



CHUCK WICHGERS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 82nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks, and Outdoor Recreation

Testimony of Representative Chuck Wichgers

Assembly Bill 30 – Every Kid Outdoors

May 2, 2023

Good morning Chairman Mursau and Committee members,

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 30. I appreciate the opportunity to talk about this legislation and answer any questions.

Assembly Bill 30, also known as Every Kid Outdoors, is a bi-partisan bill that allows 4th grade school students and their families' free access to Wisconsin state parks for one year. It is modeled off the successful existing federal Every Kid Outdoors program.

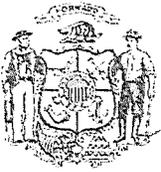
In 2015, to celebrate the National Park Service centennial, Every Kid Outdoors was started to increase appreciation for America's historical and natural treasures. Parents and guardians of 4th grade students print out a pass for their 4th grader which will waive a per person admission fee, or a vehicle entrance fee for that student and his or her family, including all children up to 16 and up to three adults to over 2,000 federal parks and historic sites.

Here in Wisconsin, there are four national parks open to this program: The Apostle Islands National Lakeshore, the Ice Age Scenic Trail, North Country National Scenic Trail, and the Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway. We know, however, Wisconsin has much more to offer. While families of fourth graders may travel to the Grand Canyon, or Yellowstone National Park or George Washington's Birthplace, many families will stay close to home and hike, camp, fish, or swim in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin's natural beauty is a treasure. This bill will encourage families to experience it together. The bill is emphatically endorsed by the public, the Sierra Club, WI Parks and Recreation Association, and Scenic Wisconsin. We have an opportunity here to increase tourism, introduce a life-long love of nature to children, and support the mental and physical health of youth and adults alike. The legislation may inspire future state pass purchases, while simultaneously having minimal administrative and fiscal impact.

The benefit of forwarding AB 30 is its simplicity. There is no new administrative program and no additional documentation for families. The other benefit is its fairness. This bill does not limit the opportunity to one child per family, but allows for each child in a family, when they are in 4th grade, to participate.

Thank you. I'm happy to answer any questions.



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Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation

State Senator André Jacque

May 2, 2023

Chairman Mursau and Committee Members:

Thank you for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Assembly Bill 30, expanding Every Kid Outdoors access to Wisconsin State Parks.

Every Kid Outdoors is a federal public lands youth initiative started by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 2015 to expand access for all 4th graders and their families to be able to experience the places that are home to our country's natural treasures and rich history. The program gives 4th graders and their families one year of free access to national parks.

Since the program was created, several states have begun to accept these passes at their state parks as a way to introduce new people to their state park system. I have again introduced this initiative to establish the same opportunity in Wisconsin to further encourage interest in the lifelong fun, exercise and adventures possible in our state parks.

As 2021 SB 376/AB 375 last session, this proposal passed the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues unanimously and this Assembly Committee with overwhelming bi-partisan support.

Most 4th graders are already registered by their teachers for the national program, and signup is also quick and easy through the program's website. Should Wisconsin choose to accept these passes at state parks, there would be no separate applications to handle.

This proposed policy change was emphatically endorsed during the 2021 DNR and Wisconsin Conservation Congress Spring Hearings by a vote of 8,727 to 775, or roughly 92% in support, garnering significantly more votes in favor than any other question put before all state residents, and was supported by the Sierra Club, Wisconsin Parks and Recreation Association and Scenic Wisconsin during the legislative committee process last session.

According to previous DNR testimony, the bill could inspire many to purchase either an annual pass or future daily passes to continue to visit these properties, and would have minimal effects on administrative procedures, managing the change similar to Federal Ice Age Reserve properties where the National Park Pass is accepted.

I've also been working with the Wisconsin Historical Society (WHS) to find a way to expand this initiative to include admission to state historic sites. Admission to national historic sites is included in the current Every Kid Outdoors pass and WHS has eagerly engaged in dialogue to offer similar connections at the state level. And as you can see from the document attached to my testimony, the WHS has many outdoor programs we could promote with recreational and educational opportunities for children and their families.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 30. I'd be happy to answer any questions.



Outdoor Programs Offered by the Wisconsin Historical Society

K-12 Programs

- Villa Louis – Kids put on their historical thinking caps and get ready to explore hundreds of years of history in one very special place. Students will tour a late 19th century Victorian mansion and grounds, have an interactive 18th century fur trade experience, and head outdoors for a history hike scavenger hunt. Programs are held outdoors and in museum buildings, rain or shine.
- Old World Wisconsin Village Quest, Fridays Sep – Nov & Apr – Jun. In small teams students explore the Crossroads Village completing a set of tasks and solving a Time Travel mystery. They solve puzzles, ask questions to gather data, check their sources, and navigate using a compass and map. A Historic Text guides their journey and a Teacher Key helps track who measures up and who solves the mystery.
- Madeline Island Field Trip from May – Jun.
- Circus World Museum field trip May 19 - June 16 – Walk the grounds and enjoy the classic Circus World Experience encompassing 64 acres, 30 structures, seven winter quarters buildings, the Circus Train shed complex, and over 260 spectacular wagons.
- Aztalan Adventure – School group exploration of Aztalan State Park with subject matter experts, in partnership with Friends of Aztalan, WDNR, and others.
- University of Wisconsin-Madison Science Expeditions: Burial Mound education station.
- Madeline Island Museum Children's Hour – Kid friendly, fun-filled activities on Thursdays for ages 4-12. This special hour-long children's program includes an engaging story read by museum staff members, a fun crafting activity and a small snack.
- Stonefield Field Trip, May – Oct. Kids explore the ABC's (the agriculture, butter, and chores, that is!) of history in the beautiful setting of Stonefield, where hands-on learning is as easy as it is fun. Students will try a Babcock tester in the State Agricultural Museum, make butter in The Creamery, learn daily farm chores in the 1901 Farm House, have a lesson in the one-room School House, and explore the 1901 Village. Programs are held outdoors and in museum buildings, rain or shine.
- Wade House Field Trip May – Jun and Sep – Oct. Kids explore the horse-powered world that existed before planes, cars, and railroads. Guides will take guests to the



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27-room Stage Coach Hotel. Then they'll head to the historic sawmill and blacksmith shop to see firsthand how tools are made and used. Finally, students put their knowledge to the test as they build a model in the Carriage Museum. Programs are held outdoors and in museum buildings, rain or shine.

Walking Tours

- Old World Wisconsin – Families with children can experience the world of Wisconsin's early immigrants. An array of outdoor activities spread over hundreds of acres include cooking, crafts and trades, helping stoke the fire in the blacksmith shop, enjoying encounters with farm animals, picking veggies in the gardens, dyeing and spinning wool, rolling pie crusts, collecting chicken eggs, and racing high wheel bicycles.
- Walking tour of archaeology and Native American history at Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Middleton, WI.
- Madeline Island Museum – Lost La Pointe Walking Tour, Wed, Jul 5 – Wed, Aug 30. Explore downtown La Pointe as you experience island landscapes, architecture present and past, and captivating stories representing the many cultures and people that have impacted Madeline Island's rich history. The island's secrets are brought to life on this trek through time. Hear stories of fires, wind, building migrations and interesting residents who lived and worked on the island over the years.
- Mineral Point Walking Tour Fri, Sep 22 – Fri, Oct 13. Visit historic buildings and landmarks while hearing captivating stories of the people who helped shape Mineral Point's rich history. Along the way, engage with local historians as they share tales of major events, the city's development, and the evolution of its architecture.

Animal Encounters

- Old World Wisconsin – Goat Yoga, Sat May 20 from 8:30 a.m. – 9:30 a.m. Hoof it to Old World Wisconsin for a morning of furry friends and relaxation.
- Circus World Museum – On the grounds, guests will encounter many of Circus World's animal partners, including ponies, dogs, and elephants. Pony rides are also offered during the summer performance season.

Camps

- Old World Wisconsin Apprentice Summer Camp – Multiple dates during Wed, Jun 21 – Wed, Aug 16. Kids get hands-on with history as they enjoy three days of fun activities and learning through this interactive summer camp for ages 13-17. They'll



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suit up in period clothing, step into historic workshops and spaces and learn directly from trained artisans. No matter a child's interest, we will match them with exciting projects, which may include blacksmithing, leatherworking, knitting, wool processing, weaving, cooking, baking, gardening, and historic chores.

- Old World Wisconsin – Little House Adventure Summer Camp. Discover the world of Laura Ingalls Wilder at this 1-day summer camp for kids ages 8-10. They'll work with other campers to explore life in a wooded cabin and at a one-room schoolhouse, help prepare a historic treat, and meet real work horses.
- Old World Wisconsin Little House Family Adventure Summer Camp. A one-day camp for the entire family to discover the world of Laura Ingalls Wilder at this summer camp for kids ages 6-11 and their family.
- Wade House Plank Road Adventure Summer Camp Mon, Jun 19 - Fri, Jun 23, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. and Mon, Jul 24 - Fri, Jul 28 from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. – Kids will experience life in the Wisconsin wilderness as they enjoy five days of fun activities and learning through this interactive summer camp. They'll discover life on the plank road and learn the skills that were needed to start a new life in Wisconsin as they try their hand at candle dipping, woodstove cooking and more. Along with enjoying beautiful nature hikes, they will also visit the sawmill, blacksmith shop and Carriage Museum. Families are invited to join their camper on Friday for an end-of-camp celebration.

Other Programs

- Old World Wisconsin – Sheep Shearing Weekend May 6 – 7 from 10 AM – 4 PM. Visit on opening weekend for a historic sheep shearing demonstration at the 1860s Norwegian Immigrant Farm.
- Old World Wisconsin Independence Day Weekend – Get decked out in red, white, and blue and head to Old World Wisconsin for a weekend packed with patriotic festivities. Celebrate the spirit of Independence Day in 19th and early 20th century Wisconsin. Play base ball, historic games and enter the famous pie-eating contest! Enjoy a special picnic menu in the cool shade of the Village Grove while listening to tunes played by a brass band and a reading of the Declaration of Independence.
- Connecting Cultures: Fur Trade Weekend Fri, Jul 7 - Sun, Jul 9 | 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Guests travel back in time over 200 years as they step into a recreated fur trade encampment. Discover the history of the fur trade on Madeline Island and beyond. Interact with historians and re-enactors as they demonstrate many aspects of life at a fur trade post, including wilderness medicine, firearms, birch canoe building, blacksmithing, surveying, and other trades.



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- Kids' World Circus - Kids, especially the younger ones, create their own circus, playing the parts of performers and animals in a fun big top production that is always unique and full of surprises. In indoor/outdoor hippodrome.
- Wisconsin Archeology Month in May each year - includes tours and events scheduled by State Archaeology Staff. Visit our website in May for details.



Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation

2023 Assembly Bill 30

Fee waivers for state park vehicle admission receipts to pupils with Every Kid Outdoors passes May 2, 2023

Good morning, Chair Mursau and members of the Committee. My name is Steve Schmelzer, and I am the Bureau Director overseeing the Wisconsin State Park System for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Assembly Bill 30 (AB 30), related to fee waivers for state park vehicle admission receipts to pupils with Every Kid Outdoors passes.

The Every Kid Outdoors program administered by the National Park Service is designed to help increase access to the outdoors. Last year, the Wisconsin State Park System saw over 19 million visitors across more than 100 properties. By allowing some visitors free admission, this bill could inspire many to purchase either an annual pass or future daily passes to continue to visit these properties.

Under AB 30, the department would waive admission fees needed to enter a state park for pupils with a valid Every Kid Outdoors pass issued by the National Park Service. Other fees such as overnight camping fees and shelter reservation fees would still apply. Surrounding states such as Minnesota and Michigan do not currently accept Every Kid Outdoors passes, but some states do accept this pass. The bill would have minimal effects on administrative procedures and management. Department parks and forest staff would manage this similarly to Federal Ice Age Reserve properties where the national park pass is accepted. Participants show their national park pass and receive a free daily pass for entrance to those properties. Free admission typically results in higher visitation at many of the properties.

The department supports efforts to increase public access to the many outdoor recreation activities available in our state. It is important to keep the self-funded model of our State Park System in mind to ensure our continued ability to provide the best outdoor recreation experience for our visitors. There are currently several fee waiver programs offered by the State Park System. Last year, Wisconsin State Park System properties reported administering 8,542 fee waivers, totaling \$95,637. With that being said, a sum sufficient transfer from the general fund, similar to what the Governor included in his 2023-25 Biennial Budget Proposal, would help offset the financial impacts of this bill and ensure that we are able to continue providing high quality outdoor recreation opportunities to our visitors.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.