

# **BUFFALO COUNTY**

# **OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN**

# **2016-2020**



Prepared by the Mississippi  
River Regional Planning Commission under the  
Direction of the Buffalo  
County Board of Supervisors





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## Introduction

Outdoor recreation aids citizens' physical health, as well as the health of the economy, as high-quality recreation opportunities attracts 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.

## Goals and 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

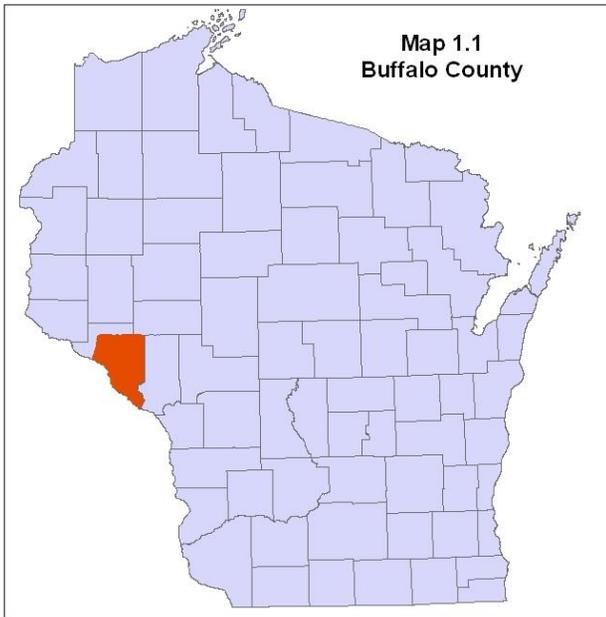
Act 1, Community Theatre Guild (Mondovi)	Fountain City Lions Club
Alma Historical Society	Fountain City River Players
Alma, Inc., WI Post 224	Fountain City Rod and Gun Club
Alma Lions Club	Girl Scouts
Alma Rod and Gun Club	Glencoe Drifters (Snowmobile Club)
Alma Snow Drifters of Wisconsin Inc. (Snowmobile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

# 1. GEOPOLITICAL PROFILE

## Buffalo County

Located in west central Wisconsin, Buffalo County's 2010 Census population was 13,587. 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, **Map 1.1**.

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 cover 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 684.5 square miles, or about 438,061 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.

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 2013 Statement of Assessment, Buffalo County has 334,946 acres of assessed lands. About 90% of land in the County is assessed as agriculture, agriculture/ forest, or forest. Land in farms as of the 2012 Agriculture Census in the County was classed as cropland (53.3%), woodland (33.3%), pastureland (6.6%) and other uses (6.8%). Other land categories are Residential 1.7%, Commercial .2%, Industrial .2%, and Undeveloped and other 8%. There are no county, state or National forest lands in the county.

**Table 1.1 Buffalo County Assessed Land Uses**

Land Classification	2013	
	Acres	% of Assessed Land Acres
Residential	5,818	1.7
Commercial	968	0.3
Manufacturing	801	0.2
Agriculture	210,545	62.9
Undeveloped	23,712	7.1
Forest <sup>(1)</sup>	21,569	6.4
Agriculture Forest	67,942	20.3
Other	3,591	1.1
	334,946	

Source: Wis. Dept. of Revenue – 2013 Statement of Assessment

## Agricultural Characteristics

Agriculture is the dominate land use in Buffalo County with dairy, crop and mixed livestock operations. The 2012 Census of Agriculture County reported 1,061 farms on 305,302 acres with an average size of a farm of 288 acres. Comparing these statistics to 2007 Ag Census, the total number of farms in the County declined by 14%, land in farms declined by 1%, and the average size of a farm increased by 15% from 2007 to 2012. The agriculture commodities ranking highest in sales as of 2012 were milk from cows (\$68,920,000); grains, oilseeds, dry beans and dry peas (\$67,609,000); and poultry and eggs (\$59,408,000).

**Local Governments**

The County has 6 incorporated communities and 17 townships. The 17 town governments range in population 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 2.1** for the population of each municipality as of the 2010 Census.

**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, **Map 1.2**. 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.

**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.

**Map 1.2 Ecological Regions**



## 2. SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE

### Population

The population of Buffalo County decreased 1.6% between 2000 and 2010. As shown in the following table, the County's population decreased by 217 people during the last decade. The Towns experienced a population loss of 52, while the incorporated communities experienced a decrease of 165 people or -2.6%. 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. **Map 2.1** on page 2-4 shows the location of the incorporated cities and villages and unincorporated towns, their 2010 census numbers and 2015 population estimates.

**Table 2.1 Buffalo County Population Data**

Municipality	Population			
	2000 Census	2010 Census	# Change 00-10	% Change 00-10
T Alma	377	297	-80	-21.2
T Belvidere	442	396	-46	-10.4
T Buffalo	667	705	38	5.7
T Canton	304	305	1	0.3
T Cross	366	377	11	3.0
T Dover	484	486	2	0.4
T Gilmanton	470	426	-44	-9.4
T Glencoe	478	485	7	1.5
T Lincoln	187	162	-25	-13.4
T Maxville	325	309	-16	-4.9
T Milton	517	534	17	3.3
T Modena	318	354	36	11.3
T Mondovi	449	469	20	4.5
T Montana	306	284	-22	-7.2
T Naples	584	691	107	18.3
T Nelson	586	571	-15	-2.6
T Waumandee	515	472	-43	-8.3
<b>Town Totals</b>	<b>7,375</b>	<b>7,323</b>	<b>-52</b>	<b>-0.7</b>
V. Cochrane	435	450	15	3.4
V. Nelson	395	374	-21	-5.3
C Alma	942	781	-161	-17.1
C Buffalo City	1,040	1,023	-17	-1.6
C Fountain City	983	859	-124	-12.6
C Mondovi	2,634	2,777	143	5.4
<b>City &amp; Village Totals</b>	<b>6,429</b>	<b>6,264</b>	<b>-165</b>	<b>-2.6</b>
<b>Buffalo County</b>	<b>13,804</b>	<b>13,587</b>	<b>-217</b>	<b>-1.6</b>
<b>Wisconsin</b>	<b>5,363,715</b>	<b>5,686,986</b>	<b>323,271</b>	<b>6.0</b>

Source: 2000 & 2010 Population U.S. Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census

### Population Age

Buffalo County, according to 2010 U.S. Census figures, had a median age of 44.1. This is an increase of almost 5 years since the 2000 Census and is higher than the median age of the State (38.5) and the Nation (37.2). The County's percentage of population 65 years and older was 18.1%, this figure is also higher than the State's percentage which, was 13.7% and the Nation's which was 13%. On the other end of the age scale the percentage of the County's population that is under the age of 20 was 24.5%, which is lower than the State's 26.4% and the Nation's 26.9%.

### Gender Characteristics

In 2010 the population breakdown in the County by gender was 50.5% male and 49.5% female. The Town of Belvidere had the largest gender difference with 55.3% male and 44.7% female, **Table 2.2**.

**Table 2.2 Gender Characteristics - 2010 Census**

Municipality	Male	% Male	Female	% Female	Total
T Alma	160	53.9	137	46.1	297
T Belvidere	219	55.3	177	44.7	396
T Buffalo	364	51.6	341	48.4	705
T Canton	162	53.1	143	46.9	305
T Cross	199	52.8	178	47.2	377
T Dover	264	54.3	222	45.7	486
T Gilmanton	208	48.8	218	51.2	426
T Glencoe	260	53.6	225	46.4	485
T Lincoln	89	54.9	73	45.1	162
T Maxville	165	53.4	144	46.6	309
T Milton	274	51.3	260	48.7	534
T Modena	172	48.6	182	51.4	354
T Mondovi	236	50.3	233	49.7	469
T Montana	146	51.4	138	48.6	284
T Naples	344	49.8	347	50.2	691
T Nelson	291	51.0	280	49.0	571
T Waumandee	238	50.4	234	49.6	472
V. Cochrane	214	47.6	236	52.4	450
V. Nelson	204	54.5	170	45.5	374
C Alma	398	51.0	383	49.0	781
C Buffalo City	509	49.8	514	50.2	1,023
C Fountain City	456	53.1	403	46.9	859
C Mondovi	1,287	46.3	1,490	53.7	2,777

Source: 2010 Census

## Urban/Rural

In 1960 the County had 36% of its population living in incorporated communities and in 2010 over 46% of residents were living in incorporated communities, a 10% 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 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 2012 farmers harvested 65,100 acres (9.6 million bushels) of corn for grain; 23,800 acres (1.1 million bushels) of soybeans; and 19,800 acres (51,300 tons) of hay alfalfa. During that period the county had 18,100 dairy cows that produced \$363.8 million pounds of milk. Over a period of 20 years between 1992 and 2012 the number of farms in Buffalo County increased from 982 farms to 1,061 farms but the total acreage in farms decreased from 323,482 acres to 305,302 acres, a 5.6% decline. This decline in rural farms has a detrimental effect on outdoor recreation.

## Housing Trends

**Table 2.3** shows housing trends in Buffalo County and the State of Wisconsin from 1990-2010. During this period both Buffalo County housing units increased by 19.3% and the State's housing units increased by 27.7%. The 2010 census reported that of the 6,664 housing units reported, 85.7% were occupied housing units, 14.3% were vacant. Of the vacant housing units 7.3% were categorized for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. The homeowner vacancy rate was 1.8%.

**Table 2.3 Buffalo County Housing Trends**

Municipality	1990	2000	2010	% Change 90-10
T Alma	157	157	171	8.9
T Belvidere	218	222	219	0.5
T Buffalo	263	277	316	20.2
T Canton	109	112	126	15.6
T Cross	118	141	165	39.8
T Dover	147	156	199	35.4
T Gilmanton	173	180	190	9.8
T Glencoe	171	180	208	21.6
T Lincoln	106	106	123	16.0
T Maxville	120	123	152	26.7
T Milton	181	227	253	39.8
T Modena	148	155	161	8.8
T Mondovi	183	165	200	9.3
T Montana	113	116	122	8.0
T Naples	190	231	278	46.3
T Nelson	237	265	291	22.8
T Waumandee	193	198	217	12.4
V Cochrane	216	197	234	8.3
V Nelson	190	201	204	7.4
C Alma	414	495	488	17.9
C Buffalo City	447	492	577	29.1
C Fountain City	410	470	467	13.9
C Mondovi	1,082	1,232	1,303	20.4
<b>Buffalo Co.</b>	<b>5,586</b>	<b>6,098</b>	<b>6,664</b>	<b>19.3</b>
Wisconsin	2,055,676	2,321,144	2,624,358	27.7

Source: U.S. Department of Commerce-Bureau of the Census

## Employment

According to the 2009-2013 American Community Survey, the top employment industries in the county were Educational Services, Health Care and Social Assistance (20.6%); Manufacturing (19.5%); and Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, Hunting, and Mining (11.3%). 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 2013 was 6.0 percent. This rate was down from the 2009 unemployment rate of 7.0 percent. **Table 2.4** shows occupations by industry for Buffalo County.

**Table 2.4 Buffalo County Occupations by Industry**

INDUSTRY	Wisconsin		Buffalo County	
	Estimate	%	Estimate	%
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	2,839,636	2.5	6,936	
Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining	70,743	5.3	784	11.3
Construction	151,201	18.2	569	8.2
Manufacturing	515,649	2.7	1,355	19.5
Wholesale trade	77,035	11.4	181	2.6
Retail trade	324,973	4.4	630	9.1
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	124,407	1.7	450	6.5
Information	48,652	6.2	76	1.1
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	176,812	7.9	385	5.6
Professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management services	225,521	23.2	277	4.0
Educational services, health care & social assist.	657,565	8.7	1,432	20.6
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	246,390	4.2	394	5.7
Other services, except public administration	119,054	3.6	229	3.3
Public administration	101,634	2.5	174	2.5

Source: 2009-2013 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 2.5. 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.



Scenic view along Mississippi River

**Table 2.5 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
Foremost Farms	50-99 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



Bluff along Mississippi River

## Per Capita Personal Income

In 2013, Buffalo County had a per capita personal income (PCPI) of \$44,853. This PCPI ranked 9th in the state and was 104 percent of the state average of \$43,244, and 100 percent of the national average, \$44,765.

## Tourism Expenditures

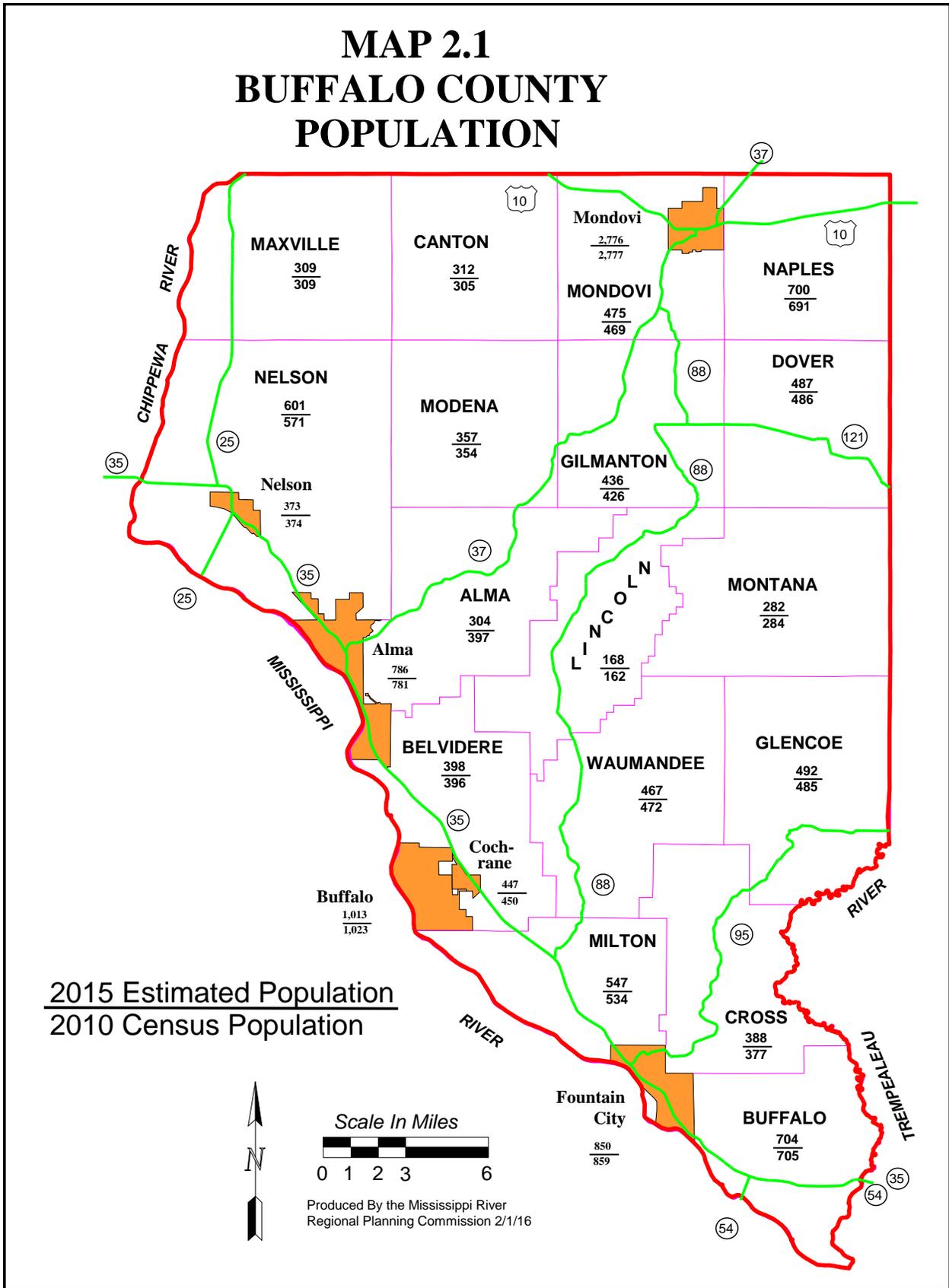
Visitor expenditures in Buffalo County grew from \$9.8 million in 2012 to \$10.38 million in 2013, Table 2.6. This same trend was prevalent in over 80% of other counties in the State. The neighboring counties of Pepin and Eau Claire also increased visitor expenditures from 2012-2013, while Trempealeau County experienced a decrease. Tourism employment in the county also increased by 3.3% from 2012 through 2013. Buffalo County ranked 69th in the State in tourism expenditures.

**Table 2.6 Tourism Impact**

County Name (County Rank in State)	Visitor Spending (Millions)		Employment	
	2012	2013	2012	2013
Buffalo (69)	9.8	10.38	179	185
Eau Claire (16)	188.82	195.80	3,958	3,963
Pepin (70)	5.22	5.43	98	100
Trempealeau (60)	22.62	22.26	373	365

Source: <http://industry.travelwisconsin.com/>

# MAP 2.1 BUFFALO COUNTY POPULATION



### 3. STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP) 2011-2016

#### RECREATIONAL TRENDS AND DEMAND

*Every five years, Wisconsin publishes a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) to serve as a blueprint for state and local outdoor recreation planning as required by the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act of 1965. For the 2011-2016 Wisconsin SCORP, the State not only met the requirements of the (LWCF) Act but also reflected on the America's Great Outdoors (AGO) Initiative, launched in 2010 by President Obama, for an approach that asks American people to become partners in preserving and enhancing their conservation and recreation heritage for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*<sup>1</sup>

For guidance on the demand for recreational outdoor activities a review of the Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2011 – 2016 was conducted. SCORP is the State-wide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan.

Chapter 2 of the SCORP analyzed demand for outdoor recreation activities by popularity and by setting. The outdoor recreation activities presented in the 2011-2016 SCORP are primarily based on the 2005-2009 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) and Outdoor Industry Foundation (OIF) studies, **Table 3.1**. The number one outdoor recreation activity identified is **Walking for Pleasure**, with 87.7 percent of the surveyed public engaging in this activity. This is an activity that can be carried out in both urban and rural settings with no special equipment needed and can be enjoyed equally by all ages. The second most popular outdoor activity is **Gardening or landscaping for pleasure**, with 65.4% participating. Other activities ranking at the top were **View/photograph natural scenery** (65.3%); **Attend outdoor sports events** (65.0%); **Family gathering** (63.5%); **Visit nature centers etc.** (63.5%); **View/photograph other wildlife** (57.9%); **Driving for pleasure** (52.8%); **View/photograph wildflowers, trees, etc.** (52.4%); **Sightseeing** (50.6%); **Bicycling** (48.7%); **Boating (any type)** (47.3%); **Picnicking** (47.0%); **Visit historic sites** (46.7%); and **Snow/ice activities (any type)** (45.9%). Activities with less than 2% of the population participating are: **Orienteering** (1.6%); **Scuba Diving** (1.1%); **Windsurfing** (1.1%) and **Surfing** (1.0%).

Chapter 2 looked at 15-year recreation trends. **Table 3.2** shows projected trends in Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Activities. The table identifies those activities which will have

an increasing demand, a decreasing demand and those which will remain stable.

Chapter 3 discusses the inclusion of health and wellness in outdoor recreation planning. Outdoor activities were identified yielding the greatest health benefits.

Chapter 4 explores current urban offerings of urban recreation across municipalities in Wisconsin when compared to similar peers. Chapter 5 examines public and private holders of recreation land through Wisconsin and the programs that encourage conservation and acquisition of public land and protection and public access of private land.

Chapter 6 lists seven goals, each with a list of actions, designed to encourage the connection of Wisconsin's residents to the great outdoors with their state. The goals are:

1. Assess, understand and adapt to growing recreation tourism demands and preferences.
2. Improve integration of outdoor recreation interests and needs in land use and other relevant planning efforts.
3. Continue to provide and enhance public access to Wisconsin recreation land and waters.
4. Conserve rural landscapes and forests through partnerships and incentives.
5. Address funding challenges associated with managing Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Resources.
6. Promote outdoor recreation as a means of improving public health among Wisconsinites.
7. Establish great urban parks and community green spaces.

As we progress into the future events and issues that influence outdoor recreation are always changing. Buffalo County's population has fluctuated through the decades. In 1960 the County has a population of 14,202 and in 1970 the county's population had dropped to 13,743, a decrease of 3.2%. In 1980 the county's population increased by 4.1% to 14,309 only to decline again in 1990 to 13,584. Between 1990 and 2000 the County's population increased by 1.6%, and then between 2000 and 2010 the County's population decreased by 1.6%. The County's median age increased from 34.9 in 1990 to 35.3 in 2000 and again in 2010 to 44.1. As people age the recreation activities they participate in may change.

Changes in family structure (an increase in single parent families) also change recreation choices. As of 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-year estimates it was

<sup>1</sup> Wisconsin SCORP 2011-2016 "Chapter 1 - Introduction"

estimated that 12% of households in Buffalo County are single family households. Income levels can also determine participation in an outdoor activity. During that same time period it was estimated that about 7% of families and 23% of

families with female householder, no husband present, had incomes below the poverty level. Another interesting estimate was that 12% of the County's (noninstitutionalized) population was living with some kind of disability.

**Table 3.2 Projected Trends in Wisconsin Outdoor Recreation Activities**

<b>Increasing Demand</b>  ▲	Adventure racing Driving for pleasure Developed/RV camping Kayaking Visit a dog park Soccer outdoors BMX biking Climbing Stand up paddling/paddleboarding Triathlon (on-and off-road) Off-highway vehicle driving Gardening or landscaping for pleasure	Popular as both an individual and a group activity An easy activity for the aging baby boomer generation Baby boomers are a continued driving force for this growth Cheaper entry points have attracted more participants Urban residents continue to demand more of these areas Youth growth is still strong in urban areas X games popularity may be driving this growth Indoor climbing walls have led to an outdoor resurgence A fast growing water sport sweeping the country Varying distance events have allowed for growth Post-recession growth continues The "grow local" concept is taking hold at many levels
<b>Stable Demand</b>  —	Walk for pleasure Running or jogging Water parks Motorboating Day hiking Golf Tent camping Snowboarding Trail running View/photograph wildlife Bicycling (road and non-paved) Snowshoeing	Market saturation does not allow for large growth Gen Y replacing the baby boomers for this activity Recession may have caused this growth to slow Still easy access in a water-based state Popular with many generations Time constraints do not allow for growth Continues to be stable, growth is illusive May have peaked after 20 years of growth A stable niche activity with Gen Y An easy activity that spans generations Popular with many generations – access is still key After large growth, this has stabilized
<b>Decreasing Demand</b>  ▼	Hunting Inline skating Skateboarding/skate parks Horseback riding on trails Softball Downhill skiing	Continues to struggle with generational loss and private access A large decrease in the last six years, the bottom may be near Gen M is free-skating with longboards Recession impacts have caused this to decrease with no rebound Baby boomers continue to leave this sport Gen Y does not have the numbers to replace aging baby boomers

Source: Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2011-2016

## 4. RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

### Introduction

Outdoor recreation is an integral part of the fabric of human environment. Over 87% of Wisconsinites enjoy 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 2011-2016 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

### 1. DEVELOPED LAND ACTIVITIES

Outdoor recreations in developed settings are those activities which use some form of manmade development (such as roads or sidewalks) or involve a high level of social interaction. Developed Land setting outdoor recreation is the most popular form of recreation, two activities, Walking for Pleasure (87.7% participating), and Gardening/ Landscaping for Pleasure (65.4% participating), are the two most popular forms of recreation in Wisconsin. Other activities in this grouping are Attending outdoor sports events (65%), Family gathering (63.5%), Driving for pleasure (52.8%), Bicycling (48.7%), Picnicking (47%), Yard games (44.7%), Golf (41.8%), Soccer outdoors (32.3%), Running or jogging (32.1%), Developed camping (25.4%), Handball or racquetball outdoors (23.5%), Horseback riding (any type) (8.7%), Tennis outdoors (8.5%), Horseback riding on trails (6.6%), and Inline skating (2.5%).

#### Driving for Pleasure

Driving for pleasure is engaged in by 52.8 percent of the state'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 offers agritourism attractions.

**Map 4.1** on **page 4-15** shows the location of the Great River Road, other scenic routes and waysides.



Great River Road Signage along State Highway 35

#### 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. The expectations of the latter or "wilderness" group will probably not be fully met anywhere in Jackson County simply because there is no "backpack trails - high mountain country" terrain in the county.

In the 2011-2016 SCORP, "Developed Camping" was reported as an activity in which 25.4 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 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 four 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.
- **Hendersons Silver Moon Park** located north of Alma has 13 sites with water and electric hook-ups.
- **Nelsons 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.
- **Pecks 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.
- **Riecks 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.

All public and private campgrounds were inventoried with results tabulated and shown in **Table 4.1** and **Map 4.2** on **page 4-16**.

**Table 4.1 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
<b>Total</b>		<b>433</b>

Source: Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, 2015



Camping at Rieck’s Lake

**Golf**

The 2011-2016 SCORP indicates that 41.8 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, to the current jump to 41.8 percent in 2011. 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. As long ago as 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, **Map 4.3** on **page 4-17**. 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.

**Walnut Grove Golf Course** (Cochrane) is an 18-hole course nestles between the bluffs.

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 market place, as the establishment of new courses is capital intensive as well as having environmental impacts.



**Walnut Grove Golf Course**

**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 8.5% participation rate according to the 2011-2016 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, but 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 insure a quality-playing surface. Tennis courts are available in Alma, Buffalo City, Fountain City, and Mondovi.

**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 thirteenth most popular outdoor recreation activity with 47 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 4.2**. State and municipal Picnic and Park Areas are shown on **Map 4.3 on page 4-17**.

**Table 4.2 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 (Buffalo City): Picnic area
5. Goose Memorial Park (Cochrane): Picnic area
6. Harmonia Park (T. Waumandee): Picnic area
7. Memorial Park (Mondovi): Picnic Shelters and arboretum
8. Mirror Lake (Mondovi): Picnic areas and shelters
9. Riecks Lake Park (Alma): Picnic area & observation platform
10. Sharps Point Park (Mondovi): Picnic shelters & Veterans Memorial
11. Tourist Park (Mondovi): Picnic shelters
12. Veteran's Memorial Park (Buffalo City): Picnic shelters

*Source: Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, 2015*

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 all 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.

**Playground Activities**

Public parks are an essential component of the outdoor recreation structure including the variety of playground activities offered. The 2011-2016 SCORP provided state participation rates for the following: Attend outdoor sports events (65%); Yard games, e.g. horseshoes (44.7%); Soccer outdoors (32.3%); Handball or racquetball outdoors (23.5%); and Tennis outdoors (8.5%). It should be noted that the 2011-2016 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.



Playground apparatus at Rieck's Lake Park

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 4.3** inventories playground facilities in Buffalo County.

**Table 4.3 Playground Areas**

Name and Description of Playground 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. Harmonia 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, 2015

Horseback Riding On a Trail - Horseback riding on a trail is not an activity that has a lot of participation Statewide. According to the 2011-2016 SCORP Horseback Riding on a trail had a 6.6% participation rate at the State level, and Horseback Riding (any type) had an 8.7 % participation rate.

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 4.4 on page 4-18** for the location of this trail. Buffalo County has one private riding stable located near Fountain City that offers private riding lessons.

All-Terrain Vehicle Trails – According to the 2011-2016 SCORP off highway vehicle driving had a 19.8% participation rate at the State level.

ATVs are permitted on the 36-mile Buffalo River State Trail that connects the communities of Fairchild and Mondovi. See **Map 4.4 on page 4-17** for locations of this trail.

**2. LIMITED DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

**Limited Development** activities take place in undeveloped, or primitive sites and general involve hiking, camping, or some form of hunting. Activities in this group are: Day hiking (36.7%), Visit a wilderness or primitive area (33.7%), Mountain biking (30.7%), Hunting-any type (22.2%), Big game hunting (18.0%), Small game hunting (11.3%), Primitive camping (11.4%), Migratory bird hunting (4.1%), Backpacking (7.4%), Rock climbing (3.8%), Mountain climbing (2.7%), Caving (2.6%) and Orienteering (1.6%). Following is an inventory of the land based and limited development activities in Buffalo County.

## **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 through the use of 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 facilities. With the exception of snowmobile and cross-country ski trails, which are treated separately, trails are definite features existing on the ground, and are maintained in order to keep them serviceable. Hiking, walking, nature walking, horseback riding, all-terrain vehicle, and bicycle trails are considered together in this section. **Map 4.4 on page 4-18** shows significant walking trails, and bicycling suitability of the public road system.

**Hiking and Walking Trails** - Outdoor recreation planners define “hiking” as a walking trip of more than four hours (*usually 8 miles*) duration. Often times 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.



Trail in Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge

**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 the fine 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 proposed multi-use trail between Nelson, WI and Winona, MN, along the Mississippi River and connecting 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 40-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).

Buffalo County has also taken the lead on the Great River State Trail Winona Connector project. With funds from the Wisconsin DOT and DNR a proposed 3.9 mile crushed limestone, multi-use trail would be built to allow for safe crossing of the Burlington Northern Railroad Santa Fe Railroad. The new trail would then angle south following the old railroad grade towards to the Town of Buffalo. A new bridge would be placed on the abandoned cut stone foundation once used by the railroad and would then follow the old railroad grade on the south side of STH 35 to the parking lot of the

Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge and the Great River State Trail.

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 amount 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 state and county road suitability based on these criteria is shown on **Map 4.5 on page 4-19**. 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.

**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 2011 – 2016 SCORP with participation rates of 22.2%. 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 4.4 and Map 4.6 on page 4-20**.



Alma Rod & Gun Club

**Table 4.4 Buffalo County Public Lands Open to Hunting**

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

Source: Wisconsin DNR, USFWS, and Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, 2015

### **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 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.

## **3. WATER ACTIVITIES**

Water-based outdoor activities are among the most popular recreation activities in Wisconsin. The 2011-2016 SCORP estimates participant rates for the following water activities: Boating, any type (47.3%); Visit a beach (42.3%); Swimming in lakes, streams etc. (41.7%); Freshwater fishing (37.4%); Motorboating (36%); Swimming in an outdoor pool (34.5%); Warmwater fishing (33.2%); Visit other waterside, besides beach (22.6%); Canoeing (17.9%); Waterskiing (13.0%); Coldwater fishing (12.8%); Rafting (9.2%); Kayaking (7.3%); Rowing (7.2%); Use personal watercraft (6.5%); Snorkeling (6.2%); Sailing (3.9%); Scuba Diving (1.1%); Windsurfing (1.1%) and Surfing (1%).

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.

### **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 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 4.5**.

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 insure 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.

Walk-in access to trout streams is often via easement or at public road crossings, in which case public access may literally be limited to the streambed itself via wading. 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.

**Table 4.5 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

Source: Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission, 2015



**Fountain City Lower Landing**

Several local fish ponds are located 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 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 insure 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 reproduction has been improving, resulting in reclassification of trout streams by the DNR.

Walk-in access to trout streams is often via easement or at public road crossings, in which case public access may literally be limited to the streambed itself via wading. Nine easements are held by local Rod and Gun or Conservation Clubs, allowing public access. Buffalo County has developed a County-held trout stream easement program, and local Conservation Clubs will continue to acquire fishing easements as the need arises. 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.

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.



**Trout Stream**

**Table 4.6 Buffalo County Trout Streams**

Local waterbody name	Miles	Trout class
Armour Creek	3.79	II
Center Creek	4.35	II

Little Bear Creek	8.82	II
Newton Valley Creek (Shoe Creek)	4.27	II
North Branch Little Bear Creek	1.39	II
North Branch Little Bear Creek	5.4	II
Rossman Creek	3.66	II
Spring Creek	2.88	II
Tamarack Creek	3.83	II
Unnamed Cr T24n R12w S5 (5-9)	3.27	II
Weisenbeck Valley Creek	5.15	II
<b>Total Class II miles</b>	<b>46.81</b>	
Bear Creek	2.5	III
Cooke Valley Creek	2.8	III
Doelle Creek	5.07	III
Eagle Creek	4.81	III
Eagle Creek	8.47	III
Elk Creek	13.19	III
Elk Creek, South Fork	5.06	III
Harvey Creek	3.81	III
Hoyts Creek	9.66	III
Kilness Creek	4.05	III
Little Waumandee Creek	10	III
Owen Valley Creej	2.16	III
Sport Valley Creek	3.44	III
Tamarack Creek	1.87	III
Waumandee Creek	6.92	III
<b>Total Class III miles</b>	<b>83.81</b>	
<b>Total Miles</b>	<b>130.62</b>	

Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

### Swimming

In the 2011-2016 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, swimming in lakes and streams had a participation rate of 41.7%, swimming in an outdoor pool 34.5%, and visiting a beach 42.3%.



Swimming Pool in the Village of Cochrane

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. **Map 4.7, page 4-21** shows the location of these public swimming facilities.

### Motor Boating/Water Skiing and Jet Skis

According to the 2011-2016 SCORP, motor boating is engaged in by 36 percent of the adult resident population in Wisconsin. 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. Motor boats 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 4.5** on page 4-8, and **Map 4.7, page 4-21**.

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 a lot of room, and allows little opportunity for other users on the water while skiing is occurring. Waterskiing had a participation rate of 13%.

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 motor boat 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 of these 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 with the resultant adverse impact on the natural environment. In Wisconsin 17.9% of the population considers canoeing a sport in which they

participate. Other types of non-motorized watercraft use have fewer followers, Kayaking was listed as having a 7.3% participation rate, and Sailing was listed at only 3.9%. 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 two official U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge trails with signage, including the 4.8 mile Nelson-Trevino Canoe trail and the 5.2 mile Alma to Finger Lakes Canoe trail. 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.
- **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.
- **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 gather in the fall.

- **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.
- **SPRING LAKE TRAIL** - Spring Lake, a 300-acres lake can be accessed from Spring Lake Landing on County Hwy OO 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.

### **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 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.

## **4. WINTER ACTIVITIES**

Snow-and Ice based activities are those that involve some form of frozen water. Winter activities are very popular with Wisconsinites with just over 45% of residents participating in some form of snow or ice activity. The 2011-2016 SCORP estimates participant rates for the following winter activities: Sledding (28.2%), Snowmobiling (18.3%), Ice skating outdoors

(13.5%), Ice fishing (13.1%), Cross-county skiing (8.8%), Downhill skiing (7.0%), Snowshoeing (6.1%), and Snowboarding (3.7%). Winter also brings Bald and Golden Eagle viewing opportunities along the Mississippi River, where they congregate around open water areas.

### **Snowmobiles**

Snowmobiling is the 41<sup>st</sup> most popular outdoor recreation pursuit, with 18.3 percent of the population participating. 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](http://www.snowbc.org).

### **Downhill/Cross Country Skiing & Snowboarding**

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. Participation rates for these activities are: 8.8% for Cross Country skiing, 7.0% for Downhill skiing and 6.1% for Snowboarding and. Jackson County does not have any formal downhill ski areas, but there are hills in nearby counties.

In the 2011-2016 SCORP cross-county skiing with an 8.8% participation rate and was the 53<sup>rd</sup> 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 and Mossy Hollow Hiking Trails at Alma are for snowshoeing only.

### **Ice Fishing**

Buffalo County offers excellent ice fishing on the Lake Pepin and 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 13.5 percent participation rate in the 2011-2016 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.

## **5. VIEWING AND INTERPRETIVE ACTIVITIES**

The most population viewing an interpretive activity Statewide is viewing or photographing natural scenery with a participation rate of over 65%. The 2011-2016 SCORP estimates participant rates for the following viewing and interpretive activities: Attend outdoor sports events (75%), Visit nature centers (63.5%), View/photograph other wildlife (57.9%), View/photograph wildflowers, trees, etc. (52.4%), sightseeing (50.6%), Visit historic sites (46.7%), Gather mushrooms, berries etc. (42.8%), View/photograph birds (41.7%), Visit a farm or agricultural setting (35.3%), Attend outdoor concerts, plays etc. (32.8%), View/photography fish (26.7%), Visit prehistoric/archeological sites (15.5%) and boat tours or excursions (13.9%).

**Historical and Cultural Sites**

The 2011-2016 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 467 sites listed for Buffalo County.

**State Historical Markers**

Wisconsin has more than 530 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 below in Table 4.7.

**Table 4.7 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+ bldgs 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 2015



**Alma Area Museum**

**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 childrens activities. The Alma Music and Arts Festival happens in September featuring food, music, art and childrens 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 Tyme 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.

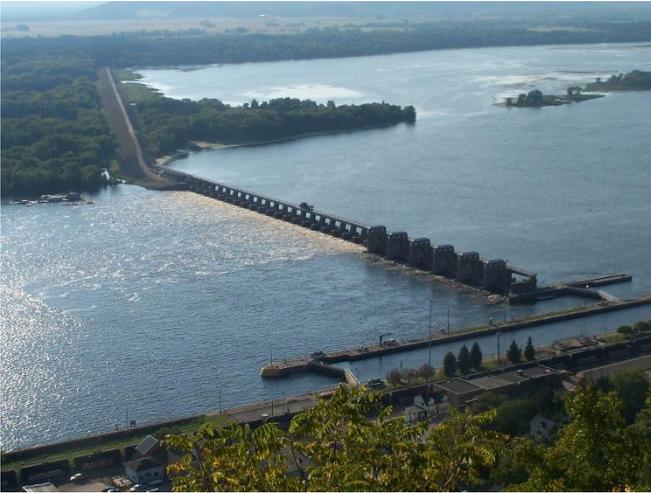


**Great River Road**

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 is known for the annual fall bird migration and viewing tundra swans. 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. Rieck's Lake Park has viewing platforms that allow for great looks at Tundra Swans during peak migration times in spring and fall. 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.



**Lock & Dam 4 at Alma**

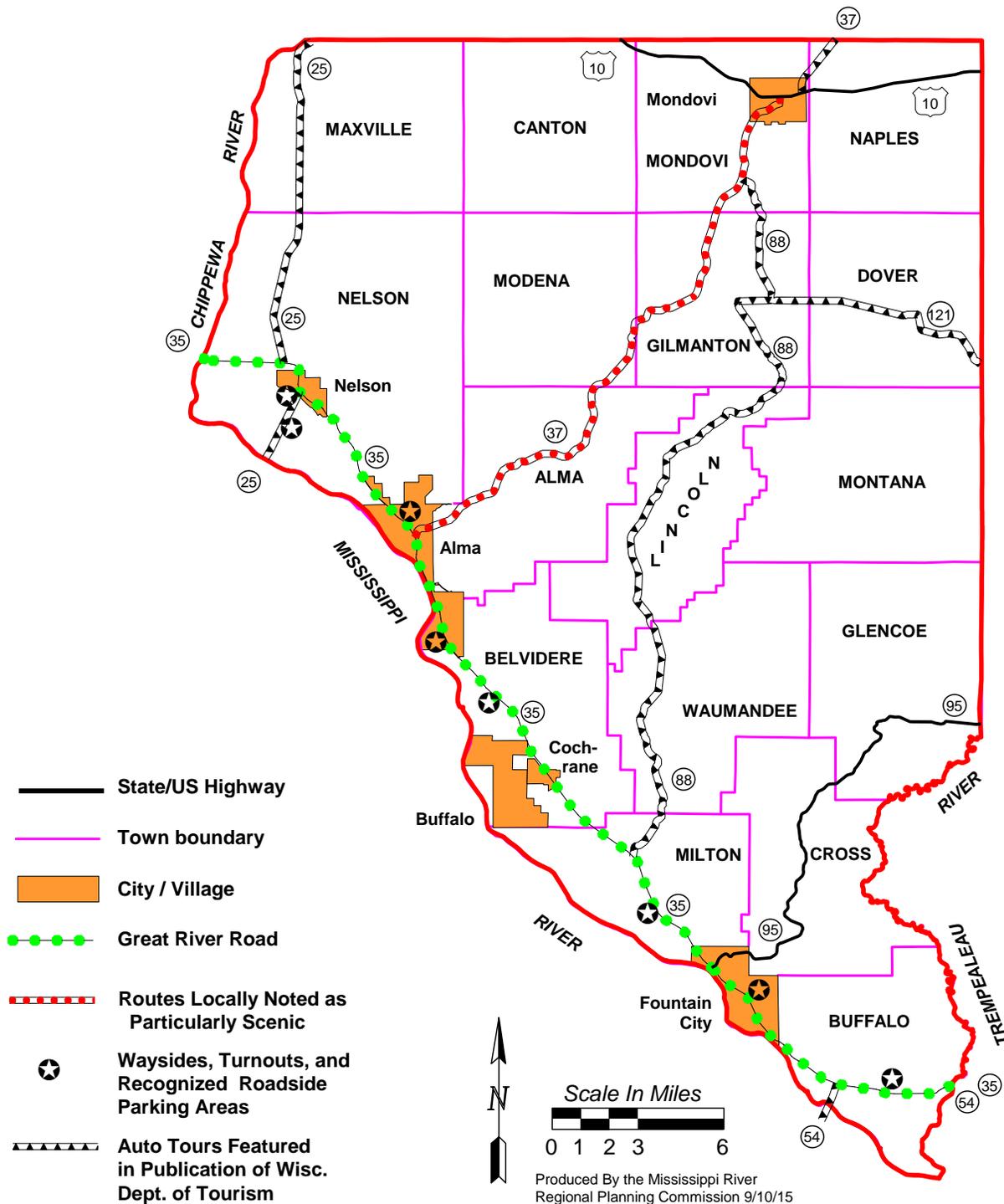
For a unique sightseeing experience visitors can visit the Rock-in-the-house in Fountain City where you can see where a 55-ton bolder came crashing through the roof of a small house and came to rest in the family's master bedroom.

The County possesses some of the best examples of the Driftless Area's unique natural and cultural features—goat

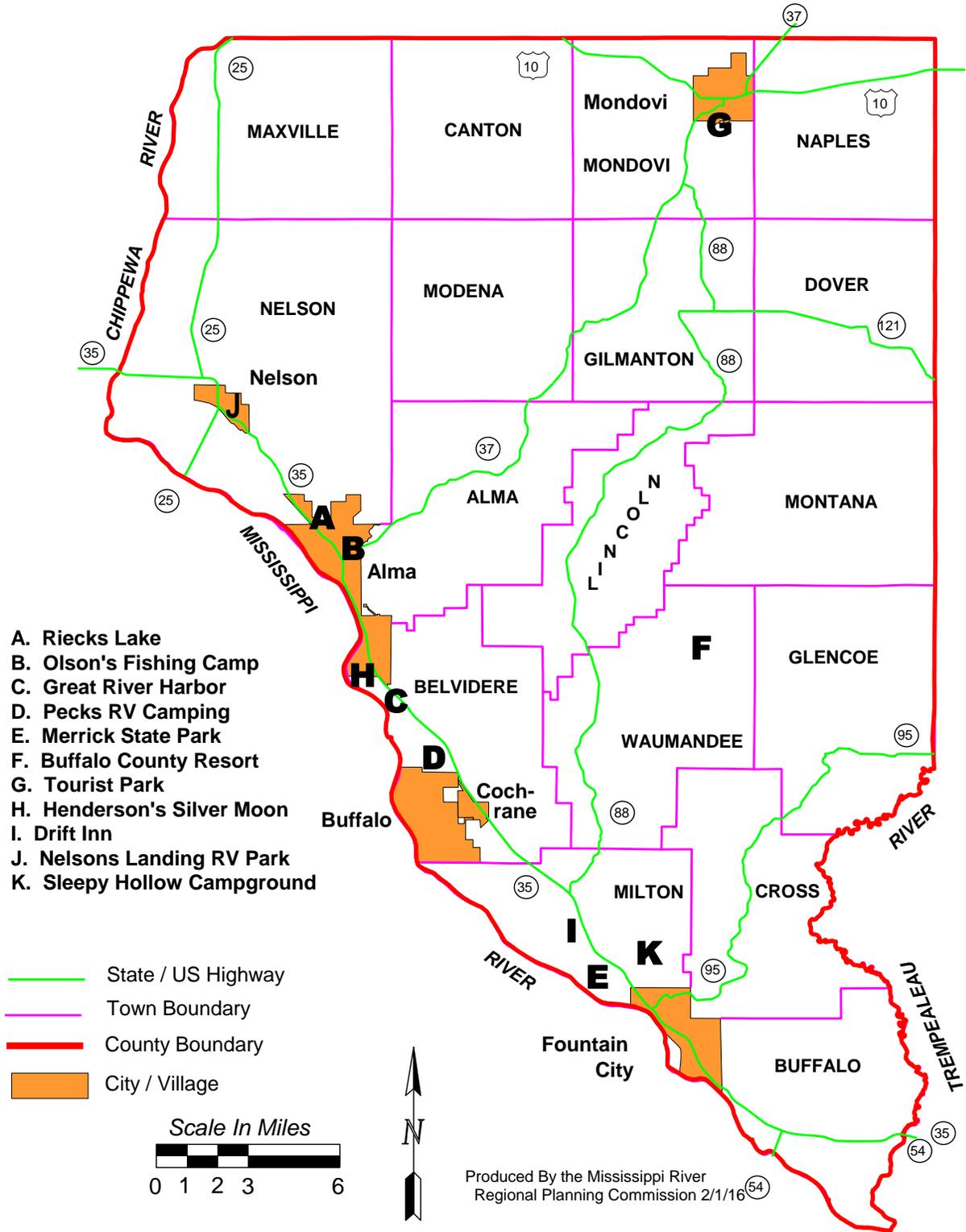
prairies, the tallest bluff lands along the Mississippi, rare and endangered plant species, and steep valley Native American and pioneer tracks, called "dugways." The area is internationally significant for its unusual geology and unique habitats. The area offers great opportunities for fishing, bird 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. Unbroken ridgelines, dramatic and wooded bluffs, and steep river and stream valleys provide intimate 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.

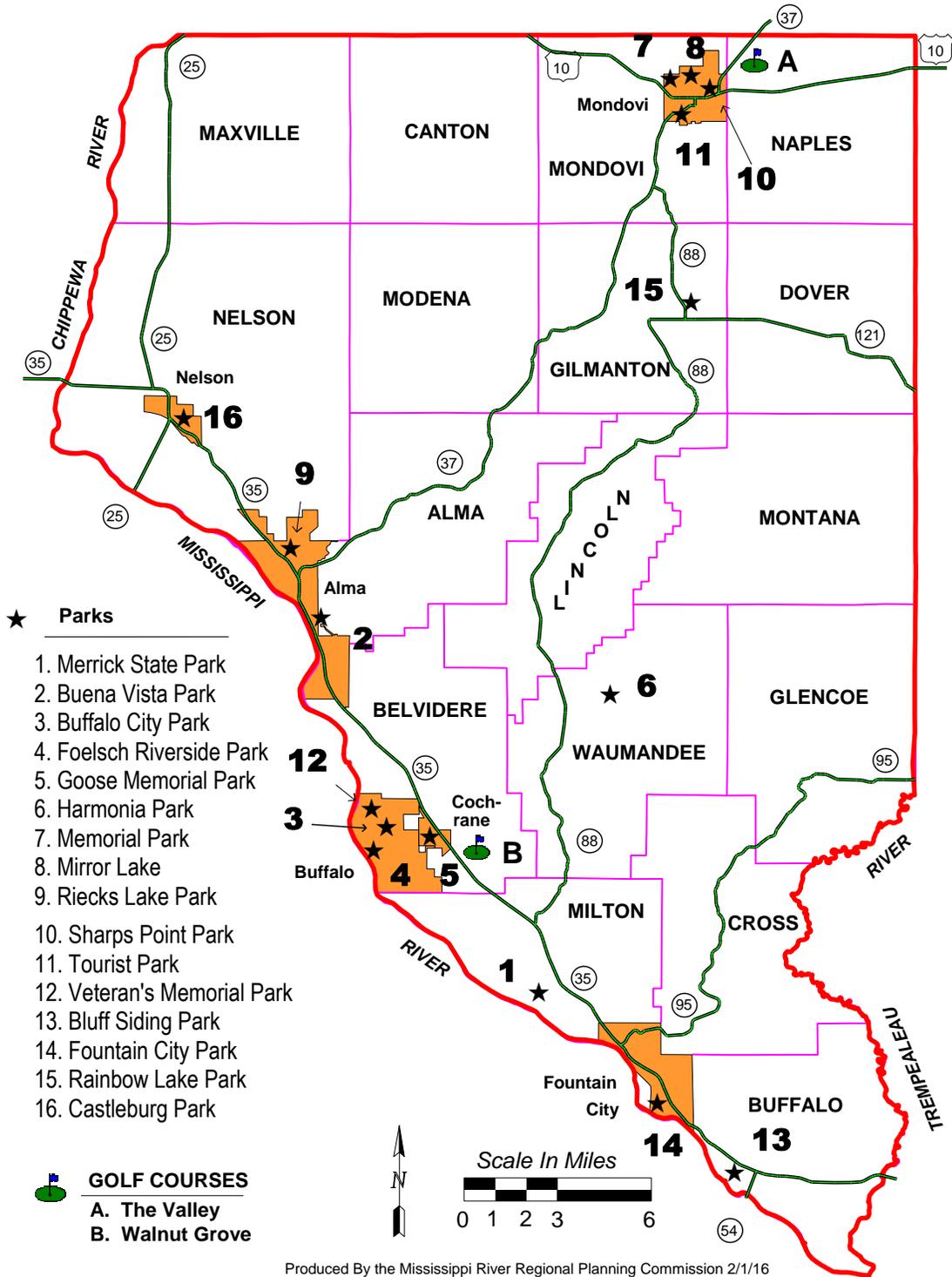
## Map 4.1 Buffalo County Designated Auto Tours, Scenic Drives and Waysides/Rest Areas



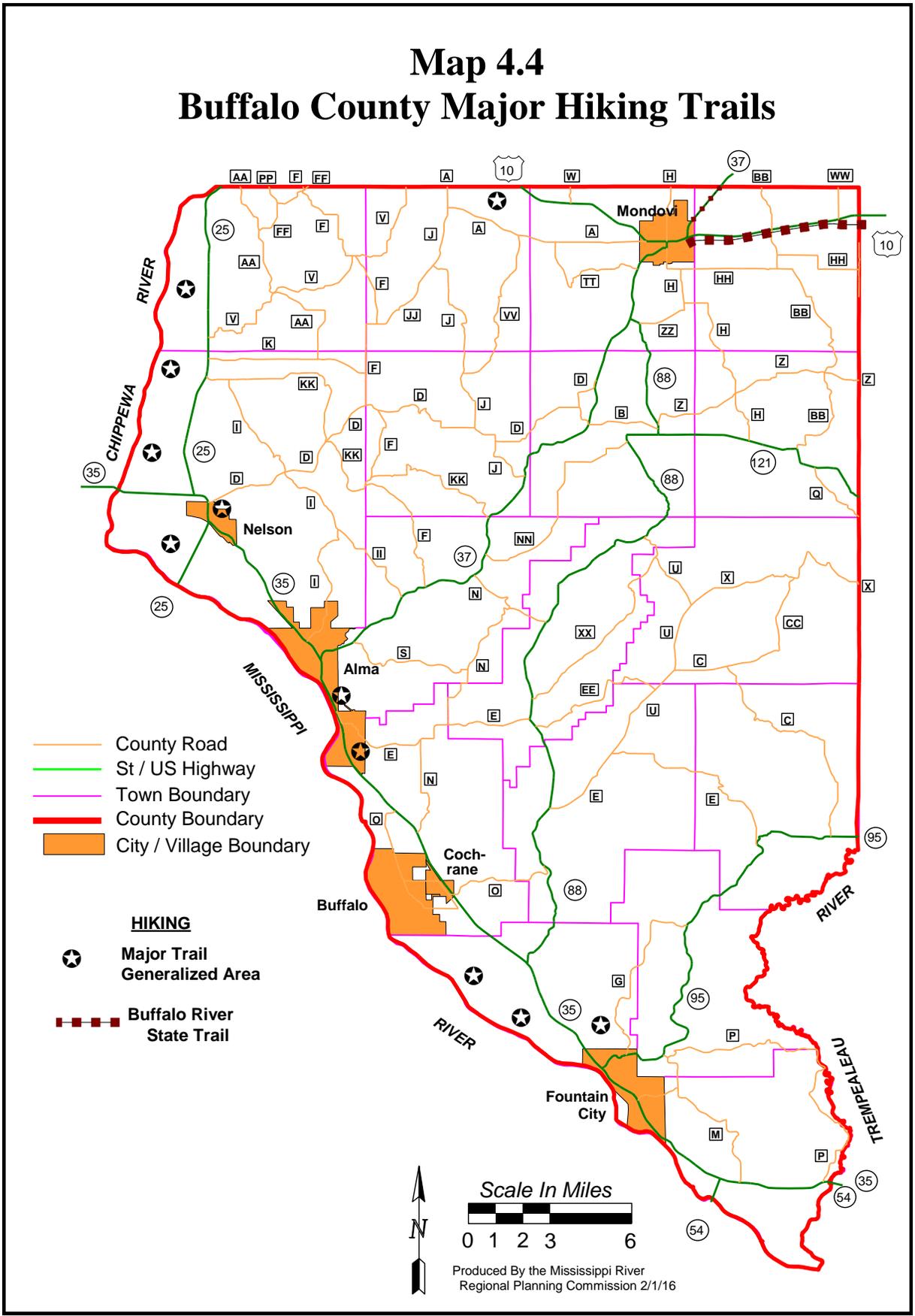
### Map 4.2 Buffalo County Campgrounds



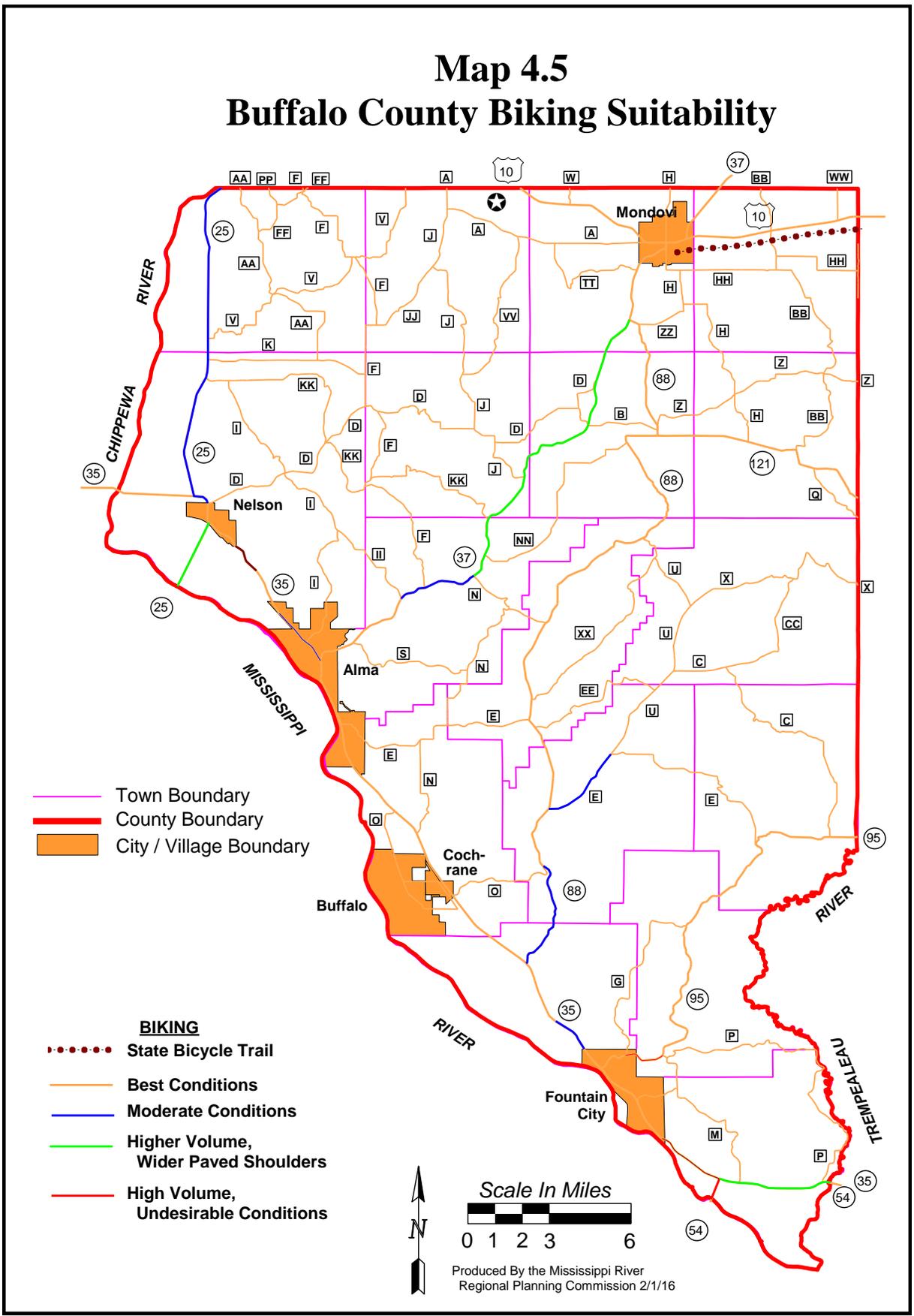
# Map 4.3 Buffalo County Picnic Areas and Golf Courses



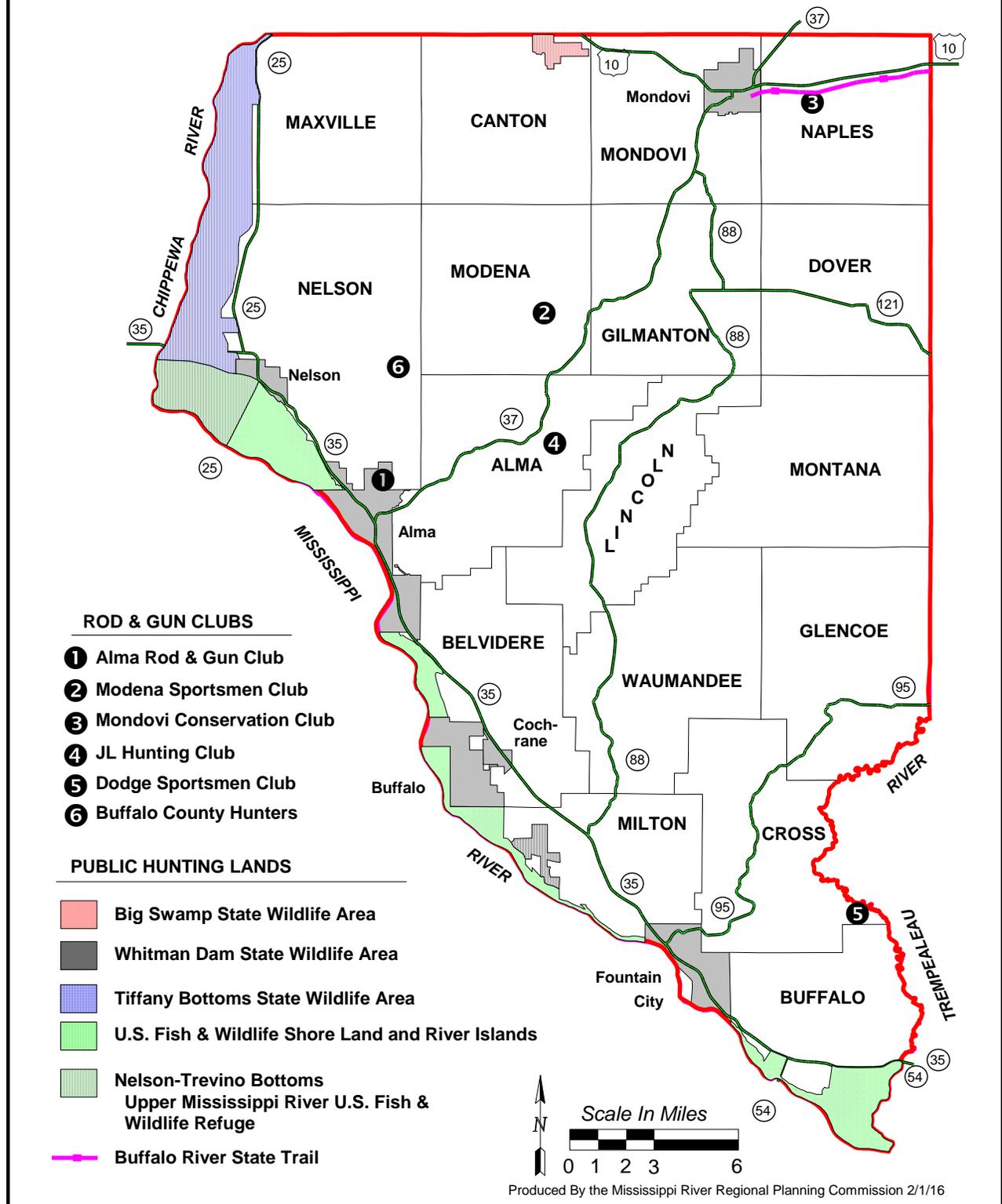
# Map 4.4 Buffalo County Major Hiking Trails



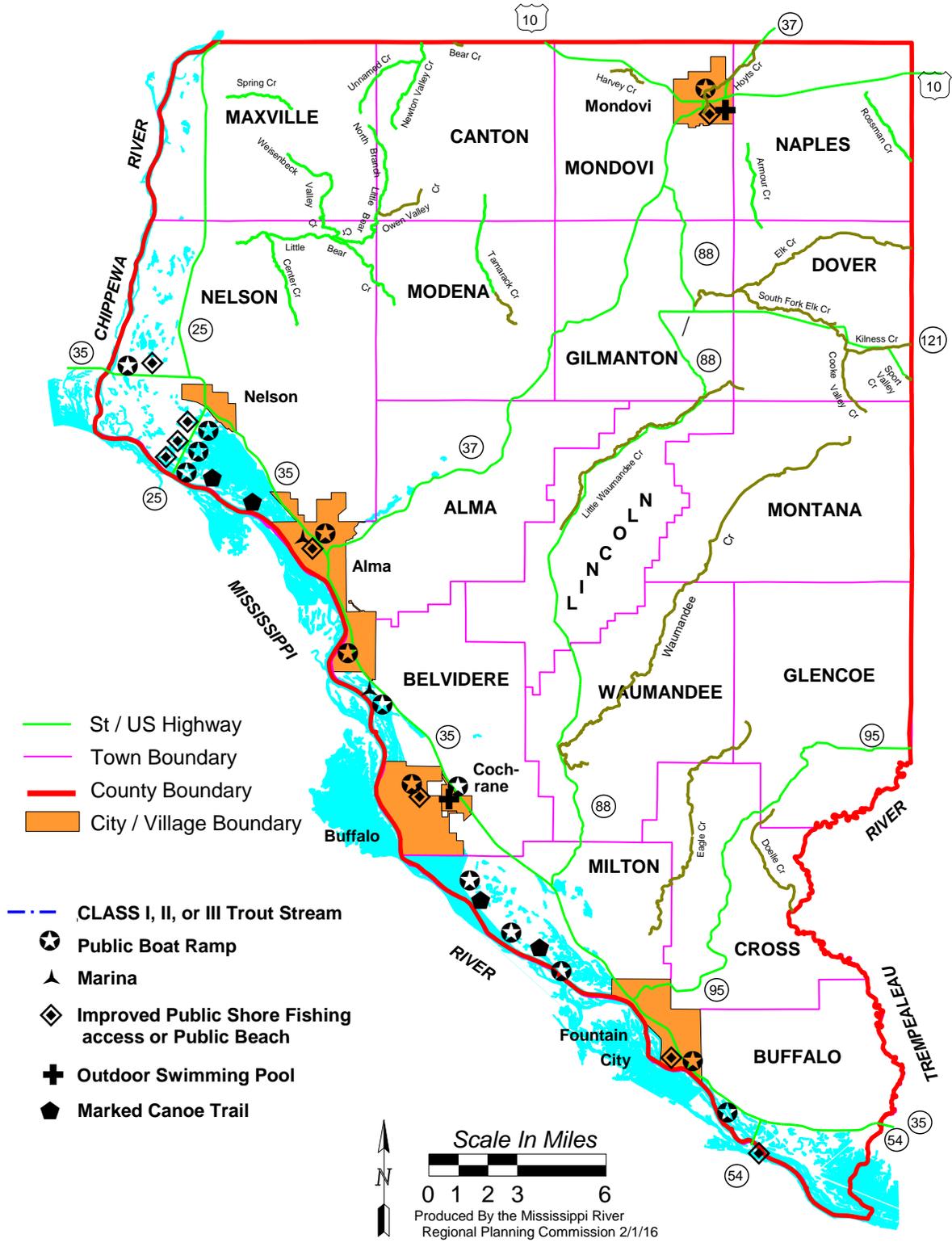
# Map 4.5 Buffalo County Biking Suitability



## Map 4.6 Buffalo County Public Accessible Hunting Lands



# Map 4.7 Buffalo County Water Related Recreation Features



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## 5. RECREATION RESOURCE INVENTORY

So far in this recreation plan each activity has been considered individually. Buffalo County offers an abundance of year round recreational opportunities for residents and tourists. The County offers some of the best hunting in the state with its sizeable populations of deer, turkey, small game and waterfowl. Buffalo County has even been referred to as the Whitetail Deer capital of the world. There are excellent fishing opportunities with the Mississippi River forming the county's western border. Residents and visitors alike can fish for bluegills, crappies, bass, catfish, walleye and panfish. Trout streams are also plentiful in the County. The County has over ten public boat launching ramps and piers floating on the Mississippi just below the dams.

Picnicking, camping, hiking, biking, swimming, cruising the river, canoeing or kayaking are all popular during the summer and during the winter recreationists enjoy ice fishing, snowmobiling, skating, and cross country skiing. Residents and tourists alike have the opportunity to view the huge flocks of ducks, geese, and other waterfowl gathering during their spring and fall migrations.

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 a recreational resources available from private, local governments, and 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.

### Federal Outdoor Recreational Facilities

Buffalo County is home to **Upper Mississippi River Nat'l 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.



Merrick Park Canoe Rentals

The newly established Lower Chippewa State Natural Area, in the Village of Nelson, allows 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.

**State Wildlife Areas and State Natural Areas**

Wisconsin can take pride in its vast treasure of natural resources. Since 1876, the 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 5.1**.

**Table 5.1 State Natural and Wildlife Areas Located in Buffalo County**

Name	Description	Access	Recreational Opportunities
<b>Tiffany Wildlife Area</b> (13,000 acres)	Diverse wildlife population. It's a great place for birds and birders offering up the migration of tundra swans and other water fowl 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
<b>Whitman Dam State Wildlife Area</b> (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
<b>Big Swamp Wildlife Area</b> (796 acres)	Upland hardwoods and marsh	5 miles west of Mondovi south of Hwy. 10	Hunting, trapping, hiking, wildlife viewing and bird watching
<b>Trempealeau River Meadow SNA</b> (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
<b>Tiffany Bottoms State Natural Area (SNA)</b> (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

**County Outdoor Recreational Facilities**

Buffalo County recently established the County Fairgrounds as its first County Park. The Fair Board will continue to operate and maintain the grounds. 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.

**Buffalo City:** Foelsch River Side Park has a one-mile nature trail and several boat ramps near Buffalo City provide access to the river.

**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.



V. of Cochrane Goose Lake Memorial Park

**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.

**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 12,500-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. The park features hiking trails, with a scenic blufftop view overlooking the Village.

**City of Alma:** (Source: <http://wigrr.com/river-towns/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.

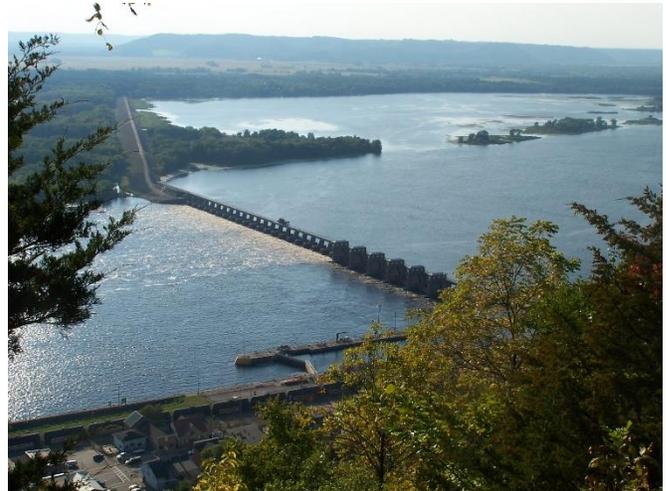
Alma is also home to Lock and Dam #4. A special steel walkway over the railroad tracks leads to an excellent observation deck for an up-close look at barge traffic passing through the lock.

Wings over Alma Nature Center is located right on Main Street. It is open daily with the exception of Thanksgiving and Christmas Day. The center offers an outdoor viewing deck overlooking the Mississippi River, equipped with spotting scopes and binoculars to view a variety of wildlife year-round. The Mississippi Flyway brings hundreds of migrating birds past the Center. During the winter months, dozens of eagles can be viewed from the deck feeding in the open water below Lock and Dam #4. Wings Over Alma overlooks the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge.

Just north of Alma, you'll find 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.



View from Buena Vista Park in City of Alma

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## 6. Actions

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.***

### **High Priority Actions**

These are items that are a priority for the county.

- Improve access to the Buffalo River and other navigable streams for recreational boaters and canoers/kayakers. Construction of developed boat ramps and landings with parking access for motorized boats and for canoes/kayaks could include signs, maps, and parking.
- Provide and promote public fishing opportunities on public waters. Provide access to the Buffalo River, fishable ponds, and the Mississippi River and backwater areas. Proposed improvements would include land acquisition, parking areas, boat landings, shore fishing opportunities, ice fishing, signs, and maps.
- Provide and promote public trout stream fishing opportunities on local trout streams. Proposed improvements would include easements and/or land acquisition, parking areas, trout stream habitat restoration projects, signs, and maps.
- Construct safe bicycling trails for landowners and visitors of all ages.  
Action Needs: trail development, access, acquisition, infrastructure, bicycle racks, maps, signs, maintenance, and vegetation management. New proposed recreational trails include:
  - Mississippi River Flyway Trail along Highway 35 and the Mississippi River.
  - Winona Connector from Nelson, WI south to Winona, MN and would connect with the Great River State Trail (boundary of Trempealeau and Buffalo Counties). This trail would create a regional/multi-state trail system.

### **Medium Priority Actions**

These are items that are on-going or moderate importance for the County

- Continue to improve and maintain existing snowmobile and ATV motorized trail routes to increase safety, post signs, construct bridges, provide access and/or parking, develop maps, and maintenance of vegetation management. Upgrade trails with bridge crossings across waterways and wetlands.
- Promote and develop Birding and Wildlife watching opportunities- Buffalo County has outstanding year-round bird watching opportunities both on the Mississippi River Flyway and inland forests. Continue to promote maps, trails, and other information for non-residents:  
<http://www.wingsoveralma.org/nature-center.html>  
<http://www.wingsoveralma.org/bird-wildlife-veiwing.html>
- Mountain biking (off-road bicycle) trail development
- Develop bicycle and pedestrian facilities. Also, working towards obtaining "Bicycle Friendly Community" designation.
- Hiking trails- Maintenance and Development of trails, maps, and signs and promotion. Trails could be located in scenic woodland trails, rugged bluff land and prairie hiking trails, or boardwalk trails in waterways and wetland ecosystems.
- Build and maintain an outdoor public swimming pool for recreational swimming.

### **Low Priority Actions**

These are items that are in need, but have a low urgency for development

- Continue to explore opportunities to develop county and local parks for public use. Sites could include: Picnic grounds, campgrounds, other recreational sporting parks, water access parks, trail access, beaches, Historic sites, performing arts stage, or overlooks/vistas.
- Develop a local or state road historic or scenic by-way. Sites could include: CCC Camp chimney on Hwy. 88, CCC PL-566 watershed structures, other scenic viewpoints, other archaeological or historic sites, etc.
- Develop maps and driving routes promoting ecotourism of Buffalo County or historic sites.
- Snow bicycle (“fat bikes”) trail development, maps, and trail signs.
- Develop new and continue to maintain existing cross-country ski trails with good partnership efforts. Trails require maintenance in off seasons to trim back overgrown branches, and winter to continually groom trails with appropriate tracked equipment for both skate skiing and classic skiing tracks.
- Golf course maintenance and development
- Equestrian trail development
- Mississippi River Docking- Including docks for larger commercial type vessels, tour boats, rental boats, transient boats, or permanent (seasonal) mooring

