality recreation opportunities attract visitors to the county each year. Buffalo County recognizes the need for an updated comprehensive outdoor recreation plan. County, city, village, and town officials as well as concerned citizens are aware of the need for local outdoor recreation facilities and are also aware that the needs vary within the county and its municipal subdivisions in the development of specific recreation programs and long-range objectives. The plan is also intended to assist in local government's budgetary considerations when planning for the maintenance and further development of recreation facilities. The recommendation and proposals found within this plan are aimed at the continued preservation, acquisition, development, and improvement of the area's outdoor recreation facilities. It is local government's responsibility to periodically further investigate and seriously consider the recommendations cited within this plan that provide for the orderly growth, development, and maintenance of the area's outdoor recreation resources.

This plan is also intended to assure the County's and municipalities' eligibility to participate in the Land and Water Conservation Fund Program (LAWCON) and the State Stewardship Program. The existence of a recreation plan will also assist the county and communities with their overall planning and development efforts for which financial assistance is also available from other federal and state programs designed to promote and assist in the development of viable communities. The provision of adequate recreation facilities is a goal that concurs with the national emphasis on improving the quality of life in our communities and preserving a balanced environment.

Objectives

Buffalo County's objective in preparing this Outdoor Recreation Plan is twofold; the first is to provide an orderly framework for guiding future development of the County's own recreation properties; and the second is to provide a single source document in which the individual community plans can be brought together to provide a county-wide inventory of existing outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities and also to provide an opportunity to view the entire county for future planning purposes.

To accomplish this objective, the following goals have been identified:

- 1) Maintain an outdoor recreation program that protects the natural environment and responds to the outdoor recreational needs of the area's citizenry.
- 2) Formulate an action agenda plan to meet the determined needs or unsatisfied public demands for outdoor recreation facilities in the county and municipalities.
- 3) Have a program that enables the county and municipalities to continually maintain and improve their recreation programs in a way that is economically feasible and environmentally sound.
- 4) Encourage the private sector to provide certain quality services and facilities for outdoor recreation enthusiasts.
- 5) Consider the impact on the local economy of the many visitors and tourists in the area that utilize the county and municipal outdoor recreation facilities.
- 6) Establish a policy of re-evaluating goals and objectives and project plans when necessary.
- 7) Receive maximum benefits from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LAWCON) and State Stewardship Program funds.

Authority

The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC) prepared this County Outdoor Recreation Facilities Plan on behalf of the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors who will adopt the plan.

Community Participation and Cooperation

The strength of the outdoor recreation program in Buffalo County can be gauged by participation and enthusiasm of numerous local citizen groups and service clubs that create outdoor recreational opportunities and support governmental efforts at improving outdoor recreation facilities and opportunities. Below are some of these groups and events that help make outdoor experiences of all kinds available in the County.

Citizen Groups and Service Clubs

- Act 1, Community Theatre Guild (Mondovi)
- Alma Historical Society
- Alma, Inc., WI Post 224
- Alma Lions Club
- Alma Rod and Gun Club
- Alma Snow Drifters of Wisconsin Inc. (Snowmobile Club)
- Arcadia Sportsmen's Club
- Big River Theatre Company (Alma)
- Boy Scouts
- Buffalo City Historical Society
- Buffalo County 4-H Clubs
- Buffalo County Conservation Alliance (BCCA)
- Buffalo County Historical Society
- Buffalo County Land & Trails Trust (nonprofit for the Flyway Trail)
- Buffalo County Snowmobile Assoc. Inc. (Snowmobile Club)
- Buffalo County Trail Riders
- Cochrane Buffalo City Lions Club
- Cochrane Historical Society
- Dillon-Johnson-Anderson, Inc., WI Post 154
- Forrest-Gunderson-Klevgard, WI Post 264
- Fountain City Area Historical Society
- Fountain City Business & Community Group
- Fountain City, Inc., WI Post 56
- Fountain City Lions Club
- Fountain City River Players
- Fountain City Rod and Gun Club
- Gilmanton Sportsmen's Club
- Girl Scouts
- Glencoe Drifters (Snowmobile Club)
- Great Rivers Anglers Chapter (Buffalo City)
- Hilltop Trailblazers (Snowmobile Club)
- Midnight Riders Saddle Club
- Mondovi American Legion
- Mondovi Area Historical Society
- Mondovi Business Association
- Mondovi Conservation Club
- Mondovi Garden Club
- Mondovi Gilmanton Sno Blazers (Snowmobile Club)
- Mondovi Lions Club
- Nelson Lions Club
- Nelson-Urne Trail Snowmobilers (Snowmobile Club)
- River Valley Riders (Snowmobile Club)
- Trout Unlimited
- Waumandee Area Lions Club
- Waumandee Rod and Gun Club
- Waumandee Trailblazers (Snowmobile Club)
- Wings Over Alma

2. Geopolitical Profile

Buffalo County Profile

Buffalo County's 2019 American Community Survey estimates population was 13,126. The County is located in west central Wisconsin, with parts of the southern portion within a 30-minute drive of the La Crosse urban area and the northern portion of the same distance from Eau Claire, and also serves as a suburban venue for Winona, Minnesota, across the Mississippi River.

Buffalo County is 28.5 miles east-west at its widest part, and about 40.5 miles north-south at the tallest part. It borders Pepin and Eau Claire Counties to the north and Trempealeau County to the east. The rest of Buffalo County is bordered by the Mississippi River and Minnesota, which covers all the west and south.

The Landscape

Buffalo County is located within the unglaciated, Driftless Area of Western Wisconsin. It has a varied topography with high ridges, long narrow valleys and steep slopes. Bluffs rise above the river bottoms by 500 feet in some areas. The land area of the county is 734.2 square miles, or about 469,881 acres.

The principal soil type is silt loam over limestone bedrock. Soils are underlain by sedimentary bedrock consisting mainly of Cambrian sandstones and Prairie du Chien dolomitic limestone. The limestone once covered most of the surface of the county, but with erosion much of the original plan has been deeply dissected and worn away; such that it is found only as remnants capping the ridge tops and higher hills. This is underlain by sandstone and, at lower levels, a sandy shale or shale sandstone. Outcroppings of bedrock are common, including sheer bluff faces along the Mississippi River.

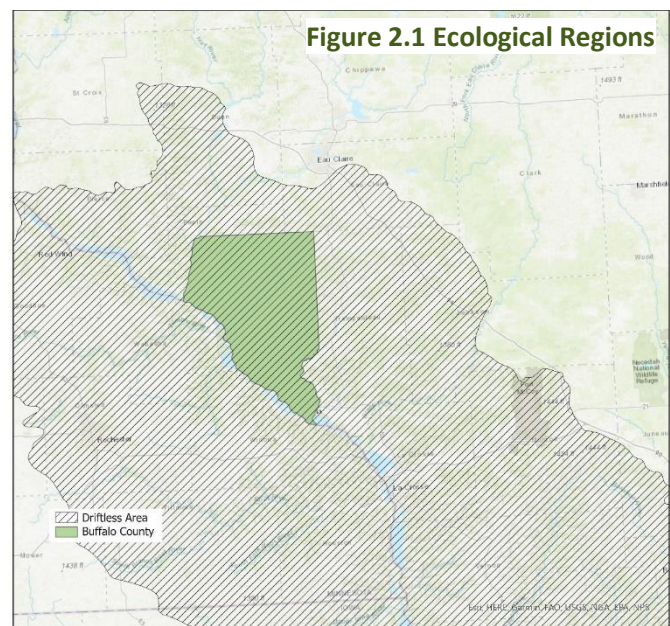
Loess, alluvium, and colluvium form the uppermost geologic deposits and, in addition to the bedrock, are the parent materials for many of the soils in the county. Soil types range from shallow silty clay loams on steep rocky land to deep silt loams on the valley bottoms, with smaller areas of sandy outwash soils. Aeolian silt deposits range from 0.5 to 16 feet deep, with decreasing depths from southwest to northeast.

Physical Characteristics

According to the Wisconsin Department of Revenue 2020 Statement of Assessment, Buffalo County has 325,221 acres of assessed lands. About 43.3% of land in the County is assessed as agriculture, agriculture/forest, or forest. Other land categories are Residential 1.3%, Commercial 0.2%, Manufacturing 0.1%, and Undeveloped 5.9% and other 1.5%. 18.4% of County land is Managed Forest Lands, 3.5% Federal, 3.1% State, and less than 1% of County non-forest land.

Agricultural Characteristics

Agriculture is the dominate land use in Buffalo County with dairy, crop and mixed livestock operations. The 2017 Census of Agriculture County reported 966 farms on 293,130 acres with an average size of a farm of 303 acres. Comparing these



statistics to 2012 Ag Census, the total number of farms in the County declined by 8.95%, land in farms decreased by 3.98%, and the average size of a farm increased by 5.2% from 2012 to 2017.

Local Governments

The County has 6 incorporated communities and 17 townships. The 17 town governments range in size from the Town of Milton's 16.3 square miles to the Town of Nelson that covers 40.6 square miles. The villages range in size from Cochrane's 0.8 square miles to the Village of Nelson with 1.44 square miles. Alma is the largest City at 7.9 square miles. See **Table 3.1** for the population of each municipality with 2019 American Community Survey estimates.

Ecological Landscape

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has divided the state into 16 ecological landscapes based on topography, soils, aquatic features, current vegetation, past vegetation, and other factors. Within each ecological landscape, legacy places have been identified. Buffalo County's land area is within the Western Coulee and Ridges Landscape, **Figure 2.1**. This Landscape is characterized by highly eroded non-glaciated topography. Its steep sided valleys are heavily forested with hardwoods and agricultural activities, primarily dairy and beef farming, are confined to the valley floors and ridge tops. Large and small meandering rivers and streams are also a characteristic. Soils are typically silt loams, and sandy loams in the uplands and alluvial or terrace deposits on the valley floors. The area's pristine waters, forested hills and valleys, and rich biodiversity are a significant asset in the county. Thousands of acres protected as natural areas, state parks, and fish and wildlife refuges are a testament to the area's value to local and national ecosystems.

There are five legacy places identified in the County. 1) The **Buffalo River Corridor** runs from Jackson County to the Mississippi River and contains a diverse mixture of high-quality habitats ranging from broad wetlands to large forest block to oak savanna. The lower end of the Buffalo River provides valuable nesting and migratory habitat for many species of birds in the Mississippi River Valley and serves as an important staging area for migrating tundra swans. There is a Watchable Wildlife Observation Platform at Rieck's Lake Park near Alma, Wisconsin. The best time to view the tundra swans is from mid-October through mid-November. 2) The **Cochrane City Bluffs** harbor good quality prairie and oak savanna complexes. 3) The 194,000 acre **Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge** Extends 284 miles from Wabasha, MN to Rock Island, IL. The refuge plays host to significant waterfowl migrations, including some of the continent's largest concentrations of migrating tundra swans and canvasback ducks. Boating, fishing and waterfowl hunting are popular recreation pursuits. 4) The **Lower Chippewa River and Prairies** located in Buffalo, Dunn and Pepin Counties feature the largest concentration of remaining prairies and savannas in the state. 5) The **Trempealeau River Delta** situated between the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge and Perrot State Park consist of undeveloped uplands that provide an opportunity to establish a conservation corridor.

Table 2.1 Buffalo County Assessed Land Uses

Land Classification	2020	
	Acres	% of Total Land Acres
Residential	6,131	1.3
Commercial	1,078	0.2
Manufacturing	664	0.1
Agriculture	203,227	43.3
Undeveloped	27,563	5.9
Agricultural Forest	65,207	13.9
Forest Lands	17,770	3.8
Other	6,875	1.5
Total	325,221	
Exempt		
Managed Forest Lands	86,424	18.4
Federal	16,424	3.5
State	14,507	3.1
County (non forest)	306	0.0006

Source: Wis. Dept. of Revenue – 2020 Statement of Assessment

Driftless Area

The Driftless area, an area covering 15,425,920 acres or 24,103 square miles covers all or part of 57 counties in southeast Minnesota, southwest Wisconsin, northeast Iowa and a small portion of northwest Illinois in the Upper Mississippi River Basin. Buffalo County is part of this unique area, an area that was by-passed by the last continental glacier some 10,000 years ago resulting in a steep, rugged landscape. The area is characterized by karst topography with shallow limestone bedrock, caves and sinkholes.

3. Socio-Economic Profile

Population

The population of Buffalo County decreased 1.45% between 2015 and 2019. As shown in the following table, the County's population decreased by 193 people during the last five years. The Towns experienced a population gain of 113, while the incorporated communities experienced a decrease of 306 people or -5.08%. Estimates and projections made by the Wisconsin Department of Administration indicate that the County will continue to decline in population slightly with a population loss of just 1.4% projected by the year 2034. This minimal decline in population does not deter from the fact there is always a demand for quality outdoor recreation facilities and the need for an updated outdoor recreation plan. Table 3.1 shows American Community Survey (ACS) data of the incorporated cities and villages and unincorporated towns.

Population Age

Buffalo County, according to 2019 ACS figures, had a median age of 46.6. This is an increase of almost 4 years since the 2010 ACS (42.8) and is higher than the median age of the State (39.5) and the Nation (38.1). The County's percentage of population 65 years and older was 21.6%, this figure is also higher than the State's percentage which, was 16.5% and the Nation's which was 15.6%. On the other end of the age scale the percentage of the County's population that is under the age of 18 was 20.4%, which is lower than the State's 22.1% and the Nation's 22.6%.

Gender Characteristics

In 2019, the population breakdown in the County by gender was 51% male and 49% female. The Town of Belvidere had the largest gender difference with 55.3% male and 44.7% female (*US Census 2010.*)

Urban/Rural Characteristics

In 1960 the County had 36% of its population living in incorporated communities and in 2019 over 43.5% of residents were living in incorporated communities, a 7.5% increase. This movement of people will have an impact on the access and amount of public lands for recreation purposes. The small lot urban dweller, whether it is a city of 2,000 or a village of 200, does not have the capability to provide a myriad of extensive outdoor recreation experiences on his or her own land and therefore is more dependent upon a public park system which offers a broader range of outdoor opportunities including hunting, hiking, camping, and picnicking.

As more people move to the incorporated communities and rural areas and farms are sold off for development, lands previously used for recreation are lost. Many rural residents can find extended outdoor recreation

Table 3.1 Buffalo County Population Data

Municipality	Population			
	2015 ACS	2019 ACS	# Change 15-19	% Change 15-19
T Alma	290	326	36	12.41
T Belvidere	395	374	-21	-5.32
T Buffalo	766	816	50	6.53
T Canton	292	272	-20	-6.85
T Cross	356	342	-14	-3.93
T Dover	523	545	22	4.21
T Gilmanton	369	415	46	12.47
T Glencoe	505	453	-52	-10.30
T Lincoln	189	225	36	19.05
T Maxville	383	377	-6	-1.57
T Milton	501	554	53	10.58
T Modena	288	238	-50	-17.36
T Mondovi	454	444	-10	-2.20
T Montana	274	303	29	10.58
T Naples	650	617	-33	-5.08
T Nelson	631	697	66	10.46
T Waumandee	428	409	-19	-4.44
Town Totals	7,294	7,407	113	1.55
V. Cochrane	442	392	-50	-11.31
V. Nelson	324	340	16	4.94
C Alma	678	688	10	1.47
C Buffalo City	1,035	875	-160	-15.46
C Fountain City	853	821	-32	-3.75
C Mondovi	2,693	2,603	-90	-3.34
City & Village Totals	6,025	5,719	-306	-5.08
Buffalo County	13,319	13,126	-193	-1.45
Wisconsin	5,742,117	5,790,716	48,599	0.85

Source: 2015 & 2019 Population Estimates American Community Survey

experiences on their own land. Snowmobiling, cross-country skiing, hunting, hiking, and scenery viewing can all be done on their own property and their dependence upon a

government sponsored recreation facility may be primarily for support of team sports like softball.

Farming

Farming is a major part Buffalo County's economy. In 2017 farmers harvested 60,689 acres (10.2 million bushels) of corn for grain; 33,612 acres (1.5 million bushels) of soybeans for beans; and 41,154 acres (136,280 tons) of forage. During that period the county had 17,400 dairy cows that produced 361.9 million pounds of milk. Over a period of 5 years between 2012 and 2017 the number of farms in Buffalo County decreased from 1,061 to 966 farms and the total acreage in farms decreased from 305,302 acres to 293,130, a 3.9% decline. This decline in rural farms has a detrimental effect on outdoor recreation.

Housing Trends

Table 3.2 shows housing trends in Buffalo County and the State of Wisconsin from 2010-2019. During this period both Buffalo County housing units increased by 1.74% and the State's housing units increased by 2.0%. The 2019 ACS reported that of the 6,788 housing units reported, 85.0% were occupied housing units, 15.0% were vacant.

Employment

According to the 2018 American Community Survey estimates, the top employment industries in the County were Educational Services, Health Care and Social Assistance (21.4%); Manufacturing (18.7%); and Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining (10.5%).

It is important to note that there are large numbers of residents who commute to places of employment outside the county, especially to Winona County, MN and Trempealeau and Eau Claire counties in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Department of Work Force Development reported the County unemployment rate for September 2020 was 4.8 percent. This rate was down from the 2010 unemployment rate of 6.4 percent. Table 3.3 shows occupations by industry for Buffalo County.

Table 3.2 Buffalo County Housing Trends

Municipality	2010	2015	2019	% Change 15-19
T Alma	171	168	181	7.74
T Belvidere	219	242	236	-2.48
T Buffalo	316	336	372	10.71
T Canton	126	126	124	-1.59
T Cross	165	167	167	0.00
T Dover	199	219	208	-5.02
T Gilmanton	190	189	183	-3.17
T Glencoe	208	221	220	-0.45
T Lincoln	123	140	147	5.00
T Maxville	152	172	155	-9.88
T Milton	253	244	266	9.02
T Modena	161	162	146	-9.88
T Mondovi	200	208	239	14.90
T Montana	122	124	173	39.52
T Naples	278	289	282	-2.42
T Nelson	291	300	328	9.33
T Waumandee	217	201	197	-1.99
V Cochrane	234	214	208	-2.80
V Nelson	204	182	176	-3.30
C Alma	488	475	460	-3.16
C Buffalo City	577	591	582	-1.52
C Fountain City	467	479	476	-0.63
C Mondovi	1,303	1,223	1,262	3.19
Buffalo Co.	6,664	6,672	6,788	1.74
Wisconsin	2,624,358	2,641,627	2,694,527	2.00

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census, 2015-2019 ACS

Per Capita Personal Income

In 2018, Buffalo County had a per capita personal income (PCPI) of \$44,756. This PCPI ranked 48th in the state and was below the state average of \$50,756, and below the national average, \$53,712.

Tourism Expenditures

Visitor expenditures in Buffalo County grew from \$12.7 million in 2018 to \$12.9 million in 2019. This same trend was prevalent in over 80% of other counties in the State. The neighboring counties of Eau Claire, Pepin, and Trempealeau also increased visitor expenditures from 2018-2019. Tourism employment in the county also increased by 2.0% from 2018 through 2019. Buffalo County ranked 69th in the State in tourism expenditures.

Table 3.3 Buffalo County Occupations by Industry

INDUSTRY	Wisconsin		Buffalo County	
	Estimate	%	Estimate	%
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	2,964,540		6,847	
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining	69,034	2.3	709	10.5
Construction	167,256	5.6	505	7.4
Manufacturing	541,654	18.3	1,283	18.7
Wholesale trade	79,385	2.7	174	2.5
Retail trade	328,771	11.1	622	9.0
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	133,175	4.5	562	8.2
Information	48,214	1.6	65	0.9
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	178,252	6.0	291	4.2
Professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management services	247,109	8.3	309	4.5
Educational services, health care & social assist.	639,627	21.6	1,466	21.4
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	253,278	8.5	383	5.6
Other services, except public administration	122,460	4.1	270	3.9
Public administration	102,325	3.5	208	3.0

Source: 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Employers

Agriculture, manufacturing, education, and health sectors largely shape the economic character of Buffalo County, and growing industries like transportation and non-metallic mining are providing new opportunities for employment. The largest employer in Buffalo County is Marten Transport with between 250-499 employees. Other major employees are Dairyland Power Co-op and American Lutheran Home, Table 3.4. A number of residents in Buffalo County commute to Winona and Wabasha Counties in Minnesota and Trempealeau, Eau Claire, Pepin, and La Crosse Counties in Wisconsin for employment.

Table 3.4 Buffalo County Major Employers

Establishment	Number of Employees (January 2015)
Marten Transport	250-499 employees
Dairyland Power Co-op	100-249 employees
American Lutheran Home	100-249 employees
La Crosse Milling Company	50-99 employees
St. Michaels Lutheran Home	50-99 employees
Midwest Dental	50-99 employees

Source: State of Wis., Department of Workforce Development, 2/15

4. Review of Recreation Demand – State of Wisconsin

Introduction

The planning of outdoor recreation facilities is of utmost importance for the development of healthy and viable communities. Three important parts of recreation planning are: (1) Determine the demand for different types of outdoor recreation activity, (2) Inventory the existing facilities which accommodate the various types of outdoor recreation activity, and (3) Evaluate the existing facilities and determine the need for improvements or additions to meet the existing and anticipated recreational demand.

According to the Outdoor Recreation Roundtable (<https://recreationroundtable.org/impact/>):

“The outdoor recreation industry does more than bring joy to millions of Americans: It helps drive our economy. In 2018, the Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) included outdoor recreation in its calculations of U.S. GDP for the very first time—a significant step that formally recognizes the critical role the industry plays in supporting economic growth in the United States. In addition, the BEA found that the outdoor recreation industry is growing rapidly, eclipsing the average increase in overall U.S. GDP.

Outdoor recreation is also a major generator of quality American jobs in industries ranging from manufacturing to retail to tourism. These jobs can be found from coast to coast and play a critical role in the economic health of local and state economies.”

Recreational Demand

As we progress into a new decade, events and issues that influence outdoor recreation in the future are changing. Issues, which will influence future outdoor recreation activities include:

- Land use patterns are shifting
- Ownership patterns in rural areas are changing
- Budgets for operation and maintenance of recreation resources are not expected to increase.

In addition, the demographics of the county are shifting. As pointed out earlier in this plan, the County’s median age increased 5.3 years since 1990. As people age, recreation activities they participate in may change. The changes in family structure (an increase in single parent families) also changes recreation choices.

For guidance on the demand for recreational outdoor activities, a review of the Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2019-2023 was conducted. During the development of SCORP, numerous Wisconsin residents were questioned as to how often they participate in various recreation activities. Data is collected at 8 regional levels; Buffalo County lies in the Mississippi River Corridor. The box on page 19

Popular recreation activities in which respondents to the State survey participate:

Bicycling – paved trails

Bicycling – mountain biking, single track

Bicycling – winter/fat tire

Camping – tent

Canoeing/kayaking

Cross-country skiing/snowshoeing

Fishing – from a boat, canoe, or kayak

Fishing – from shore

Harvesting berries, mushrooms, etc.

Hiking, walking, running on trails

Swimming

Wildlife/bird watching

indicates the most popular recreation activities in the State with activities **bolded** indicating the top activities in the Mississippi River Corridor Region.

Activity Group	% of WI residents that participated at least once in the last 12 months
Hiking	68%
Hiking/walking/running on trails	
Nature Observation	66%
Bird/wildlife watching	
Nature photography	
Gathering berries, mushrooms, etc.	
Boating-related	61%
Motor boating	
Canoeing/kayaking	
Personal watercraft (jet-ski)	
Sailing	
Stand-up paddle boarding	
Waterskiing	
Fishing	49%
Lake fishing	
Stream/river fishing	
Ice fishing	
Camping	41%
Tent camping	
RV/pop-up camping	
Dog-related activities	38%
Walking/running dog on trails	
Visiting a dog park	
Bicycling	35%
Bicycling on rail-trails or other developed trails	
Mountain biking	
Fat-tire biking/snow biking	
Hunting	27%
Big game hunting	
Turkey hunting	
Small game hunting	
Migratory bird hunting	
Motorized trail-based activities	25%
ATVs/UTVs on trails-routes	
Snowmobiling	
4-WD vehicles on trails-routes	
Motorcycles on trails-routes	

Favorite Places to Visit Based on Public Input

Of the people providing input, the majority (67%) selected the quality of trails as one of the top four most important factors in determining their favorite property to visit. This is expected, given that many respondents noted their participation in a variety of motorized and non-motorized activities. The following were the next three important factors to determine favorable places to visit:

- Desire to be in a quiet place,
- Good maps, signs, or information about the property, and
- The quality of the habitat.

Wisconsin residents have historically participated in outdoor recreation at higher rates than the national average. The table to the left shows participation rates of Wisconsin residents for general groupings of nature-based recreation activities. For comparison, 46% of Wisconsin residents participated in ball sports (golf, tennis, basketball, softball, baseball, soccer, and handball).

77% of respondents believe more outdoor recreational opportunities are needed in the Mississippi River Corridor Region. The opportunity that was most frequently selected as needed in the Mississippi River Corridor Region was more trails for hiking, walking or running, which was selected by nearly half of respondents.

The Mississippi River Corridor Region is a unique setting lending itself well to various types of outdoor recreation. Trout fishermen are drawn from throughout the Midwest to the many streams draining to the Mississippi River. These same rivers attract paddlers and bluffs are attractive to mountain bikers. The area provides exceptional habitat for many game species, especially deer and turkey. Since the huge success of wild turkey reintroduction beginning in Buffalo County back in the 1970's, this region has been a hotbed for spring turkey hunting. The river is a migratory bird flyway which attracts waterfowl hunters during the fall migration as

countless birds make their way south. The bluffs are also home to rare plant species and natural communities. With the abundance of nature, this area offers countless avenues to be explored.

These communities are partnering with local citizen groups, raising funds and developing parks, trails and accesses to waterways, attracting visitors year-round. The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCF) was enacted by Congress in 1965 “to strengthen the health and vitality of the citizens of the United States” through outdoor recreation. From 1965 to 2017, Buffalo County has been awarded \$454,910 by LWCF and has been used for 12 projects.

According to Spending Potential Index, based on Esri forecast for 2020 and 2025, Buffalo County residents spend more money per year on recreational vehicles and fees than the national average. These expenses are predominately on boats, trailers, campers and RVs. The MPI (Market potential Index), which measures the likelihood of adult spending behaviors based on purchasing patterns, is another indicator used by Esri to predict spending patterns in a region from 2020 to 2025. Based on these projections, Buffalo County residents participate approximately 50% more in freshwater fishing, rifle and shotgun hunting, target shooting, archery, and motorcycling than the national average.

Future Recreation Needs

Based on the 2019-2023 SCORP, the Mississippi River Corridor Region rates recreational activities as high, medium, or low relative to needs of the region. The groupings are as follows:

Mississippi River Corridor Region Recreation Needs 2019-2023 SCORP		
Future Recreation Needs – High	Future Recreation Needs – Medium	Future Recreation Needs – Low
Bicycling – touring/road riding	ATV/UTV riding	Dog sledding/ skijoring
Bicycling – mountain/off road	Bicycling – fat tire/snow	Dog training
Bird or wildlife watching	Fishing – lake from shore	Dog Trialing
Camping – developed	Fishing – ice fishing	Geocaching
Camping – primitive	Four-wheel vehicle driving	Off-highway motorcycle riding
Canoeing or kayaking	Horseback riding	Rock climbing
Cross Country Skiing	Horse cart driving	Sailing, windsurfing, rowing, etc.
Dog Walking	Hunting – migratory birds	Snowmobiling
Fishing – lake from vessel	Hunting – small game	Scuba diving/snorkeling
Fishing – river from vessel	Hunting – turkey	Whitewater rafting
Fishing – stream or shore wading	Motorboating (waterski, tubing)	
Gather mushrooms, berries, etc.	Swimming in lakes and rivers	
Hiking, walking, trail running	Target shooting – archery	
Hunting – big game	Target shooting – firearms	
Nature photography	Trapping	
Nature based education programs		
Picnicking		
Snowshoeing		
Visit a beach, beach walking		

Plan Definitions

To assist in the interpretation and implementation of the Buffalo County Outdoor Recreation Plan, the following terms have been identified.

Community Park (30-50 acres) – A park designed to serve several municipalities or neighborhoods and

to provide many recreational opportunities for people of all ages.

Neighborhood Park (5-10 acres) – A park usually less than 2 acres in size, designed to serve the needs of the surrounding neighborhood.

Neighborhood Playground – A facility often provided in conjunction with a community school. It is designed to serve the needs of the surrounding neighborhood and can accommodate a variety of informal or active athletic activities.

Specialized Recreation Area – Areas restricted by design to certain uses and may not always be available for use by the public. In some cases they may serve a very small segment of the community’s population. Golf courses, historic sites, and conservancy areas are examples of specialized recreation areas.

Open Space – Primarily land and water that is owned or managed by federal, state, or local governments, or a conservancy organization that is preserved for public use. Examples include wetlands, woodlands, wildlife refuges, prairies/meadows, rock outcroppings, etc.

Pathways and Parkways – Spaces that are connections related to travel such as trail or water trail providing connectivity for recreation and/or transportation purposes.

Recreation Trail – A travel way established through construction or use and is passable by the following, including but not limited to foot traffic, bicycles, cross country skis, off road recreation vehicles, snowmobiles, etc.

Silent Sports - Silent sports can be defined in many ways; most often referring to any type of nonmotorized outdoor recreation activity. More active and competitive types of silent sports include skiing, bicycling, running and kayaking. It can also include non-sport leisure activities such as birding, bow-hunting, hiking, camping and canoeing. According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, various types of traditional silent sports such as biking and hiking are forecast to experience sustained demand, while others such as climbing can expect increased demand (Wisconsin DNR, 2012). In addition, demand for silent sports in general is forecast to increase as the Wisconsin population ages.

Wayside – Locations adjacent to a public highway that provides motorists with a convenient opportunity to stop and rest. Historical markers, restrooms, drinking water, picnic area, and waste disposal are commonly found at waysides.

Recreation Standards

One accepted way to measure the adequacy of a county’s park system is to determine the number if people the system serves or has the capacity to serve. This is accomplished by assigning an acreage requirement for each type of recreation facility for every 1,000 people in the service area. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has set the following “rule of thumb” standards for designing recreation facilities:

These standards are dependent on the physical and cultural features of a given county. In this Outdoor Recreation Plan, one of the guidelines to be used to determine the adequacy of recreational facilities and areas is the standard of 12 acres per 1,000 people. It has been determined through the planning process that this standard is acceptable to apply in the Buffalo County recreational planning process.

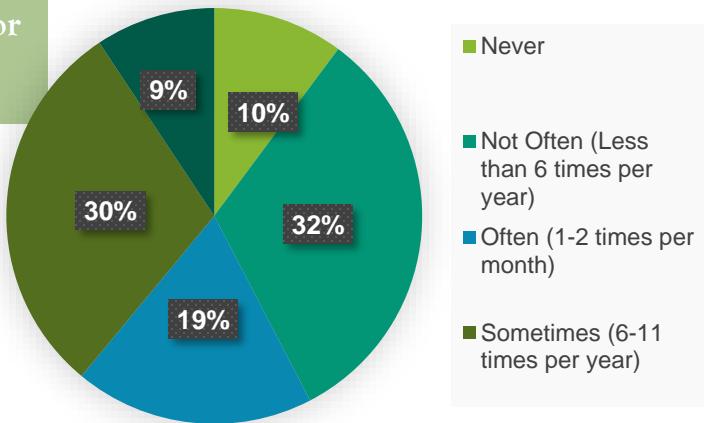
“Rule of Thumb” Standards

Neighborhood Playground: 2 acres per 1,000 people
Community Park: 5 acres per 1,000 people
Specialized Recreation Area: as needed

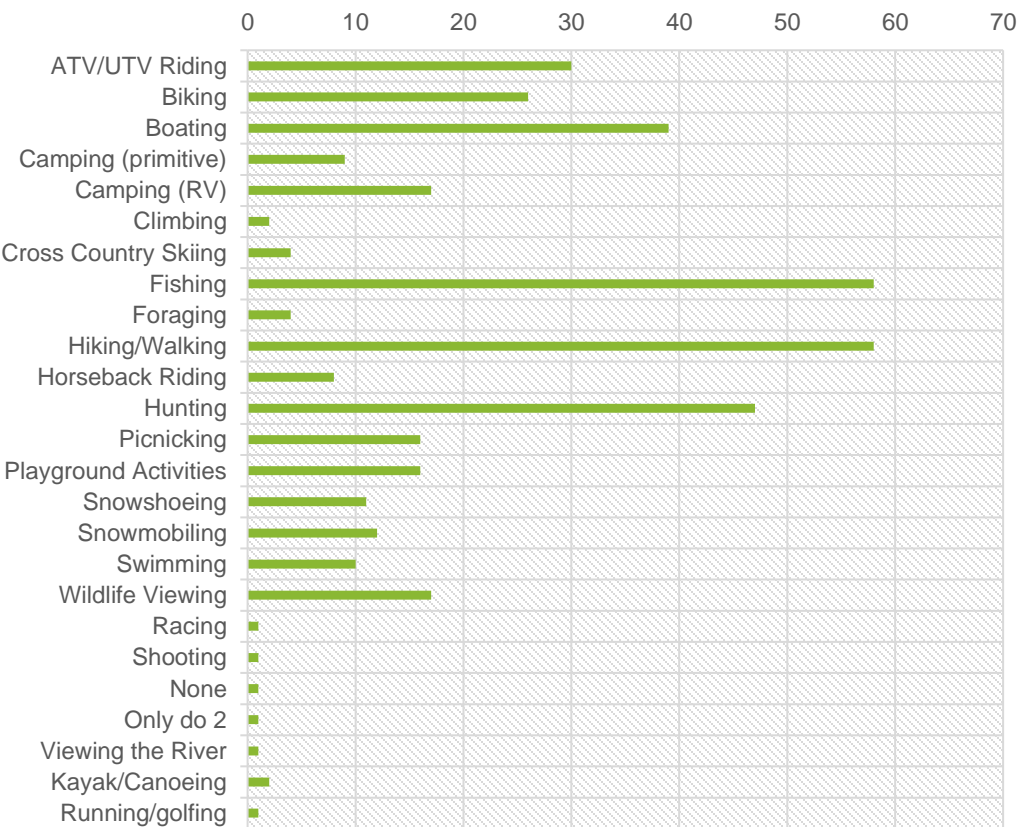
5. Public Participation

The County prepared a survey during the process of updating its Outdoor Recreation Plan. The survey was made available on the County’s website and shared on social media platforms hosted by Buffalo County. A total of 121 responses were received and the results are shown below.

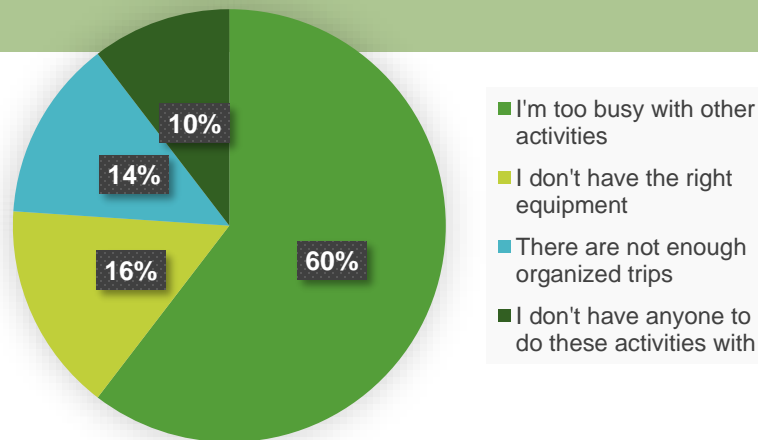
1. How often do you use County Parks or outdoor facilities?



2. What are your top two outdoor recreation activities you participate in in Buffalo County?

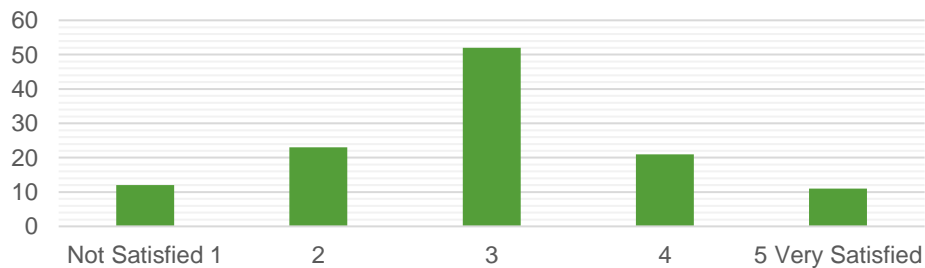


3. If you feel you spend too little time in outdoor activities, what keeps you from spending more time?

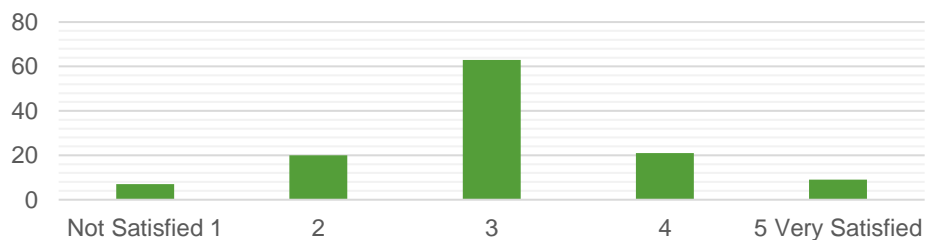


Please tell us how satisfied you are with the following...

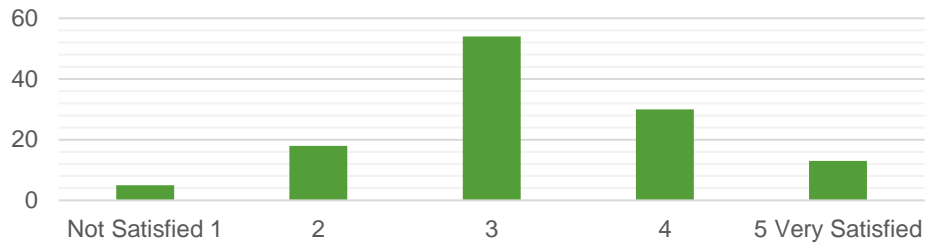
4. The number of outdoor parks/facilities available in Buffalo County



5. The quality of outdoor parks/facilities available



6. The maintenance of outdoor parks/facilities



7. Comments on number of, quality of, or maintenance of outdoor parks/facilities available. (*not a complete listing of responses)

"Not sure how many parks there are"

"This is a beautiful area and unless someone owns land or is special enough to have neighbor's allow them to use private trails, Buffalo County is missing out on revenue from the equestrian recreation community."

"I would like more designated bike trails rather than sharing roadways"

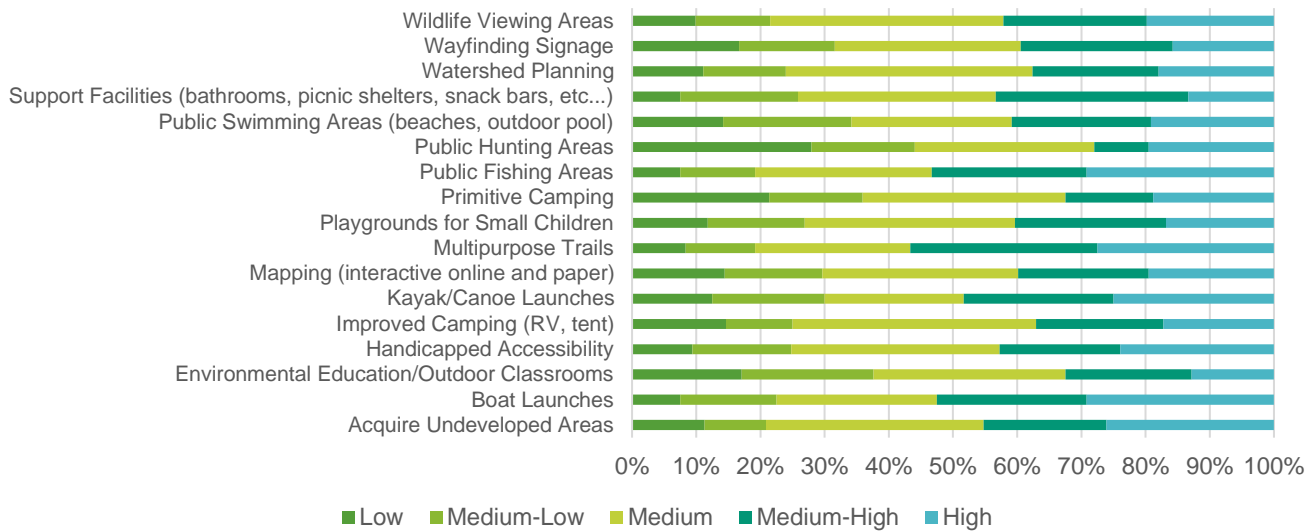
"The county needs to invest in bike trails, climbing sites, and related picnic/resting sites in combination with these developments. We need to attract tourism given we have so little industry in the County. This last year demonstrated how much folks will go outdoors and how they search of outdoor recreation close to home. Buffalo county lost out on this surge given our lack of investment in these areas."

"Are there any county parks? There are some great city parks. We go to other counties for recreation."

"I wish there was more places available. I enjoy parks bit I feel like I have to travel in order to use facilities that have what I want."

8. Include your priorities for future County/outdoor facility improvements.

Rate on a scale of low to high (low=low priority, high=high priority)



9. Please comment on any additional high priority items not listed above.

"The snowmobile trail system would be beautiful for all seasons. There have been states that have provide tax relief to landowners who grant permission and usage for equestrian trails."

"Could use a better way to map out areas that are public, like areas where one can trout fish or hunt"

"It would be nice if there was an organized volunteer group that does outdoor activities."

"We have very little public recreation land in Buffalo County and this should be a priority to preserve habitat and wildlife in the county. This would also benefit the economy by having more public recreating."

10. If you could create the ideal outdoor recreation experience in Buffalo County, what would it be? DREAM BIG! We want your best project ideas. (**not a complete listing of responses*)

"A place to rent equipment like lake lodge Winona at a low cost, near trails along the river... also having a band shelter with weekly live music concerts would be great."

"A bike trail would be great! Many people don't feel safe on Hwy 35, it would be great to have something to connect to the one that goes to Trempealeau or into Winona and up to at least Alma!"

"I would develop a suite of bike trails along the river and up into the valleys. I would work with private land owners and develop mountain bike trails. I would work with the local climbing groups and develop climbing routes, rest areas, picnic areas, etc., again in partnership with private land owners. These could be ice climbing in the winter like we see over in Winona. I would work to expand multi use trails like snow mobile and atv across the county, encouraging rural businesses like pizza, breweries, wineries, small niche restaurants, and related items that could bring tourism dollars into the county. One related item that is huge in developing this is access to broadband service while recreating. Folks want to upload their pictures, stay in touch with friends, and feel a sense of safety that comes with having wireless/broadband connectivity.."

"Dog park!! Would love a great dog park to take the dogs for walks and exercise"

"ATV and UTV trails connecting different areas of Buffalo county so community members have more access to the area and can enjoy all parts of it. Could have sitting/ picnic areas on different parts of the trails. Maybe a lodge type building near an area of water that a group who is using the trails could gather and have a grill out or picnic. The water area could also be a public beach for swimming"

"Look at Bayfield, WI for an example. Buffalo County has many niche places and experiences. But there is not a centralized way to connect all of these niches so a person can make Buffalo County a destination. More lodging is needed, and or camping options. As a resident of Buffalo County the logging roads and field roads to become accessible for public use would be exciting. As a child I rode these bluffs on horseback or in a horse drawn wagon with my family routinely. It is those experiences that have deepened my love for our county and the desire to maintain and enjoy this diverse beauty."

"Interconnected quiet sport trails between locations not necessarily part of county park system including bike trails, ski & snowshoe trails, and hiking."

"More volleyball courts. An organized volunteer outdoor activities group. Canoe/kayaking trails"

11. For Municipal Officials*

What projects or improvements in outdoor recreation are you hoping to see in your community in the next 5 years? (**not a complete listing of responses*)

Town of Belvidere-No areas within this area would benefit.

Town of Buffalo-Improvement of local parks, continued development of bike trail

Town of Lincoln-Access to fishing locations for trout.

Town of Maxville-Hoping to see the UTV ordinance passed and promoted in the County as an outdoor recreation activity. -people could access pizza venues and farm to home by UTV, hoping this will bring in people from outside the County and bring in more money to County

Town of Nelson-Hope to pass ordinance for Town Rods and UTV usage, based on County approval of roads, bring UTV traffic to businesses in Nelson.

Town of Waumandee-Tell DNR to end deer hunting in early December-allow snowmobile trails to open earlier if conditions allow. Feel snowmobilers bring more into Waumandee than the few hunters. Potential endurance course for 4 wheelers

6. Recreational Activities

Introduction

Outdoor recreation is an integral part of the fabric of human environment. Over 95% of Wisconsinites participate in some form of outdoor recreation. Therefore, the planning of outdoor recreation facilities is of utmost importance for the development of healthy and viable communities. Three important parts of recreation planning are: (1) Determine the demand for different types of outdoor recreation activity, (2) Inventory the existing facilities which accommodate the various types of outdoor recreation activity, and (3) Evaluate the existing facilities and determine the need for improvements or additions to meet the existing and anticipated recreational demand.

Proactive planning is important to ensure that recreation is accessible to all citizens. One of the greatest challenges is understanding the ever-changing needs of those participating in outdoor recreation. The 2019-2023 SCORP examines outdoor recreation by recreation setting, the environment in which people recreate. The activities were divided into five groupings:

1. Developed Land
2. Limited Development
3. Water
4. Winter
5. Viewing and Interpretive

The following activity's participation rates listed in each category are based on the 2019-2023 SCORP participation rates specifically in the Mississippi River Corridor.

DEVELOPED LAND ACTIVITIES

Camping

There are probably few other outdoor recreation experiences where the demands or expectations of the participants vary so widely. Some campers want amenities such as electricity, hot showers, laundry facilities, and amusements like miniature golf and movies. Other campers seek solitude and campfires with their amusement being morning bird song and hiking. Private for profit campgrounds in the county make no apologies for trying to meet the expectations of the former group.

In the 2019-2023 SCORP, "RV/pop-up camping" was reported as an activity in which 27 percent of the adult respondents engaged in. Frequently, camping is the primary purpose of the trip, but camping can also be an adjunct to another purpose. For example, families may view camping as a way to save lodging money while on a vacation.

Buffalo County is rich in camping opportunities. Following is a brief description available of the camping facilities in the County.

- ❑ **Buffalo County Resort** campground is available for campers, motor-homes and tents with electrical hookups. There are also 10 cabins available for rent and a stocked trout stream and a restaurant/bar on site.
- ❑ **Drift Inn** located north of Fountain City has 13 campsites with water, and electric hook-ups and five cabins.
- ❑ **Great River Harbor Campground and Marina** has 125 campsites offering tent and trailer camping as well as cabins. There are campsites with and without hookups, overnight docking, a marina, restaurant and bar, an 18-hole mini golf course, playground, lounge, game room, trails, and boat launch.
- ❑ **Henderson's Silver Moon Park** located north of Alma has 13 sites with water and electric hook-ups.

- ❑ **Nelson’s Landing RV Park** located at the foot of the bluffs on the Great River Road offers 100 RV sites with sewer, water, and electric.
- ❑ **Olson’s Fishing Camp** offers six campsites with water and electric hook-ups.
- ❑ **Peck’s RV Camping** has 50 campsites and provides water, sewer, and electrical hook-up to all sites.
- ❑ **Merrick State Park** has 65 campsites. Showers and flush toilets are available as well as a dumping station. Electric hookup is also available.
- ❑ **Rieck’s Lake Park**, a city of Alma park has 20 campsites with electricity. Full restroom facilities are available with showers.
- ❑ **Tourist Park**, a city of Mondovi park has a small campground with six sites offering electric and water hookup.
- ❑ **Sleepy Hollow Campground**, located in Eagle Valley, near Fountain City, extra-large pull-thru sites featuring full hookups, including water, electric, and sewer. There is also cabin rentals, tent sites and hike-in primitive camping sites. There is also an office store with private showers, washers, and dryers.

Table 6.1 Public and Private Campgrounds

Name/Area	Owner	Camp Sites
Merrick State Park, Fountain City	State	65
Riecks Lake Park, C. Alma	City	20
Tourist Park, C. Mondovi	City	6
Buffalo County Resort, T. Waumandee	Private	
Drift Inn, Fountain City	Private	13
Great River Harbor, C. Alma	Private	125
Henderson’s Sliver Moon Park, C. Alma	Private	13
Nelsons Landing RV Park, V. Nelson	Private	100
Olson’s Fishing Camp, C. Alma	Private	6
Pecks RV Camping, Buffalo City	Private	50
Sleepy Hollow Campground, Fountain City	Private	35
Total		433

Source: Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, 2020

Driving for Pleasure

Driving for pleasure is engaged in by 79 percent of the region's residents and one that can be enjoyed even when it is not the participant's major purpose is scenic driving, or "sightseeing". Since it occurs while sitting in a fuel consuming vehicle, an environmental purist might not consider it outdoor recreation; yet it is clearly an activity directly dependent upon the beauty of nature and upon facilities with which to view this natural beauty.

The Great River Road (STH 35) Wisconsin’s only National Scenic Byway parallels the Mississippi River on Buffalo County’s western border and travels through the Villages of Cochrane and Nelson and the cities of Alma, Buffalo City and Fountain City. The Great River Road offers incredible scenery passing through natural areas provides exceptional bird watching opportunities and agritourism attractions.



Great River Road
Signage along State
Highway 35

Golf

The 2019-2023 SCORP indicates that 32 percent of the population plays golf. This sport has shown remarkable growth in participation, from 10 percent in 1985, to 17 percent recorded in the 1991 SCORP survey. It represents the aging of the “Baby Boomer” generation, that in the 1970’s sparked the growth of tennis courts, and now, as the “Boomer’s” grandchildren are beginning to flock to the soccer fields, the “50 something” generation is turning increasingly to the relatively more relaxed sport of golf. Dating back to 1990, citizen outdoor recreation planning sessions in western Wisconsin attached a “Medium” priority to the development of golf facilities, with a general agreement that more courses were needed for the existing population and growing number of golfers. A generally accepted standard for determining golf course capacity is that one 9-hole golf course can accommodate 250 golfing occasions per day. There are two private golf courses available to the public in Buffalo

County. Other quality golfing opportunities are available to County residents in Trempealeau and Eau Claire, Wisconsin and Winona, Minnesota.

The Valley Golf Course (Mondovi) is an 18-hole course for golfers of all skill levels featuring beautiful views of picturesque farmsteads. There is a clubhouse that can accommodate up to 350 people.

The Grove Golf Course (Cochrane) is an 18-hole course nestled between the bluffs near Cochrane.

The private sector has typically been a participant in developing golf courses, although acquisition and continued operation of former membership “country clubs” by local governments is also common. Demand for new courses needs to be mentioned in the marketplace, as the establishment of new courses is capital intensive as well as having environmental impacts.

Picnicking

Picnicking implies that people are traveling to a predetermined location to eat a meal in an outdoor setting. It may be the major purpose of the outing or it may just be auxiliary to a camping trip or a ball game. Many areas with picnic tables located along highways are used for resting more often than picnicking. Some picnic areas, especially in village or city parks, are often used for large family gatherings or reunions which last for several hours, while some highway rest stops are used almost exclusively by travelers for just a few minutes. Picnicking ranked as the second most popular outdoor recreation activity with 74 percent participation rate.

Roadside parks and some city waysides provide picnic tables that are used primarily by transients or visitors to the area. Also, private and public camping areas include picnic tables, but these are used primarily by campers. The specific number of tables varies from year to year, or even during the season.

There are many developed, publicly owned picnic areas in the county, Table 6.2. Additionally, a map of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge is found on Map 5.

The theoretical "standard" for measuring the use of picnic areas assumes each picnic "event" involves four people and the turnover rate per table per day is one and one-half. This means that each picnic table provided for the public accommodates six people per day. Although this seems very low, especially when you consider the many people that may sit at a table in a given day at a busy highway rest area; they are also averaged in the day long family parties. Since no projected demand figures exist, no theoretical number of tables to meet the potential demand can be stated. Picnic areas that exist as part of a broader outdoor recreation experience or that are located in a pleasant environment are more apt to be used than a table in a small park or one haphazardly located.

Each community can observe the pressure for picnic tables at its own parks and determine if additional units should be added. As with most types of demands, the peak period is only a small portion of the total time; but picnic tables, especially if added nearby to existing tables, are a relatively inexpensive outdoor recreation device.

Table 6.2 Picnic Areas

Name and Description of Picnic Area	
1.	Merrick State Park (Fountain City): Picnic areas along the Mississippi and three picnic shelters
2.	Buena Vista Park (Alma): Picnic shelter and scenic view
3.	Buffalo City Park: Picnic shelters
4.	Foelsch Riverside Park: Picnic area
5.	Gilmanton Park (Mondovi): Picnic Shelter
6.	Goose Memorial Park (Cochrane): Picnic Area
7.	Harmonial Park (T. Waumandee): Picnic Area
8.	Memorial Park (Mondovi): Picnic shelters and arboretum
9.	Mirror Lake (Mondovi): Picnic area and shelters
10.	Riecks Lake Park (Alma): Picnic area and observation platform
11.	Sharps Point Park (Mondovi): Picnic shelters and Veteran's Memorial
12.	Tourist Park (Mondovi): Picnic shelters
13.	Veteran's Memorial Park (Buffalo City): Picnic shelters

Source: Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, 2020

Playground Activities

Public parks are an essential component of the outdoor recreation structure including the variety of playground activities offered. The 2019-2023 SCORP provided state participation rates for the following: Taking kids to playground (50%); Attend outdoor sports events (68%); Soccer outdoors (13%); Handball or racquetball outdoors (4%); and Tennis outdoors (14%). It should be noted that the 2018-2023 shows participation rates for people 16 years old and older.

The term "Playground Activities" as used here refers to playground facilities including ballfields, swings, slides, general-purpose recreation fields, and other facilities that provide for outdoor games or activities. The fact that most of the participants using playgrounds are children should not detract from its importance as an outdoor activity.

Playgrounds can range from simple to elaborate. Any community planning to develop or expand its playground apparatus should consult with experts at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, or other recreational departments for an update on the latest technology. Installation of playground equipment, while a primary responsibility of the municipality operating the park is also a good project for community civic groups. Individual community park plans present additional information on specific needs and actions regarding playgrounds, and the appendix contains information on apparatus safety considerations. Table 6.3 inventories playground facilities in Buffalo County.

Table 6.3 Picnic Areas

Name and Description of Picnic Area	
1.	Merrick State Park (Fountain City): Playground and nature center
2.	Buena Vista Park (Alma): Playground
3.	Buffalo City Park: Playgrounds, volleyball and tennis courts
4.	Harmonial Park (T. Waumandee): Playground area
5.	Memorial Park (Mondovi): Playground equipment, volleyball courts, and baseball/softball fields
6.	Mirror Lake (Mondovi): Playground equipment
7.	Riecks Lake Park (Alma): Playground and ball diamond
8.	Ede's Park (Mondovi): Playground apparatus
9.	Fountain City Park: Ball Park and playground equipment
10.	Veteran's Memorial Park (Buffalo City): Baseball/softball fields

Source: Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, 2020

Tennis

Tennis is both a participatory and spectator sport, which gained great popularity in the late 70's and early 80's. Many small communities constructed tennis courts in their village parks. It is not an activity which has been traditionally associated with such other outdoor recreation activities as hunting and fishing, but the federal Land and Water Conservation (LAWCON) Fund has funded many of the courts and now is being used for major rehabilitation of existing facilities. Tennis has an 14% participation rate according to the 2019-2023 SCORP. Demand is varied from community to community based upon local interest and programs. A version of tennis called "Pickle Ball" is gaining popularity especially among the older generations. Pickle Ball can be played on tennis courts and takes up less space.

Tennis is the type of outdoor activity usually associated with urban parks. The individual communities must evaluate their own residents' desire for tennis courts versus the other park activities. Existing courts should be maintained and rehabilitated as necessary to ensure a quality-playing surface. Tennis courts are available in Alma, Buffalo City, Fountain City, and Mondovi.

LIMITED DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Hunting

Hunting and consumptive uses of natural resources in general, has come under increasing criticism from an urban population that is removed from the land; yet true sportsmen hunters are sensitive to environmental

issues and have, through license fees and personal financial and labor contributions, improved land cover conditions so that all people, hunters and non-hunters alike, may enjoy wildlife observation. This of course cannot ignore the fact that some persons carrying firearms in the field, by their actions, cause public condemnation for their behavior, which threatens, continued public support for all hunting activities.

Statewide, hunting remains a popular sport as indicated in the 2019-2023 SCORP with participation rates of:

- 32% of big game hunting on private land
- 19% of small game hunting on private land
- 15% of turkey hunting on private land
- 14% of big game hunting on public land
- 11% of small game hunting on public land
- 6% of hunting migratory birds on private land
- 6% of turkey hunting on public land
- 5% hunting migratory birds on public land

Public hunting areas with enough land to allow safe hunting, need to continue to be maintained and expanded as necessary. Hunter education needs to continue to stress courtesy and respect, both to private landowners, and to the population of non-hunters who hear stories of rude and arrogant hunters. The hunters' rule in supporting habitat preservation and environmental responsibility needs to be publicized. Local sportsmen's clubs should continue to cooperate with state and national conservation organizations and with the Department of Natural Resources in hunter education programs, and in maintaining good relations between hunters and landowners.

The County's land and water resources provide valuable habitat for wildlife and in turn offers some of the best hunting in the state with large populations of deer, turkey, small game and waterfowl. Buffalo County is nationally recognized as trophy country for Whitetail Deer. Hunters can also enjoy hunting turkey and waterfowl. Although privately owned lands provide most of the hunting opportunities in Buffalo County there are also public lands open to hunting, see Table 6.4.

Private Hunting Clubs

There are some sportsmen's clubs around the county that provide their members with hunting and target shooting opportunities. It should not be assumed that these lands are open to public use without permission. Private clubs within the County are: Mondovi Conservation Club, Arcadia Sportsman's as well as Rod and Gun Clubs in Alma, Fountain City and Waumandee.

Local sportsmen's clubs in alliance with the Buffalo County Conservation Club have continued to cooperate with state and national conservation organizations and with the Department of Natural Resources in hunter education programs, and in maintaining good relations between hunters and landowners. Private landowners

Table 6.4 Buffalo County Public Lands Open to Hunting

Site	Location	Size
Upper Mississippi Fish and Wildlife Refuge	Along Mississippi River	240,000 acres
Merrick State Park (Hunting allowed in open areas from 11/15 to 12/15)	Fountain City	322 acres
Big Swamp Tamarack Fen SNA (located in Big Swamp Wildlife area)	T. Mondovi	354 acres
Big Swamp Wildlife Area	Near T. Mondovi	796 acres
Nelson-Trevino Bottoms	Between Nelson and Wabasha	3,608 acres
Tiffany Bottoms State Natural Area (located within Tiffany Wildlife Area)	Located on Chippewa River between Nelson & Durand	717 acres
Tiffany Wildlife Area		13,000 acres
Trempealeau River Meadow SNA	T. Cross	443 acres
Whitman Dam Wildlife Area	T. Milton	2,253 acres
Whitman Bottoms Floodplain Forest SNA	Located in Whitman Dam Wildlife Area	154 acres

Source: Wisconsin DNR, USFWS, and Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, 2020

will continue to provide hunting opportunity for themselves and friends, although as individual parcels of private ownership become smaller, and sub urbanization increases, more and more private lands will undoubtedly be posted against hunting.

Trail Activities

Providing “trails” can accommodate many of the most popular outdoor recreational activities. Activities such as wildlife watching or bird watching can be enjoyed using trails, in addition to the more traditional trail activities such as walking and bicycling. Trails serve a multitude of recreational activities, although bicycle trails can also serve as legitimate transportation route. Except for snowmobile and cross-country ski trails, which are treated separately, trails are definite features existing on the ground, and are maintained to keep them serviceable. Hiking, walking, nature walking, horseback riding, all-terrain vehicle, and bicycle trails are considered together in this section.

Hiking and Walking Trails - Outdoor recreation planners define "hiking" as a walking trip of more than four hours (*usually 8 miles*) duration. Often camping facilities are associated with this type of long-distance hiking trail. A "walk" is any foot travel for pleasure of less duration than a hike and may include a rugged terrain interpretive nature trail two or three miles long, or a paved surface a few hundred feet in length from a parking lot to a scenic overlook. Buffalo County is home to some abundant and unique hiking opportunities. Some unique Hiking opportunities in the County are identified below.

State Wildlife Areas and State Natural Areas (SNAs) located in Buffalo County that allow hiking are: Big Swamp Wildlife Area and Big Swamp Tamarack Fen SNA; Lower Chippewa River SNA; Trempealeau River Meadow SNA; Whitman Bottoms Floodplain Forest SNA; Tiffany Bottoms Wildlife Area; and Whitman Dam Wildlife Area. Tiffany Bottoms Wildlife Area is a 12,500-acre area, which protects the Chippewa River bottomlands and supports a number of rare plants and animals. The Lower Chippewa River SNA is one of DNR's hallmark projects. It protects the largest concentration of remnant dry prairies and globally imperiled oak savannas in the Midwest. Parts of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge are also available for hiking. **Merrick State Park** has two miles of hiking trails that meander through the park and offering river views. The **Buffalo River State Trail** is open all year to hiking and biking. Mississippi Valley Conservancy – **Angel Bluff** property (20 acres) located in Buffalo Township is open to hiking. **Foelsch Riverside Park** in Buffalo City offers ten acres of woodland with meandering walking trails to view wildlife. **Joseph Peterson Arboretum**, a 10-acre natural area in Mondovi offers hiking in a peaceful, tranquil setting. At Alma you can enjoy hikes, bird watching, and nature studies at **Mossy Hollow Trail**, a 102-acre area in the valley on the south end of the city extending up 12-mile bluff, as well as on the scenic **Buena Vista Trails**, which extends from Main Street up Alma Bluff to Buena Vista Park and overlook. **Eagle Valley Trails** located in Eagle Valley near Fountain City offer miles of scenic connecting trails. The Village of Nelson recently acquired a new public park through donation of a private landowner. Thrive! Park is a 25-acre property featuring hiking trails winding through woodlands with a scenic blufftop view overlooking the Village of Nelson.

Bicycle Trails - Wisconsin is fortunate to have an exceptional bicycle trail system it has developed statewide. It was one of the first states to promote a “rails to trails” program. The **Buffalo River State Trail** extends from Fairchild in Trempealeau County to Mondovi, near the northern boundary of Buffalo County. Established in 1976, the surface of this trail is not finished, many areas of old cinder ballast or sand blows make this trail better suited for mountain bikes or hiking rather than the typical narrow tired touring type bicycle.

Buffalo County Land & Trails Trust Inc, is a community-driven startup that formed with a goal to develop the “Flyway Trail”, a multi-purpose trail linking Winona, MN to Wisconsin over Highways 54/43 and the Old Wagon Bridge. The projected plan is to run the trail along the Mississippi River and connect to the Great River State Trail in Marshland, WI. The Flyway Trail will offer area residents and visitors unique and diverse recreation and transportation experiences through a variety of trail typologies, including shared-use paths, shoulder bikeways,

bike lanes, and signed on-street bike routes for the entire 50-mile corridor. A feasibility study has been written for the trail, which includes recommended trail alignments, operations, maintenance, design guidelines, and trail facilities (trailheads, bicycle parking, seating, lighting, trail signage, and trail intersections/crossings). Phase one of the project was completed June 20, 2020. Phase one goes from the Town of Buffalo Park to Winona using a bike/pedestrian bridge and the Old Wagon Bridge. Phase two will link from the Town of Buffalo Park to the Great River Trail at Marshland.

Off Road Mountain Biking is becoming a popular sport in the Midwest. Several mountain biking trails are being constructed in Buffalo County to accommodate off-road bicycling. The City of Alma has two trails in development. Mossy Hollow Trail is an off-road trail loop utilizing a newly constructed Xcel Energy access road as the up-slope path, starting from Mossy Hollow Road winding up the bluff to Danzinger Winery and looping back down to the city, utilizing existing trails. An additional public trail is proposed surrounding the Shawnee Estates development, the City Memorial Cemetery, and the City Landfill with access of County Road I, on the north end of Alma.

Wisconsin has long been considered a premier state for bicycling, especially due to the large number of paved roads. Bicycles are considered vehicles by state statute and have a legal right to operate on any public roadway except where specifically prohibited, such as on the Interstate highway system or other freeways, or on some bridges. Common sense however indicates not all bicyclists feel comfortable, or are competent to ride in certain traffic conditions, just as some motorists feel uncomfortable in heavy or fast traffic conditions. The Department of Transportation (DOT), with input from county highway and district DOT staff has examined several variables, with traffic volume (Average Daily Traffic-ADT) and roadway and shoulder width being the major ones, to classify all state and county roads in unincorporated areas as having “Best”, “Moderate”, or “Undesirable” conditions for bicycling. In cooperation with the Bicycle Federation of Wisconsin (BFW) four maps, which together cover the entire state, have been published and are available for public sale. Portions of Highway STH 35, STH 95, and STH 37 were suggested as “Best for Bicycling” in Buffalo County. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WisDOT) county bike maps provide a bicycling conditions assessment that benefits both cyclists and transportation planners. The county maps were updated in 2015 are based on the 2015 Wisconsin State Bicycle Map. The Buffalo County map shows a majority of named county and state highways as being designated, “Best Condition” for Bicycling, meaning they have light volumes of traffic and may have other favorable factors such as good sight distance, minimal truck traffic, and paved shoulders.

Rock Climbing

The relief of the County is characteristic of the Driftless area, with extremely varied topography consisting of high ridges, long narrow valleys, and steep slopes. Bluffs rise above the river bottoms by 500 feet in some areas. Only a small corridor along the Mississippi River was ever glaciated, where terraces have been formed from glacial melt water deposits. These areas are ideal for local climbers and tourists. Though no public rock-climbing areas exist in Buffalo County, there is the potential in acquiring land for public rock climbing. Outdoor tourists and climbers spend money on accessing outdoor resources as well as on lodging, food, transportation, and other expenses. The closest rock climbing is available in Winona, MN which diverts enthusiasts out of Buffalo County to enjoy this recreational activity.

Horseback Riding on a Trail - Horseback riding on a trail is not an activity that has a lot of participation Statewide. According to the 2019-2023 SCORP, Horseback Riding on a trail had a 7% participation rate at the State level.

The 36-mile Buffalo River State Trail that connects the communities of Fairchild and Mondovi allows horseback riding when there is not enough snow cover for a groomed snowmobile trail. See Map 4 for the location of this trail. Buffalo County has one private riding stable located near Fountain City that offers private riding lessons. The County has numerous non-profit organizations promoting outdoor recreation. For those interested in

horses, Midnight Riders of Mondovi is a group that meets weekly. They also host an annual rodeo and horse pull.

All-Terrain Vehicle Trails – According to the 2019-2023 SCORP off highway vehicle driving had a 17% participation rate at the regional level.

ATVs are permitted on the 36-mile multi-use Buffalo River State Trail that connects the communities of Fairchild and Mondovi. See Map 4 for locations of this trail. The trail consists mainly of an old railroad trestle surrounded by view of local farms. The trail is open year round and is open to snowmobiles in the winter months.

WATER ACTIVITIES

Water-based outdoor activities are among the most popular recreation activities in Wisconsin. The 2019-2023 SCORP estimates participant rates for the following water activities in the State: Boating, any type (50%); Visit a beach (65%); Swimming in lakes, streams etc. (54%); Lake fishing from shore of pier (40%); Motorboating (45%); Swimming in an outdoor pool (36%); Lake fishing from boat/canoe/kayak (37%); River fishing from a boat/canoe/kayak (20%); Stream/river fishing from shore/wading (21%); Canoeing or Kayaking (34%); Waterskiing (13.0%); Use personal watercraft (12%); Stand-Up Paddle Boarding (11%); Snorkeling (6.2%); Sailing (7%); and Water skiing/tubing/wakeboarding (21%).

Siltation and continuous water turbidity can affect the quality of facilities and opportunities for outdoor recreation. Many sloughs, ponds, and marshes can fill with silt, resulting in undesirable boat launch sites, hazardous pleasure boating, and decreased habitat for waterfowl and fish. This “non-point” pollution consisting of soil runoff from farms, construction projects, and other disturbed soil; and biologic wastes from inadequately protected farms and home septic systems is often a significant cause of water quality degradation. Watershed planning and adherence to plans, can help make the rivers and lakes of Buffalo County cleaner and more enjoyable for outdoor recreation use.

Boating/Water Skiing and Jet Skis

According to the 2019-2023 SCORP, motor boating is engaged in by 50 percent of the adult resident population in the region. The discovery of aggressive aquatic invasive plants in Wisconsin’s waters underscores the need for boaters to clean their boats. In Wisconsin, motor trolling is prohibited on all waters unless specifically authorized. Buffalo County does not have any restrictions on motorboats; however all boats should follow Wisconsin boating laws and regulations as well as any local regulations. Motorboats are not allowed on Mirror Lake in Mondovi and the Town of Belvidere has an ordinance in place for a slow-no-wake zone for Spring Lake Islands on the Mississippi River. Buffalo County has an abundance of public boat access sites, see Table 6.5.

Personal watercraft are a controversial issue in water use as inexperienced jet ski operators have caused serious injury or death to themselves and others, and the impact of only a few craft operating at high speed can adversely affect many other water users and wildlife habitat.

Water skiing is a more established sport and is dependent upon motorboats for its conduct. It requires open space and allows little opportunity for other users on the water while skiing is occurring. Waterskiing had a participation rate of 21%.

Water skiing and motorboating are recreational sports that require large, flat water areas. There are opportunities for these activities on Lake Pepin and the Mississippi River. The county’s lakes are either too small to allow unlimited motor cruising or have restrictions on motorboat use. Over half the lakes in Buffalo County have water depths of less than five feet. Related to water skiing but gaining in popularity are tubing behind a boats and wake boarding. Both activities are included within the water-skiing category.

Canoeing, Kayaking, and Sailing

These three water sports are generally low impact activities, although in some parts of the state popular canoeing waters can become very crowded resulting in adverse impacts on the natural environment. In the region, 37% of the population considers canoeing or kayaking a sport in which they participate. Other types of non-motorized watercraft use have fewer followers and sailing was listed at only 6%. A boat launch adjacent to the lower boat landing at Merrick State Park offers easy access for canoeists and kayakers. The park was named for George Merrick, a riverboat pilot from Prescott. An excellent self-guided canoe trail will take paddlers through Merrick State Park's extensive wetlands that make up much of the park.

There is also ample opportunity for canoeing and kayaking in the backwaters of the upper Mississippi River. There are a total of 96 miles of marked canoe trails on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge and 4 designated Canoe areas with no marked trails. Additional trails are mapped, but not signed, see attached 'Paddling in Alma' list of water trails for canoeing and kayaking. The Buffalo River also offers excellent canoeing and kayaking opportunities for all ages and skill levels due to its shallow, wide channel that winds through undeveloped wetland areas. Access from private lands or bridges currently limits paddling opportunities. Development of boat landings, parking facilities, acquisition of properties, signs, and maps for access is needed throughout this river system.

Paddling Trails

- ❑ ALMA TO FINGER LAKES CANOE TRAIL (Designated A National Trail) - In Alma at the south boat landing (WI State Highway 35) and the Dairyland Power Plant paddle across the main channel angling toward the North to the islands. Trail enters through the islands and winds all the way to Finger Lakes. This is an official USFWS canoe trail with signage, although most of the signage is for those paddling from the other direction.
- ❑ BUFFALO RIVER/RIECKS LAKE TRAIL - In Alma, across Highway 35 from Rieck's Lake Park is Brekow's Landing. Paddling to the left out of Brekow's Landing, go under the Highway 35 bridge and paddle to the right into the Buffalo River. This winding river is shallow and narrow but the paddling is great and the views of the Buffalo River Valley are exceptional. Follow the open path among the wetland grasses and keep turning right you will end up in Rieck's Lake in front of the small park where tundra swans have historically gathered in the fall. This number has decreased over time as tundra swans still stop over at Big Lake on the Mississippi River.
- ❑ BEEF SLOUGH/MISSISSIPPI BACKWATERS TRAIL - In Alma across Highway 35 from Rieck's Lake Park is Brekow's Landing. Paddle to the left out of Brekow's Landing until you reach the flowage from the Buffalo River out into Beef Slough and the backwaters of the Mississippi River. Paddle to the right, going under the railroad bridge. At this point you are in Beef Slough, paddle to the right. Follow the slough to the end and you will come to a sand island on the Mississippi River. Leaving the island to the left you will return to the railroad bridge, pass under and to the left to return to Brekow's Landing.
- ❑ BELVIDERE SLOUGH/MISSISSIPPI BACKWATERS TRAIL - From Belvidere Slough Landing in Buffalo City paddle up river or down river, the choice is yours. There are several cuts which lead into backwaters where motors are not allowed.
- ❑ CHIPPEWA RIVER WATER TRAIL – A 6.8 miles canoe trail with access from the Chippewa River landing. This trail goes south on the Chippewa river to the main channel of the Mississippi River, winding north on the Government Light Slough to Tim's Slough Landing on STH 35.
- ❑ NELSON-TREVINO BOTTOMS CANOE TRAIL (Designated A National Trail) - This official USFWS canoe trail (with signage) can be accessed from the Nelson/Trevino Landing or the Pontoon Slough Landing both of which are located on Highway 25 between Nelson and Wabasha Minnesota.
- ❑ NELSON-TREVINO BOTTOMS CANOE TRAIL to BIG LAKE - Paddle the Nelson-Trevino trail all the way out to Big Lake across from Cedar Ridge Resort. This is where 1000s of tundra swans gather in the Fall. Several great blue herons. This is an official USFWS canoe trail with signage.

Table 6.5 Buffalo County Upper Mississippi Boat Landings

Name	Description	Location
Indian Slough Landing, USFWS	1 concrete plank ramp, 1 gravel ramp	Hwy 25
Pontoon Slough Landing, Buffalo Co.	gravel ramp	Hwy 25
Beef Slough Landing, USFWS	gravel ramp	Hwy 25
Nelson Trevino Landing, USFWS		Hwy 25
Cedar Ridge Resort Landing, Private		STH 35
Buffalo River Landing, USFWS/C. Alma	concrete plank ramp	C. Alma
Alma Marina, Private	concrete ramp	C. Alma
Tank Pond Landing, C. Alma	fishing pier	C. Alma
Alma Landing, Wisconsin DNR/Alma	concrete ramp	C. Alma
Great River Harbor, Private	concrete ramp (fee)	STH 35
Belvidere Slough Landing, WI DNR	paved ramp	Belvidere Slough
Whitman Dam Wildlife Area, WI DNR	gravel ramp	Whitman Dam Wildlife Area
Buffalo City Landing, Buffalo City	paved ramp	Buffalo City
Merrick State Park, WI DNR	two asphalt ramps	Fountain City
Fountain City Boat Dock, Fountain City	concrete ramp	Fountain City
Lower Fountain City Landing, FC	two concrete ramps	Fountain City
Breezy Point Marina, Private	concrete ramp	STH 35
Chippewa River Boat Landing	concrete ramp	STH 35
Tim's Slough Landing	gravel ramp	STH 35

Source: Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, 2020

Nelson; 2) Pontoon Slough Landing – Town of Nelson and 3) Alma Marina – City of Alma has Panfish, Largemouth Bass and Northern Pike. **Mirror Lake** (19 acres) in Mondovi has one public boat landing and fish include Panfish, Largemouth Bass and Trout. Buffalo County has numerous boat landings accessing the Mississippi River and its numerous backwater fisheries (Table 6.5, Map 3).

Trout fishing is also possible in Buffalo County. According to a comprehensive Trout Stream list prepared by the DNR, there are approximately 131 miles of Class II and Class III trout streams in Buffalo County. Class II streams have good water conditions and may have some natural reproduction, but light to moderate stocking is necessary to ensure adequate density for good sport fishing and Class III streams have marginal water conditions for sustaining trout populations on a year-round basis. Continual hatchery stocking is necessary to provide adequate fishing.

Several local fishponds are in the County, including in the City of Mondovi and a currently drawn-down pond in Rose Valley. Trout fishing is becoming a popular recreation activity in Buffalo County. According to a comprehensive Trout Stream list prepared by the DNR, there are approximately 165 miles of Class II and Class III trout streams in Buffalo County. Class II streams have good water conditions and may have some natural reproduction, but light to moderate stocking is necessary to ensure adequate density for good sport fishing and Class III streams have marginal water conditions for sustaining trout populations on a year-round basis. Continual hatchery stocking is necessary to provide adequate fishing. Stream health and trout natural

□ **SPRING LAKE TRAIL** - Spring Lake, a 300-acres lake can be accessed from Spring Lake Landing on County Hwy 00 in Buffalo City. From the landing head to the left and follow the dike road along the edge for beautiful views. Sand islands reduce wind fetch and related waves.

□ **TIFFANY BOTTOMS/CHIPPEWA RIVER** - To access this area use the Chippewa River Landing located at the Chippewa River bridge on State Highway 35. Paddle out to the Chippewa River turning left. Tiffany Bottoms State Wildlife Area is to your left, there are several entry points. This is a premier birding spot and well known for Bald Eagle viewing, especially in the fall season as the backwaters begin to freeze.

Fishing

Fishing and Wisconsin are almost synonymous in many people's minds. Wisconsinites also must think fishing is good in Wisconsin as it is the 22nd most popular outdoor recreation activity with 37.4% of the population participating in Freshwater fishing. Buffalo County is a haven for fishing with its rivers, sloughs, lakes and streams filled with northern pike, bluegills, crappies, walleye, bass, trout and catfish. The County has numerous public boat launching ramps and fishing floats positioned on the Mississippi River just below the dams. **Lake Pepin** with three public boat landings in the County: 1) Beef Slough Landing – Town of

reproduction has been improving, resulting in reclassification of trout streams by the DNR. From 2015 to 2020, there was an increase in Class II Trout streams in the County from 47 miles to 119 miles.

Walk-in access to trout streams is often via easements or at public road crossings, in which case public access may be limited to the streambed itself via wading. Buffalo County supports public fishing access easements on almost 12 miles of cold-water streams through stream access easements that were donated by 24 landowners and held by Buffalo County or the local Conservation Club. Since 2009, many agencies, clubs, organizations, and landowners have been involved in cooperative projects to improve streams for fish and wildlife habitat, stabilize stream banks, and provide public access. All of these streams are capable of supporting native reproducing brook trout and public access to these waters is allowed during the Wisconsin trout season.

There are approximately 5,400 acres of state land designated as state fishing areas in the western part of the county, which serve trout streams. Some of this acreage also includes upland areas for hikers and hunters, and another 1,400 acres is designated as state wildlife area, which may have some water access, but fishing is not the principal resource. The only “public amenity improvements” at these State parcels in the western part of the county are provisions for off-road parking.

There is always a need for developed bank fishing facilities and for additional fishing sites accessible to the physically handicapped population. There is also a need for more walk-in access sites for ice fishing, and adequate, safe parking is needed for both ice fishing access as well as the bank and handicapped access sites.

A trout stream field guide and mapping of Buffalo County can be found at <https://www.buffalocounty.com/479/Trout-Field-Guide>. When accessing private land, the WI DNR asks for users to please respect land owner rights on private lands open to public access. Rules, regulations, and laws in regard to public access site can be found at

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/regulations/troutregs.html> and

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Fishing/questions/access.html>. A map of Buffalo County trout streams can be found on Map 6.

Boat/canoe access sites and roadside parking areas at bridges over rivers would help increase the usefulness of the water resource. The Department of Natural Resources will continue to acquire fishing easements as the need arises.

Scuba Diving

Recreational Scuba Diving is a sport that is dependent upon large clear bodies of water. In Wisconsin, Scuba Diving has a participation rate of only 1.1%. Lake Wazee, the deepest lake in Wisconsin is located in Jackson

Table 6.6 Buffalo County Trout Streams

Local waterbody name	Miles	Trout class
Armour Creek	3.79	II
Center Creek	4.35	II
Danuser Creek	7.07	II
Eagle Creek	5.60	II
Eagle Creek	8.47	II
Elk Creek	3.32	II
Elk Creek, South Fork	13.2	II
Little Bear Creek	8.82	II
Little Waumandee Creek	11.0	II
Little Waumandee Creek	10.1	II
Newton Valley Creek (Shoe Creek)	4.27	II
North Branch Little Bear Creek	5.40	II
North Branch Little Bear Creek	1.39	II
Rossman Creek	3.66	II
Spring Creek	2.88	II
Tamarack Creek	3.05	II
Tamarack Creek	3.83	II
Unnamed-Botana Valley Creek	6.16	II
Unnamed-Newton Valley Creek	4.27	II
Unnamed Cr T24n R12w S5 (5-9)	3.27	II
Unnamed-Weisenbeck Valley Creek	5.15	II
Total Class II miles	119.05	
Bear Creek	2.50	III
Cooke Valley Creek	2.80	III
Doelle Creek	5.07	III
Harvey Creek	2.36	III
Harvey Creek	1.45	III
Kilness Creek	4.05	III
Peeso Creek	0.72	III
Peeso Creek	8.44	III
South Fork Elk Creek	5.06	III
Sport Valley Creek	3.44	III
Unnamed-Owen Valley Ck. Trib	2.16	III
Waumandee Creek	6.92	III
Total Class III miles	44.97	
Total Miles	165.02	

Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources 2020

County in Western Wisconsin. Lake Wazee is one of the best scuba diving locations in the Midwest and draws divers from all over the country. Lakes in Buffalo County are shallow and with low visibility, making them less conducive to scuba diving activities.

Swimming

In the 2019-2023 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, swimming in lakes and streams had a participation rate of 54%, swimming in an outdoor pool 36%, and visiting a beach 65%.

The Alma Beach and Recreational area provides a 300-foot sand swimming beach area located on the Mississippi River one mile north of Alma, staffed with lifeguards as posted, beach bathhouse with restroom facilities and showers (including handicap units). Public outdoor swimming pools are provided by the City of Mondovi and the Village of Cochrane. Motels and commercial campgrounds and resorts located in nearby Winona, MN may also provide outdoor and indoor swimming opportunities for Buffalo County residents. With the recent closing of Fountain City's swimming pool, there is a need for additional public swimming pools in the County. Poor water quality and erratic currents make river and stream swimming undesirable.

WINTER ACTIVITIES

Snow-and ice-based activities are those that involve some form of frozen water. The 2019-2023 SCORP estimates participant rates for the following winter activities: Snowmobiling (15%), Ice skating outdoors (14%), Ice fishing (23%), Cross-county skiing (13%), Downhill skiing and snowboarding (14%), Snowshoeing (13%), and Fat tire biking/snow biking (4%). Winter also brings Bald and Golden Eagle viewing opportunities along the Mississippi River, where they congregate around open water areas.

Downhill/Cross Country Skiing, Snowboarding, and Snowshoeing

These popular winter sports are mentioned together although only cross country or "touring" skiing uses a trail system. Downhill or "alpine" skiing and Snowboarding areas require groomed slopes and a lift to be considered by serious sportsmen. County does not have any formal downhill ski areas, but there are hills in nearby counties.

In the 2019-2023 SCORP cross-county skiing with an 13% participation rate in the region and was the 44th most popular activity statewide. A trail used for biking or hiking in the summer is usually suitable for use as a cross-county ski trail in the winter, except for some hiking trails especially in wooded areas which may be too steep or curved for ski trails.

There are 10 miles of trails along the Buffalo River State Trail, however, the typical cross-county skier seeks a quiet solitude and therefore trails, which permit snowmobiling, such as the Buffalo River State Trail, are usually not considered prime cross-county skiing trails. The surface condition of a snowmobile trail is not usually conducive to good skiing. There are also cross-country skiing opportunities available at Merrick State Park, Foelsch Riverside Park at Buffalo City, and Tiffany Bottoms. Buena Vista, Mississippi River backwaters, and Mossy Hollow Hiking Trails at Alma are for snowshoeing only.

Ice Fishing

Buffalo County offers excellent ice fishing on the Mississippi River. Each year in February an ice fishing contest is held on Mirror Lake at Mondovi.

Ice Skating/Hockey

Ice skating outdoors had a 14 percent participation rate in the 2019-2023 SCORP. Within Buffalo County, there appear to be a few more or less formally designated public ice skating rinks, most of which are created by flooding a land area after outside temperatures hold below freezing. Skating on rivers and lakes can be dangerous, as ice thickness is often not determined, and cannot be controlled. Since the sport has grown slightly in popularity, and due to our climate, sports such as ice hockey have become more popular. Schools or local civic organizations sponsor teams, in which some have indoor practice facilities that can be utilized by the public when not in use by the teams.

Since most of the skating is done on facilities that are built by people, it is important for municipalities to continue to provide skating rinks. Sometimes skating facilities are made by flooding parking lots, but this has the obvious disadvantage of reducing parking space at a recreation facility even as it is being used. Flooding portions of a golf course, or ball diamond has detrimental effects on the turf cover come spring time. At least one facility in a municipality will provide lights for night skating, for the recreational needs of the working person. A warming house is also a nice facility to consider.

Snowmobiles

Snowmobiling is the 39th most popular outdoor recreation pursuit, with 18 percent of the population participating in the region. Snowmobile registrations, administered by the Department of Natural Resources, provide a funding source to acquire trail easements and to maintain the trails by grooming and signing. Snowmobile clubs also participate in trail building and maintenance. The number of snowmobiles registered in Buffalo County, and throughout the state, seems to have peaked in the 1970's. There was a decline throughout the 80's, but interest has picked up again over the last decade, as seen by the increased number of registrations.

The County participates in the State funded snowmobile trail program. The seven snowmobile clubs in the County help make the 218 miles of trail possible. These trails are located primarily on privately owned land with easements to support their use and maintenance. These trails may provide opportunities for trail alignments, as property owners have historically been amenable to public use of their lands for recreation. The Buffalo River State Trail between Mondovi and Fairchild, operated by the DNR, provides snowmobiling opportunity. For a current map of the various trails and for trail conditions go to the Buffalo County Snowmobile Association web page at www.snowbc.org. Trails are also outlined in Map 4.

VIEWING AND INTERPRETIVE ACTIVITIES

The 2019-2023 SCORP estimates participant rates for the following viewing and interpretive activities: Attend outdoor sports events (64%), Driving for pleasure (73%), Visit nature centers (52%), Nature photography (37%), Visit historic sites (57%), Bird/wildlife watching at home (55%), Gather mushrooms, berries etc. (31%), Bird/wildlife watching away from home (39%), and Attend outdoor festival or music event (69%).

Agri-Ecotourism

While ecotourism is nature-based and agrotourism is farm-based, agri-ecotourism is a combination of both. The rural landscape, usually a combination of wild and agri-ecosystems, is the most important resource for tourism development. It is apparent that a diversified agricultural landscape, with semi-natural habitats, has a greater aesthetic and recreational potential over uniform, degraded and/or polluted agricultural areas. Agri-ecotourism is the economic activity that occurs when people link travel with agricultural products, services or experiences to cater to the needs of mutual demands. Agri-eco-tourism entails visiting a working farm or any agriculture, horticulture or agribusiness operation, for the purpose of leisure, education or active involvement in the activities of the farm or operation. It provides the opportunity to experience rural life, taste the local food, and become familiarized with the various farming tasks during the visit. It also provides an escape from the daily hectic life in a peaceful rural environment.

Buffalo County is home to over 900 farms, the average farm being 250 acres. Agriculture is a way of life with dairy, crop, and mixed livestock operations, some being Century Farms owned by families for many generations. Some farms in the area offer on the farm dining, a unique experience to gather on a farm to eat farm fresh food while enjoying the rural scenery. Farm stays offer experiences to vacation on a farm while participating in tasks like bottle feeding calves and milking cows. Agri-ecotourism in Buffalo County provides visitors the chance to learn the history of farming in the area and grow an appreciation for the local economy through interacting with local farms and farmers.

The Wisconsin Great River Road (Wisconsin GRR) runs through one of the most interesting agriculture regions in the Midwest. The Wisconsin GRR encompasses a 250-mile corridor traveling through eight counties and over thirty river communities. The Wisconsin GRR passes through Buffalo County offering numerous opportunities to experience agriculture in this region. A map of attractions determined as ‘agritourism’ by the Wisconsin GRR is provided at the following website: <https://www.wigrr.com/travel-the-byway/activities/agritourism/>

Historical and Cultural Sites

The 2019-2023 SCORP estimates that over half of state residents have gone sightseeing in the past year, while just under half visited historic sites. Scientific or natural areas may never attract as many tourists as water slides or ball games, but tourism is not their primary purpose. The county and communities should support efforts to identify and preserve unique ecological or cultural features within the county.

Historical Sites

The Buffalo County landscape and its Mississippi River corridor possess features that reflect ancient processes and historic times. Old geology, unaltered landscape types, Native American, agricultural, river, and industrial history are still visible. Dugways—steep narrow valley roads unique to the county—still operate for daily commuting. Heritage farms, historic cemeteries, historic site markers; farm, village, and upland place names (e.g. Urne, Czechville, Praag, Garden Valley, Town of Cream) dot the landscape, as do historic buildings in upland areas, river town neighborhoods and along the River. Old rip rap, historic wing dams and dredge piles along the River’s banks testify to the continuous engineering required since the 1860’s to mold and maintain its navigable channels.

There are 13 sites in Buffalo County listed in the National Register of Historic Places: 1) Alma Historic District; 2) Berni, Jacob, House; 3) Burlington Hotel; 4) Fugina House; 5) Harmonia Hall; 6) Laue, Frederick, House; 7) Laue, Frederick, Jr., House; 8) Senn, John L., House; 9) Sherman House; 10) Steiner, John, Store; 11) Tenny, Dr. J. T., House; 12) Tester and Polin General Merchandise Store; and 13) Walser, Ulrich, House. All sites are located in Alma with the exception of the Fugina House in Fountain City and Harmonia Hall in Waumandee.

In 1982, 346 acres and over 200 buildings were included in the designation of the City of Alma as a National Historic District when it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The historic district is roughly bounded by railroad tracks, 2nd Street, Swift Street and Cedar Street recognizing the building history periods of 1850-1874, 1875-1899, and 1900-1924.

The Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory Collection (AHI) provides details on historic buildings, structures and objects that reflect Wisconsin's distinct cultural landscape. There are 483 sites listed for Buffalo County.

State Historical Markers

Wisconsin has more than 585 official Historical Markers in the State. These markers tell the stories about events, individuals, buildings, or sites of local, state, or national significance. Buffalo County has one historical marker within the county. The Marker entitled Beef Slough is located on STH 35 .5 miles north of the City of Alma.

Museums

Buffalo County is rich in historical museums and exhibits that are shown in Table 6.7.

Cultural Events

The Buffalo County Fair is an annual event in Buffalo County that offers an abundance of activities including judging of 4-H projects, junior livestock Sale auction, tractor pull, carnival rides, demolition derby, food, music, and entertainment. The 4-H Festival of Arts is another annual event in the County that provides 4-H youth a platform to share their skills and talents by exhibiting in the arts, crafts, photography, marketing, communication arts (speaking), music and drama.

Each year in the spring (May) or fall (September) migration there are two opportunities to ride the Chippewa Valley Motorcar Association's Mini-Train with a bird guide and a train historian through the Tiffany Bottoms DNR State Natural Area.

Many communities in the County hold annual cultural events and celebrations throughout the year. Each year in the City of Alma, Swiss Heritage Days is celebrated in August with food, music, art, and children's activities. The Alma Music and Arts Festival happens in September featuring food, music, art, and children's activities and in October the historical society holds its annual quilt show in Alma.

In the City of Mondovi, Mondovi Friendship Days is held annually near the 4th of July featuring food and beverage, a parade, entertainment, special events, and fireworks. The Little Britches Rodeo is held in late spring in Mondovi; the annual Bluegrass and Gospel Music Festival is held just outside of Mondovi each summer; and the annual Ice Fishing Contest is held on Mirror Lake each February.

Fountain City host several events throughout the year. The Old Time Farm Fest highlights old and new tractors and machinery with food, a tractor pull and entertainment. Each fall the Lions Club in Fountains City hold its annual fall festival. The Cochrane-Buffalo City Lions Club annually sponsors a Winter Fest Ice Fishing Contest.

Sightseeing

Buffalo County is located in the Driftless region with land surrounded by the last glaciers and sculpted by the melt waters. The Driftless Area consists of dramatically sculpted karst topography born from eroding limestone. Forested bluff sides slope steeply into deep cold-water trout stream valleys cut from bedrock. Lush deciduous woodlands and oak savannahs, rock outcroppings, remnants of ridge top prairies, wetlands, and grassland river bottomlands provide habitat for diverse wildlife and vegetation. The Mississippi River Valley furnishes some of the most rugged topography and picturesque scenery to be found in the Driftless Area along the "coast" of western Wisconsin. Steep slopes and bluffs (some as high as 650 feet) enclose bottomland forests, wetlands, and sloughs. These floodplain backwaters (1 to 6-1/2 miles wide) serve as an internationally recognized breeding, migration, and wintering habitat for hundreds of migratory birds and a highly productive refuge for fish, wildlife, and plants. Spectacular overlooks are abundant and country roads are overflowing with picturesque beauty. The Great River Road, Wisconsin's only scenic byway travels along Buffalo County's western border.

eBird is a free birding opensource website with year-round data on bird species and locations. This bird data can be used to analyze distribution, abundance, habitat use, and trends through checklist data collected within a

Table 6.7 Buffalo County Museums

Museum Name	Description
Alma Area Museum	Houses century old memories and artifacts
Castlerock Museum- Alma	An arms and armor museum; exhibits include arms and armor from many points in European history
Fountain City Historical Museum	One of the best collections of prehistoric Native American artifacts and arrowheads in the state
Rural Life Museum - Mondovi	Exhibits and displays dedicated to farm and small town life.
Alma National Historic District and Walking Tour - Alma	346 acres and 200+ buildings are included in the designation of the City of Alma as a National Historic District
Country School and Rural Life Museums and the Machine Shed - Mondovi	Restored 1-room schoolhouse and rural life museum featuring exhibits dedicated to small town and farm life

Source: Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission 2020

simple, scientific framework. Explore the interactive bird hotspot map by following the link provided:

<https://ebird.org/hotspots>

The Wings Over Alma Nature and Art Center has a 50-foot view deck to watch wintering bald eagles. From mid-December through mid-March, dozens to hundreds of bald eagles can be seen sitting on the ice. Alma has historically been known for the annual fall bird migration and viewing tundra swans. Tundra swan viewing in Alma has diminished in recent years, but tundra swans still stop over Big Lake on the Mississippi River for a long-distance view. The Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trail is a mapped auto trail that reaches into every area of Wisconsin, including Buffalo County. Buena Vista Park located 500-feet above the village of Alma offers a beautiful view of the Mississippi River for miles to the north and south. Merrick State Park located near Fountain City on the backwaters of the Mississippi River is a great place to bird watch any time of the year. Tiffany Bottoms, occupying both sides of the Chippewa River between Nelson and Durand has the largest intact floodplain forest in the state and attracts nearly every species of bird found in Wisconsin.

Lock and Dam 4 at Alma located on River mile 752.8 was constructed in 1935. The federal lands in Pool 4 are mostly dedicated for wildlife reserves as part of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge. The pool is large and includes Lake Pepin. The site also has a public observation platform open from April to November.

Kinstone Megalithic Garden, a 30-acre bluff-top property home to over 100 standing stones including a large stone circle and megalithic dolmen, classic 7-circuit labyrinth, thatched cordwood chapel, natural buildings, permaculture gardens, and terraces is located in rural Fountain City just off County Road M. Located outside of Cochrane on Highway 35 is the Prairie Moon Sculpture Garden and Museum, a premiere folk art site.

For a unique sightseeing experience visitors can visit the Rock-in-the-house in Fountain City where you can see where a 55-ton bolder came crashing through the roof of a small house and came to rest in the family's master bedroom.

The County possesses some of the best examples of the Driftless Area's unique natural and cultural features—goat prairies, the tallest bluff lands along the Mississippi, rare and endangered plant species, and steep valley Native American and pioneer tracks, called "dugways." The area is internationally significant for its unusual geology and unique habitats. The area offers great opportunities for fishing, bird watching, wildlife viewing, and interpretation in the bottomlands, open water, upper wooded bluffs, and sand prairies. Area farmers and residents actively participate in goat prairie and trout stream restoration projects, other conservation activities, and environmental education.

The County is also popular for whitetail deer, turkey, and grouse hunting. Buffalo County has even been referred to as the Whitetail Deer capital of the world. Unbroken ridgelines, dramatic and wooded bluffs, and steep river and stream valleys provide detailed scenes of the Driftless Area's most notable features. Overlook vistas from bluff tops or views from the open water of the river back toward uplands and river towns, provide panoramic views of the region's beauty and scale. Quiet roads through farmland and valleys offer serene and scenic experiences of the places that make this area so important to an understanding of the region's ecology and culture.

7. Public and Private Outdoor Recreation Facilities

This section reviews the physical facilities available in the unincorporated areas of the County available upon which to carry out some of these activities. Buffalo County has recreational resources available from private, local governments, state, and federal governments. Lands owned by Public School Districts in Buffalo County may be treated ambiguously in this plan. In some cases, Public School outdoor recreation facilities are specialized in function for school purposes and are not available for general public use. In other cases, School Districts provide facilities that are available for general public use. This latter category of school lands is mentioned as appropriate in the community recreational inventories. When Public School-owned lands are available for general public use, they are also eligible for LAWCON and Wisconsin Stewardship funding provided the school district has adopted the outdoor recreation plan.

The Wisconsin DNR has created an interactive map for public access lands in the state of Wisconsin. This includes but is not limited to public lands, boat access sites, recreation trails, trout streams, and historic sites. Visit https://dnrmapping.wisconsin.gov/H5/?Viewer=Public_Access_Lands to explore the interactive map.

Federal Outdoor Recreational Facilities

Buffalo County is home to **Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife & Fish Refuge** lands. There are over 15,000 acres of the refuge in Buffalo County; a significant portion of federal refuge in Buffalo County is the Nelson-Trevino bottomland (3,000+ acres) in Chippewa River delta featuring an extensive, undisturbed wilderness portion of the largest delta floodplain forest in the upper Midwest. The 4.8 mile “National Designated” **Nelson-Trevino Canoe Trail** located in Buffalo County takes canoeists and kayakers into the backwater areas of the Refuge.

At its southern tip, Buffalo County contains part of the **Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)**. The 6,226-acre Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is located in southern Buffalo County and southwestern Trempealeau County. About 2,500 acres are located in Buffalo County. The refuge, located along the eastern edge of the Mississippi River, was established in 1936 as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds and other wildlife.

There are also three **Corps of Engineers Lock and Dams, Nos. 4, 5 & 5a** located in Buffalo County. Lock and Dams 4 and 5 have observation platforms open to the public. Thousands of people enjoy recreational boating and visiting the lock and dams.

State Outdoor Recreational Facilities

Merrick State Park (322 acres) is located on the Mississippi River North of Fountain City. The park offers camping, boat landings, canoeing, hiking/snowshoe trails; fishing and bird watching. The park is popular with boaters and its marshy backwaters provide habitat for egrets, herons, muskrats, and otters.

State Wildlife Areas and State Natural Areas

Wisconsin can take pride in its vast treasure of natural resources. Since 1876, the State of Wisconsin has been acquiring land to meet conservation and recreation needs. Wildlife areas are managed to sustain the wildlife and natural communities found on the properties and to provide a full range of traditional outdoor recreational uses. State Natural Areas (SNAs) are areas that are being preserved by the DNR to protect outstanding examples of Wisconsin's native landscape. Public lands managed by the Wisconsin DNR provide recreational opportunities and public spaces for hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, canoeing or wildlife viewing, Table 7.1.

In 2012 The Nature Conservancy protected the Lower Chippewa State Natural Area, in the Village of Nelson, allowing outdoor enthusiasts to explore the breathtaking views from the high bluffs overlooking the Mississippi

River and Great River Road. The 161 acres not only provides scenic views of the bluff lands, but also provides excellent habitat for raptors, reptiles, and rare plant life found in few other parts of the state. Once used by the Native Americans, this site was designated by the Wisconsin Historical Society as an important archaeological site. This site not only protects the natural beauty of Buffalo County but also the County's historical heritage.

In 2008, Mississippi Valley Conservancy acquired a 20-acre plot called Angel Bluff. The property is open for public use with scenic bluff views. From the bluff top, one can see all of Winona and a broad swath of the Mississippi River. The property includes a dry prairie, southern dry-, dry-mesic, and mesic forest, emerging aquatic wetland and surrogate grasslands.

County Outdoor Recreational Facilities

Buffalo County owns the Buffalo County Fairgrounds as its first County Park in Mondovi. The fair grounds are leased to a fair association for upkeep and maintenance. Opportunities for increased camping and improvements now have potential due to County ownership.

Parks and Attractions in Buffalo County's Cities and Villages

Small municipal parks can be found all throughout the County. Many of these parks include playground equipment and green space or open areas for organized sports. Surrounding many of these parks, residents can find additional amenities such as tennis and basketball courts and baseball diamonds. These recreational areas not only provide a safe atmosphere for our county's youth to play but also provide an outlet for physical fitness and community wellbeing. Private golf courses can be found near the Village of Cochrane and the City of Mondovi. A third golf course, just north of the County lines near Durand, has the availability to serve the residents of Buffalo County as well.

City of Alma:

Recreation includes two marinas, a swimming beach and a popular fishing float, where, for a small fee, anglers can spend the day fishing mid-river on a special floating fishing platform strategically located below the roller dams. The Alma Beach and Recreational area provides a beach area, staffed with lifeguards as posted, beach bathhouse with restroom facilities and showers (including handicap units), a tennis court, basketball court, volleyball courts, playground area for children and a softball/baseball field. The City of Alma Boat Launch and the Alma Marina are also located at this site. The area provides a gazebo with beautiful views of the river and can be reserved.

Alma is also home to Lock and Dam #4. A special steel walkway over the railroad tracks leads to an excellent observation deck for an up-close look at barge traffic passing through the lock.

Just north of Alma is Rieck's Lake Park, one of the top birding hotspots on the Wisconsin Great River Road. This widening of the mouth of the Buffalo River is a high quality waterfowl habitat that attracts a number of migrating bird species, the most popular being the tundra swan. Detailed outdoor displays help to explain what visitors are seeing as they gaze out over the wetlands and explain the history of the area. A number of waterside campsites are also available at Rieck's Lake Park along the banks of the Buffalo River. Rieck's Lake Park and Campground offers a playground and picnic area to the north with full restroom facilities (including showers), two shelters and a kitchen shelter, and 20 campsites with electricity (no water).

A winding roadway to the top of the bluffs takes you to Buena Vista Park. From the park, you can see the lock and dam, the town of Alma and Minnesota on the far shore. Buena Vista Park offers a picnic shelter, picnic tables, sitting areas and vault bathrooms. Buena Vita trail offers a 550' climb from Main Street in Alma to the top of Buena Vista Park.

Buffalo City:

Buffalo City is located on the slough of the Mississippi River with views across the Spring Lake and Whitman Bottoms. Fishing is easily accessible by boat at three landings. Foelsch River Side Park has a one-mile nature trail and several boat ramps near Buffalo City providing access to the river. The historic Buffalo County's first jail is located in Buffalo City Park.

Cochrane: Goose Lake Memorial Park has a community swimming pool and is a popular spot in the summer. One of the Cochrane's most popular attractions is the Prairie Moon Gardens and Museum, located two miles south of Cochrane off of Prairie Moon Road. Prairie Moon features the sculptural works of Herman Rusch, a farmer who retired in 1952 and became a self-taught sculptor. A tour by bike, motorcycle, or car through Waumandee Valley leads to one of four "pizza farms" in the area at Suncrest Gardens Farm.

Fountain City: The community has a public boat landing as well as several unique restaurants, shops and attractions, including Elmer's Toy Car Museum, located up on Eagle Bluff. Fountain City is also home to Lock & Dam 5A and is a great place to watch barge traffic. There is also a floating fishing platform below the dam. The strangest attraction in Fountain City is the Rock in the House. For a small donation, you can see where a 55-ton bolder came crashing through the roof of a small house and came to rest in the family's master bedroom. Just north of Fountain City, you'll find Merrick State Park, a favorite destination for boaters, anglers and birdwatchers. The park was named for George Merrick, a riverboat pilot from Prescott. An excellent self-guided canoe trail will take paddlers through Merrick State Park's extensive wetlands that make up much of the park.

Mondovi: Mondovi is the eastern gateway to Buffalo County and hosts the County Fair. There are 36.4 miles of trail found on the Buffalo River State Trail for multi-use running from Fairchild to Mondovi. Mirror Lake Park, Sharps Point Park, Mondovi's Veteran Memorial Park, and Tourist Park have attractions for all ages from camping to museums.

Nelson: Nelson sits at the lower end of Lake Pepin, the widest part of the river on the Wisconsin Great River Road. Nearby, the Chippewa River spills into the Mississippi River, forming a massive sandbar that acts as a natural dam and forms Lake Pepin. North of Nelson on Highway 35 is the 13,000-acre Tiffany Bottoms Wildlife Area River, which protects the Chippewa River bottomlands and supports a number of rare plants and animals. Village of Nelson's latest acquisition is Thrive! Park, donated by Gary Christopherson in 2016. The 25+ acre park features hiking trails, with a scenic blufftop view overlooking the Village.

Waumandee: Located in the center of Buffalo County, the beautiful scenery makes Waumandee a great "back road" trip. Waumandee Creek and Little Waumandee Creek carve through the valley offering Class II trout streams. The historic Harmonia Hall and Park, Waumandee House, and Waumandee Mill are historic sites dating back to the 1800's.

Table 7.1 State Natural and Wildlife Areas Located in Buffalo County

Name	Description	Access	Recreational Opportunities
Big Swamp Wildlife Area (796 acres)	Upland hardwoods and marsh	5 miles west of Mondovi south of Hwy. 10	Hunting, trapping, hiking, wildlife viewing and bird watching
Lower Chippewa River SNA (161 acres)	Contains dry prairie, cliffs, oak openings and southern forest communities	From the intersection of State Routes 25 and 35 in the Village of Nelson, head south on Route 35 for 0.7 miles.	No marked or maintained trails Permitted uses: hiking, cross-country skiing, hunting and wildlife viewing
Trempealeau River Meadow SNA (443 acres)	High quality wetland complex featuring large undisturbed sedge meadow and a diversity of species	Intersec. of STH 95/35 in Fountain City, go E & N on Hwy 95, then E on Wolfe's Dugway Rd (Doelle Valley Rd) to the T-intersection with River Rd and park along the road	Hiking, fishing, cross country skiing, hunting, trapping and wildlife viewing
Tiffany Bottoms State Natural Area (SNA) (717 acres)	Part of an extensive 8,000-acre beaver/ otter closed area	From Nelson go N on Hwy 25 seven miles to a parking area, then overland and across Buffalo Slough to the site. Or from Ella by boat, directly across the Chippewa River to the N boundary.	Hiking, fishing, cross country skiing, hunting, trapping and wildlife viewing
Tiffany Wildlife Area (13,000 acres)	Diverse wildlife population. It's a great place for birds and birders offering up the migration of tundra swans and other waterfowl twice a year. Has one of the state's largest, continuous bottomland hardwood forests.	Located along the Chippewa River between Nelson and Durand; west of STH 25 and mostly N of STH 35	Hunting, trapping, hiking, skiing, berry picking, canoeing, rafting, camping (by permit only), wildlife viewing, and bird watching
Whitman Dam State Wildlife Area (2,253 acres)	Floodplain forest and marshland	Three miles SE of Cochrane across main river channel from Merrick State Park	Hunting, trapping, hiking, wildlife viewing and birdwatching

8. Planning Initiatives and Funding Opportunities

This recreation plan will only be beneficial if it influences how the County makes park and recreation planning and budgeting decisions. This plan is intended to become a key policy document for local government officials in the development of desired and well-coordinated recreation activities that will improve public health, safety and economy of the County.

The following improvements are planned for Buffalo County Outdoor Recreation Facilities.

<p>High Priority Activities: <i>Promote healthy living outdoor recreation opportunities which produce no or low noise and/or other disruption to resident living, wildlife, and environment.</i> <i>(Also know as “silent sports” *for definition, see page 22)</i></p>
<p>Improve access to the Buffalo River and other navigable streams for recreational boaters and canoers/kayakers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Construction of developed boat ramps and landings with parking access for motorized boats and for canoes/kayaks could include signs, maps, and parking.
<p>Construct safe multipurpose trails for landowners and visitors of all ages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete the Mississippi River Flyway Trail along Highway 35 and the Mississippi River from Nelson, WI south to Winona, MN. It would connect with the Great River State Trail (boundary of Trempealeau and Buffalo Counties). This trail would create a regional/multi-state trail system. ○ Pursue trail development with acquisition and infrastructure including bicycle racks, access maps, signage, and outdoor toilet facilities and cover shelters. ○ Provide trail maintenance with vegetation management ○ Create campground(s) along trial route. ○ Work towards obtaining “Bicycle Friendly Community” designation. ○ Design/develop “silent sports” trails which cross scenic woodlands, rugged bluff lands, prairie remnants, river bottomlands, and wetland ecosystems. ○ Consider developing a private land easement acquisition to develop a hiker’s challenge “Buffalo Trail” to destination locations within Buffalo County
<p>Develop birding and wildlife viewing opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Buffalo County has outstanding year-round bird watching opportunities both on the Mississippi Flyway and inland forests. ○ Promote wildlife trails and aps for residents and non-resident birding/wildlife visitors
<p>Promote public trout stream fishing opportunities on local trout streams (Streams of Buffalo County are predicted to harbor the highest resiliency to climate change effects which threaten native brook trout and other cold water stream species).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Continue to support trout stream restoration projects. ○ Support improved mas, signage, and needed parking areas.
<p>Promote public fishing opportunities on public waters.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve access to the Buffalo River, fishable ponds, and the Mississippi River backwater areas. ○ Improvements should include parking areas, boat landings, and shore fishing opportunities. ○ Improve signage and maps.
<p>Medium Priority Activities: <i>Promote other outdoor recreation opportunities; recommendations outside of “silent sports” category.</i></p>

Continue to explore opportunities to develop County and local public parks. Sites should include picnic grounds, campgrounds, water access parks, beaches, recreational sporting parks, historic sites, performing arts stage, etc.
Create and/or improve Mississippi River boat docking. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Include docks for larger vessels, tour boats, rental boats, transient boats, and possible permanent/seasonal mooring
Establish and market additional overlooks/vistas along the Mississippi River for all user types.
Develop local historic roads or scenic by-ways. Sites could include CCC Camp chimney on Hwy. 88, CCC PL-566 watershed structures, archeological sites, and scenic viewpoints.
Create area/opportunity for public rock-climbing.
Promote cross country ski trails. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Provide winter grooming of trails with appropriate tracked equipment for both skate skiing and classic skiing tracks. ○ Improve maps and signage for trails. ○ Provide needed off season trimming and vegetation management. ○ Cross-country ski trails can be used as multi-purpose trails for activities such as wildlife viewing, hiking, and biking
Provide a mountain biking (off-road bicycle) track.
Continue to maintain existing snowmobile and ATV trail routes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Increase safety, post signs, construct bridges, provide vegetation management, access and/or parking, and develop maps.
Promote Buffalo County as Wisconsin's Driftless Area.
Low Priority Actions
Snow bicycle ("fat bikes") trail development, maps, and trail signs.
Golf course maintenance and development.
Equestrian trail development.
Build and maintain an outdoor public swimming pool for recreational swimming.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Funding Programs Funding for recreational development can come from several sources both public and private. Most funding for this type of development comes from public local funds. Primarily, local funds come from a number of sources including the sale of bonds, allocations from the local tax base, and donations from individuals and organizations. Non-local funding can come from several sources, either in the form of a grant or a loan. Currently, the DNR, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife, and Rural Development (RDA) provide competitive funding relating to outdoor recreation.

The Wisconsin Waterways Commission is a good source of funding for acquiring and improving those amenities that primarily benefit recreational boaters in the state. Boat ramps, launches, parking lots, restrooms, and other boating related improvements can be 50% funded under this quarterly grant program administered by the WDNR.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is a main source of funding for outdoor recreation facilities. The Stewardship Program, administered by the DNR, is a fund designed to provide opportunities for outdoor recreation, protect land sensitive to environmental degradation, conserve and restore wildlife habitat and

protect water quality. As a prerequisite to the following WDNR funding programs, applicants must first submit a comprehensive outdoor recreation plan, such as this plan, or a master plan that has been approved by resolution by a local governing unit, or a plan of a higher unit of government. Applicants submitting qualifying comprehensive outdoor recreation plans or master plans may receive eligibility to apply for funding for up to five years. The DNR's priority for funding is land acquisition, followed by facility development. Outdoor recreation grant programs currently administered by the DNR include:

All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) Program: provides funds to accommodate all-terrain vehicles through the acquisition, insurance, development, and maintenance of all-terrain vehicle trails and areas, including routes.

ATV Enforcement Patrol: provides grants to county sheriffs for all-terrain vehicle patrols.

County Conservation Aids: provides funds to counties or recognized Indian tribes to carry out fish or wildlife management projects that enhance fish and wildlife habitat or fishing and hunting opportunities.

Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration: provides funding for sport fish restoration and boating access including the construction of boat landings and fishing piers.

Recreational Boating Facilities Program: provides funds to local units of government and qualified lake associations for the construction of capital improvements to provide safe recreational boating facilities. The program also provides financial assistance for feasibility studies related to the development of safe recreational boating facilities, purchase of aquatic weed harvesting equipment, purchase of navigation 58 aids, dredging of channels of waterways, and chemical treatment of Eurasian water milfoil.

Recreational Trails Program: provides funds for motorized and non-motorized recreation trail rehabilitation, trail maintenance, trail development, and trail acquisition.

Snowmobile Trail Aids: provide funds to maintain trail systems that provide passage through a county and connections with adjacent counties.

County Snowmobile Enforcement Patrols: provide funds for county snowmobile patrols functioning as a law enforcement unit for the enforcement of Ch. 350, Wis. Stats.

Stewardship Local Assistance - Acquisition and Development of Local Parks Stewardship: provides funding to acquire land, rights in land, and develop public outdoor recreation areas for nature-based outdoor recreation purposes.

Stewardship Local Assistance - Urban Rivers Stewardship Local Assistance: provides funds for the acquisition of land in urban areas. Projects focus on providing access for the greatest number of potential users and providing the greatest opportunities for nature-based outdoor recreation.

Stewardship Local Assistance - Urban Greenspace Stewardship Local Assistance: provides funds for the acquisition of land in and around urban areas. Projects focus on providing access for the greatest number of potential users and providing the greatest opportunities for nature-based outdoor recreation.

Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF): provides financial assistance to state agencies, counties, villages, towns, school districts, cities, and Indian tribes for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. The program provides up to 50 percent reimbursement grants for approved state and local projects. Competition for LWCF funds is on a statewide basis.

Rural Development Administration (USDA - Rural Development)

The USDA provides a loan program, which provides Community Facility Project Loans to applicants with areas of less than 20,000 people, for the purpose of constructing, enlarging, or improving community facilities for health

care, public safety, or public services. These loans should be secured with bonds or notes pledging taxes, assessments, or revenues.

There are many Rural Development program that are different areas of community development that could provide loans, or possibly grants, if criteria are met for income and utility rates, for facilities in the communities that are smaller in size. 59 Coastal Management Program, Department of Administration

Transportation Assistance Program (TAP) Wisconsin Department of Transportation

This program provides funds for non-traditional projects within programs called the Safe Routes to School Program, Transportation Enhancements, and the Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Program. The TAP program provides up to 80 percent reimbursement grants for approved projects that target transportation-oriented pedestrian and bicycle planning and construction projects.

Community Development Block Grant, Department of Administration

This program funds support infrastructure and facility projects for communities. Examples of eligible projects include improvements, repairs, or expansions of streets, drainage systems, water and sewer systems, sidewalks, and community centers.

Access Fund

The Access Fund awards grant money to help local communities with climbing area acquisitions through the Climbing Conservation Grants Program.

9. Maps

Map 1: Bike Trails



Section 3 Alma



Distance: 9 miles between Nelson and Alma. 6 miles between Alma and Cochrane. 4 miles between Cochrane and Czechville. 23 miles from map matchline to map matchline.

Difficulty: The terrain for the entire length of the route on the panel is flat.

Route Travel Conditions: Conditions are mixed for this section. WIS 35 north of Alma is moderately good for cycling. From Alma, south to the matchline, the route is in the "Best" category for cycling. WIS 35 is busy in the City of Alma and the road is narrow with parking.

Directions: Southbound: From Nelson travel south on WIS 35 to map matchline. Northbound: From map matchline (Czechville) travel north on WIS 35 to Nelson.

Alternate Route: Southbound: South of Alma, turn right (west) on County OO. Continue on County OO through Buffalo City for about 4 miles. Turn right (south) on Prairie Moon Rd (also know as Main Street in Cochrane and Kamrowski Rd). Continue on Prairie Moon/Kamrowski until the intersection of Bechly and Indian Creek Road. Stay to the right on Indian Creek Road. Continue on Indian Creek Road for about 0.7 mile. Turn right on WIS 35. Northbound: Turn left on Indian Creek Road. At intersection with Kamrowski Road, stay to left. Continue on Kamrowski (also know as Prairie Moon and Main Street in Cochrane) for about 4 miles to County OO. Left on County OO and continue for about 5 miles (through Buffalo City). Turn left (north) on WIS 35.

Figure 1. Source - Wisconsin Great River Road

Map 2: Bike Trails 2



Figure 2. Source - Wisconsin Great River Road

Section 4 Fountain City



Distance: 5 miles from Czechville to Fountain City. 7 miles from Fountain City to Bluff Siding. 3 miles from Bluff Siding to Marshland (beginning of the Great River State Trail). 7 miles from Marshland to Trempealeau on Great River State Trail. 25 miles from map matchline to map matchline.

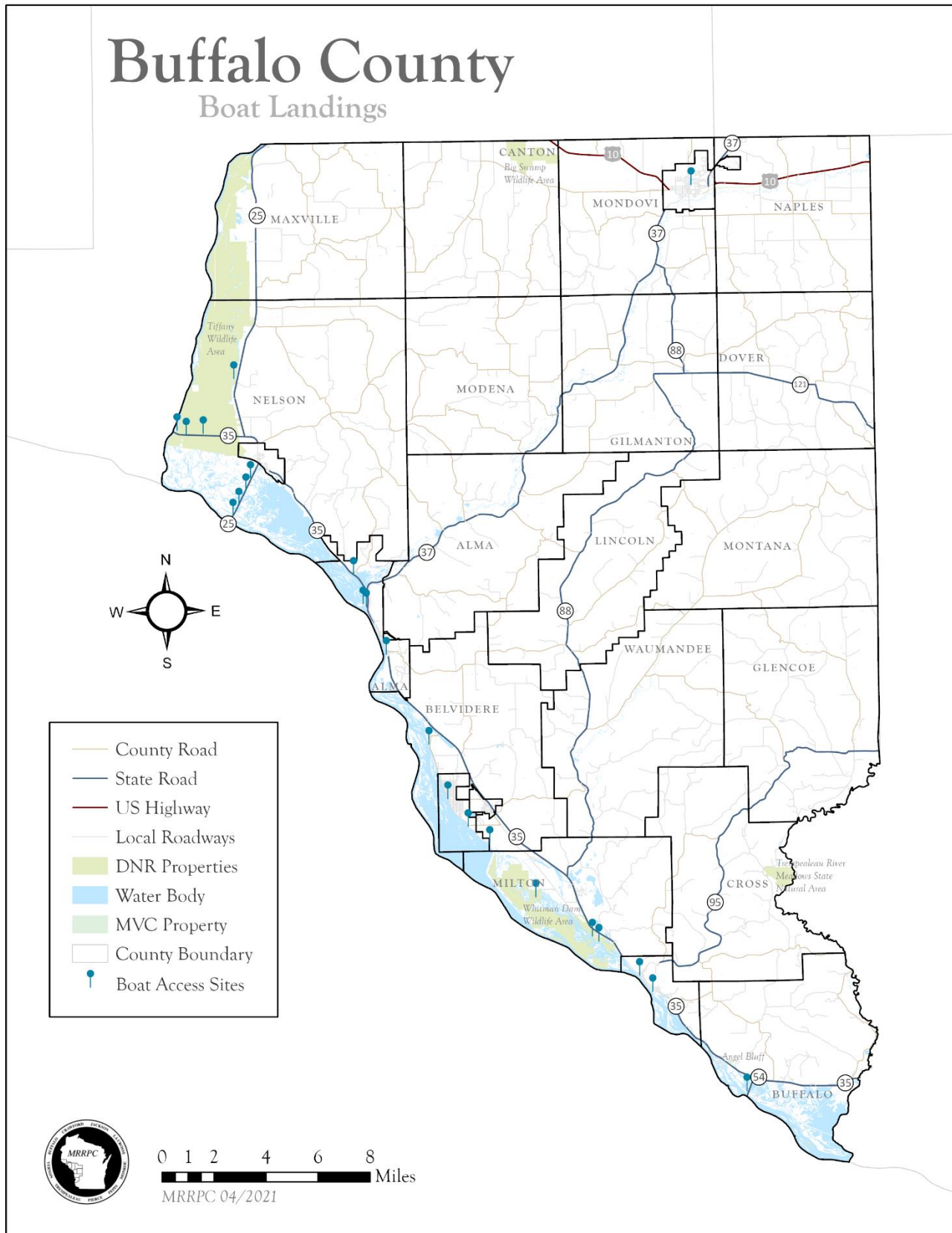
Difficulty: The terrain for this entire length of the route on the panel is flat.

Route Travel Conditions: Traffic is fairly heavy in this stretch, especially south of Fountain City. WIS 35/54 between Bluff Siding and Marshland has wider paved shoulders, but the remaining segments have 5 foot wide paved shoulders. The Great River Trail is crushed limestone suitable for most skinny tires. Adjacent town roads between Marshland and Trempealeau are paved, but narrow with very low traffic volumes.

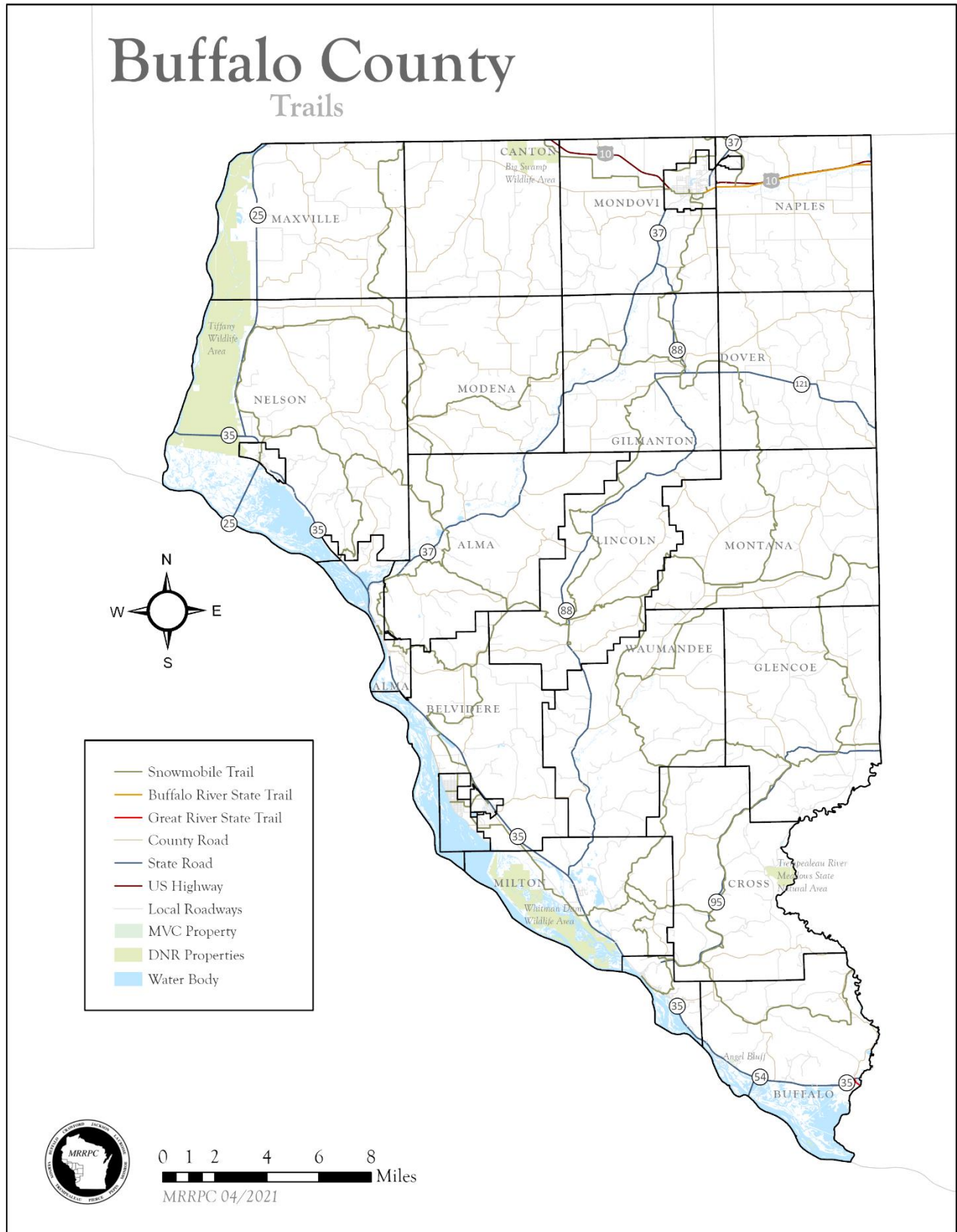
Directions: Southbound: From Czechville to Marshland on WIS 35 (NOTE: Marshland is merely an intersection of the Great River State Trail and WIS 35. Look very carefully for the trailhead of the Great River State Trail). Right or south and east on the Great River State Trail (off-road) to Trempealeau. Northbound: From Trempealeau continue on Great River State Trail (off-road) to Marshland. Turn left (west) on WIS 35/54.

Alternate Routes: Indian Creek/Kamrowski Road just north of Merrick State Park. See Section 3 for alternate route details.

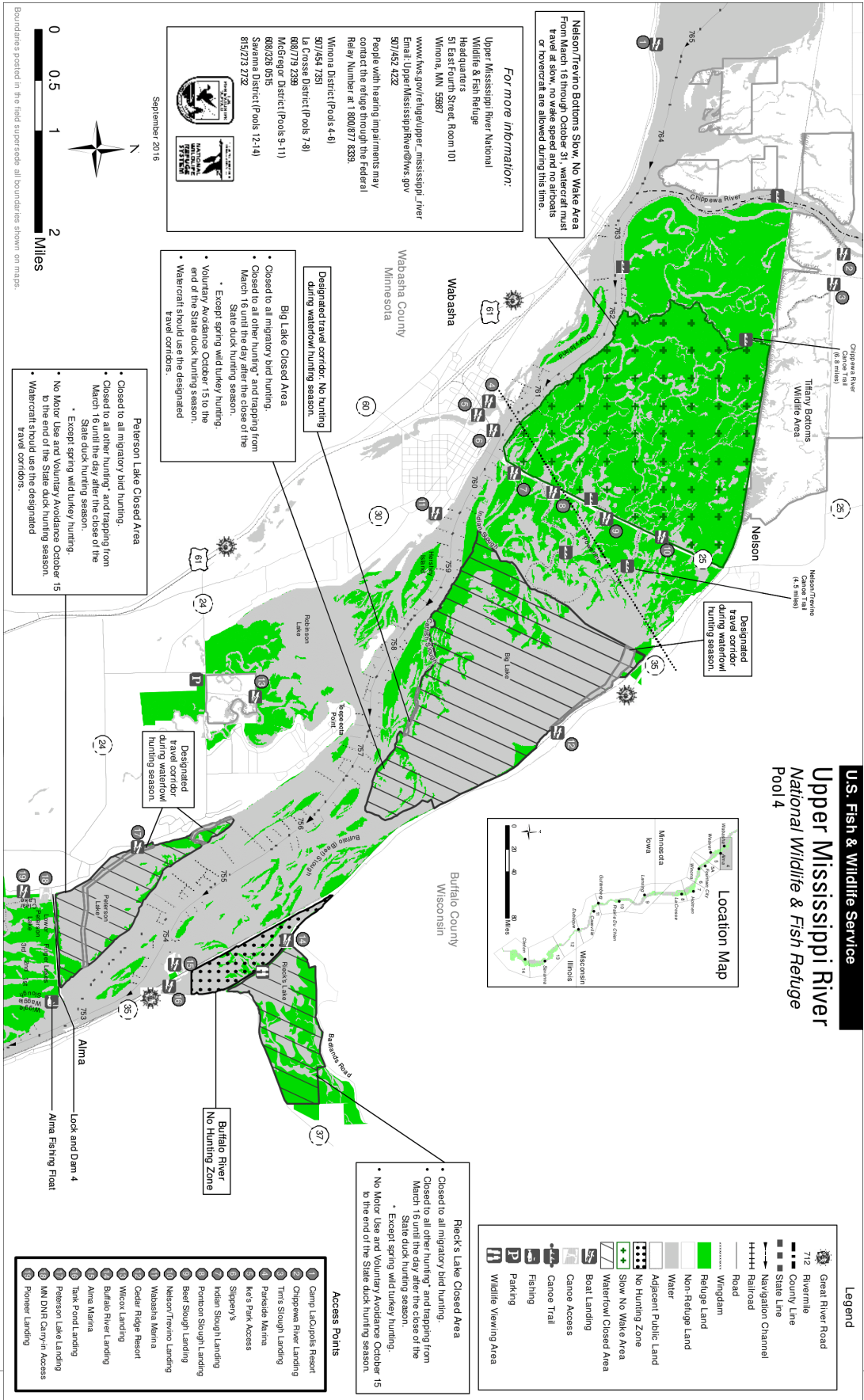
Map 3: Boat Landings



Map 4: Trails



Map 5: Pool 4 – National Wildlife and Fish Refuge



Map 6: Trout Streams



10. Adopting Resolution



Drafted By:
Sonya J. Hansen
Presented Month/Year:
November 2021
Involved Committees:
Land Conservation & Ag & Extension

County Department:
Administration
Fiscal Impact: YES / NO
AC Approved: YES / NO

RESOLUTION # 21-12-04

**A RESOLUTION TO ADOPT THE BUFFALO
COUNTY OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (CORP)
for Years 2021-2025**

WHEREAS, Buffalo County has participated in a countywide Outdoor Recreation Planning Program, and

WHEREAS, said planning program has been conducted by Buffalo County through the Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission in conjunction with the Buffalo County Land Conservation and Ag and Extension Committee, and

WHEREAS, public surveys and meetings have been held throughout Buffalo County by local committees, boards, or councils to seek input on community recreation needs, and the plan was available for public input through the Land Conservation Department office, and

WHEREAS, said planning document reflects community and county recreation needs considering goals, objectives, and generally accepted recreation planning standards.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors does hereby adopt the Buffalo County Outdoor Recreation Plan as its guide to future recreation facility improvements and outdoor recreational opportunities in the County of Buffalo.

Adopted at a duly called and noticed meeting of the Buffalo County Board of Supervisors on the 28th day of December, 2021.


County Clerk

ATTEST:


County Board Chairperson

Respectfully submitted by:

Land Conservation & Ag & Extension Committee

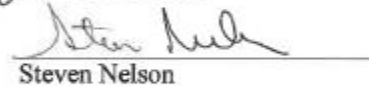

Dwight Ruff


William Bruegger


Terry Sobotta


Brad Schindtknecht


John Sendelbach


Steven Nelson

Financial Impact:

None