

Final Evaluation Findings

Wisconsin Coastal Management Program

June 2017 to July 2024

Published February 2025



Office for Coastal Management
National Ocean Service
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
United States Department of Commerce

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Summary of Findings

The Coastal Zone Management Act requires the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to conduct periodic evaluations of the performance of states and territories with federally approved coastal management programs. This evaluation examined the operation and management of the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program administered by the Wisconsin Department of Administration, the designated lead agency, for the period from June 2017 to July 2024. The evaluation focused on three target areas: program administration, coastal resilience, and tourism and economic development and public access and habitat.

The findings in this evaluation document will be considered by NOAA in making future financial award decisions concerning the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program. The evaluation came to these conclusions:

Program Administration

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program's Coastal Grants Program and associated technical assistance is highly valued by coastal communities and other partners and considered essential to their ability to implement coastal management. The grant funds can fill gaps that other funding sources do not cover, such as supporting the initial development of initiatives and projects.

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program was very successful in competing for additional federal and state funding to support its projects and initiatives. The coastal program also supported its partners in developing successful grant applications that have funded projects and initiatives that are improving coastal management in the state.

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program's long-term support, staff engagement, and connections with coastal communities have been key in the designation processes for the Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary and Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Recommendation: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the Wisconsin Department of Administration and Wisconsin Coastal Management Program to pursue additional staffing, including filling the two vacant program and policy analyst positions, and pursuing staff assistance with administrative grants and contracts that will enable the coastal program to better assist its partners and meet state needs.

Recommendation: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the Department of Administration and Wisconsin Coastal Management Program to consider and pursue opportunities for ensuring the Wisconsin Coastal Council remains fully staffed.

Necessary Action: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management finds that the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program must submit a schedule within 120 days of approval of the final findings

for (a) reviewing legislative or regulatory changes to enforceable policies and submitting program changes and (b) revising its program document so that the implementing authority for federal consistency, and the involved organizations and processes, are clearly and consistently identified throughout the document including the three memorandums of understanding in the appendices. The coastal program should complete and submit these changes as agreed upon in the schedule.

Recommendation: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program to (a) update its website to better support public involvement in federal consistency; (b) work with our office to provide training on federal consistency as appropriate; and (c) have one entry point for information, such as through applicable software or a dedicated federal consistency email address.

Coastal Resilience

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program, in partnership with Wisconsin Sea Grant, continues to implement the successful J. Philip Keillor fellowship program that has brought needed capacity to the coastal program to address coastal hazards and climate resilience. The fellowship program has also created a valuable network of coastal professionals working in the Great Lakes region.

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program has led, and invested in, multiple communities of practice and collaboratives, including the Coastal Hazards of Superior (CHAOS), Collaborative Action for Lake Michigan (CALM), East River Collaborative, and Southeast Wisconsin Resilience Project (CARES), which are bringing people from a wide range of backgrounds together to learn and work together to make Wisconsin's coast more resilient.

Recommendation: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program to work toward identifying sustainable avenues of support and leadership for the successful communities of practice it has helped create, particularly the Coastal Hazards of Superior (CHAOS) and Collaborative Action for Lake Michigan (CALM). There are also opportunities to bring in new energy through recruitment of new diverse members and leadership and to expand support of vulnerable communities.

Intersection of Economic Development, Tourism, Public Access, and Coastal Habitat

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program provides exceptional support for coastal communities in the intersection of economic development, tourism, public access, and protection of coastal habitat. For example, the coastal program has supported numerous land acquisition projects; development of ADA accessible facilities; development of outreach materials, activities, and sites that support tourism; and studies that are informing the economic development of the state's ports.

This evaluation concludes that the State of Wisconsin is successfully implementing and enforcing its federally approved coastal management program, adhering to the terms of the federal financial assistance awards, and addressing coastal management needs identified in section 303(2)(A) through (K) of the Coastal Zone Management Act.

Program Review Procedures

The Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended (16 U.S.C. 1451 *et seq.*), requires that state coastal zone management programs (coastal programs) and national estuarine research reserves (research reserves) that are developed under the act and approved by the secretary of the Department of Commerce be evaluated periodically. Section 312 of the Coastal Zone Management Act and implementing regulations at 15 C.F.R. Part 923, Subpart L, require that a state coastal program be periodically evaluated concerning the extent to which the state has 1) implemented and enforced the program approved by the secretary; 2) addressed the coastal management needs identified in section 303(2)(A)-(K) of the act; and 3) adhered to the terms of any grant, loan, or cooperative agreement funded under the act.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) evaluated the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program in fiscal year 2024. The evaluation team consisted of Carrie Hall, evaluation team lead; Emily Rau, coastal management specialist; Chiara Zuccarino-Crowe, Great Lakes regional lead; and Clinton Little, coastal program specialist, Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Management Program. The support of Wisconsin Coastal Management Program staff members was crucial in conducting the evaluation, and this support is most gratefully acknowledged.

NOAA sent a notification of the scheduled evaluation to the secretary of state, head of the Wisconsin Department of State, published a notice of "Intent to Evaluate" in the *Federal Register* on May 24, 2024, and notified members of Wisconsin's congressional delegation. The coastal management program posted a notice of the public meeting and opportunity to comment in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, the official state newspaper, on June 1, 2024.

The evaluation process included a review of annual federal financial assistance award reports, Coastal Zone Management Act Section 309 assessments, and information provided by the programs documenting how they are implementing their programs and addressing the programmatic requirements of the act. The review also included a survey of interested parties, which helped identify the three target areas for the evaluation: program administration, coastal resilience, and tourism and economic development and public access and habitat. A virtual site visit was conducted from July 8 to 12, 2024, and the evaluation team held meetings with staff members and group discussions with program partners, interested parties, and staff members about the target areas. In addition, a virtual public meeting was held on July 9, 2024, to provide an opportunity for members of the public to express their opinions about the implementation of the coastal program.

Interested parties and members of the public were given the opportunity to provide written comments via email or U.S. mail through July 19, 2024. One written comment was received (see Appendix A). NOAA's Office for Coastal Management then developed draft evaluation findings, which were provided to the Wisconsin Department of State for review. The state's comments were considered in drafting the final evaluation findings.

Final evaluation findings for all coastal management programs highlight the program's accomplishments in the target areas and include recommendations, which are of two types:

Necessary Actions address programmatic requirements of the Coastal Zone Management Act or its implementing regulations at 15 C.F.R., Part 923, and of the state coastal management program approved by NOAA, and the terms of any grant or cooperative agreement funded under the Coastal Zone Management Act. Necessary actions must be carried out by the date specified. Failure to address necessary actions may result in a future finding of nonadherence and the invoking of interim sanctions as specified in the Coastal Zone Management Act.

Recommendations are actions that the office believes would improve the program but which are not mandatory. The state is expected to have considered the recommendations by the time of the next evaluation or dates specified.

Evaluation Findings

Program Administration

Overview

The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program is housed in the Department of Administration and is a networked program with the Department of Natural Resources; Department of Transportation; Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection; Department of Tourism; Department of Public Instruction; Wisconsin Emergency Management; and the Public Service Commission. The Wisconsin Coastal Management Council is a governor-appointed council that sets the policy direction of the program.

Coastal program staff work closely and collaboratively with a wide range of partners to implement the state's coastal program and address coastal management issues. The coastal program provides both funding and technical support to partners, and staff members are active leaders and members of many working groups. Staff listen to their partners' needs and proceed to identify ways to address them. Staff connect communities to organizations (federal, state, regional, and local) and resources that can provide needed funding opportunities, technical knowledge, partnerships, and support networks. Staff members are able to draw on their institutional knowledge and skills to provide strategic advice to communities and other partners. The coastal program has also helped catalyze a number of initiatives discussed further in the findings.

Coastal program staff are highly valued by their partners for their expertise and assistance and willingness to serve on committees and working groups. They were described by their partners as innovative and creative in addressing problems and appreciated for their knowledge, energy, and responsiveness. The coastal program was described by one evaluation participant as the "best organization in the world to work with." Another stated the "team is one of the best I've worked with professionally," and many evaluation participants mentioned how well known and liked the staff are in coastal communities. Coastal program staff members' deep relationships and knowledge are key to the program's success.

Staffing

The coastal program has a small staff composed of a bureau director who has additional duties, a program manager, two program and policy analysts, and a term-limited project position created in 2023, that is supported, in part, through Bipartisan Infrastructure Law capacity funding. In addition, the coastal program has 25 percent of an account's time in the Bureau of Financial Management. The coastal program also has two vacant program and policy analyst positions. The coastal program is planning on hiring a coastal resilience coordinator, another term-limited, five-year project position. The coastal program also cohosts a Keillor Fellow, usually with a focus on updating the Coastal Process Manual. The fellowships are for one year, but the coastal program has been able to extend recent fellowships.

Coastal program staff are seen as highly competent and continue to be asked to engage in projects by partners, including by the governor's office, regional, national, and international organizations. The coastal program benefits from having staff with long-term relationships and extensive expertise. The coastal program would greatly benefit from additional staff to be able to meet the needs of the state and reduce burnout among existing staff. A priority is the addition of an administrative grants and contracts manager. The position would free program analysts' time to further work with local communities and partners and implement initiatives and projects. The additional capacity would also allow the coastal program to focus on improving the efficiency of collecting and reviewing information from subgrantees and obtaining NOAA approval of projects, a need discussed in the *Grants Program* section. The coastal program would also greatly benefit from filling its two empty program and policy analyst positions, providing additional capacity to support partners and implement initiatives benefiting coastal communities. In addition to existing needs, NOAA's Office for Coastal Management is also calling for the coastal program to invest significant staff time in strengthening implementation of federal consistency, as discussed in the *Federal Consistency* section.

Recommendation: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the Wisconsin Department of Administration and Wisconsin Coastal Management Program to pursue additional staffing, including filling the two vacant program and policy analyst positions and pursuing staff assistance with administrative grants and contracts, which will enable the coastal program to better assist its partners and meet state needs.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the coastal program was able to successfully transition to remote work and hold virtual meetings. This transition provided some advantages as staff were able to have more time to interact virtually with partners and spend less time driving 2-6 hours to meet partners and attend meetings. This has allowed the coastal program to increase their partnership base and reach more small communities. The coastal program is encouraged to consider its balance of engagement styles between meeting in person and virtually. Location flexibility, such as basing a staff person in the Lake Superior region, is an option that could be explored. The department and coastal program are also encouraged to consider opportunities to reduce burnout and retention of staff such as maintaining hybrid work.

Coastal Council

The Wisconsin Coastal Council serves as the advisory council to the program, sets the policy direction for the program, selects grant projects for funding, and advocates for coastal issues. There are 14 members representing state agencies, local governments, Tribal governments, and the general public. The governor appoints the broad-based council to represent state agencies, local governments, Tribal government, and the general public with an interest in coastal issues. The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program staffs the council and administers the coastal program. The Wisconsin Coastal Council and coastal program have a well-functioning relationship.

Council member term appointments are for two years with the possibility of reappointment. In practice, appointing new citizen council members has not been a priority of governors, and appointed members rarely turn over. Council members usually continue to serve so that there are no gaps in council members. The council has benefited from effective leadership and the expertise of long-term members, but members may also feel compelled to stay as the replacement process is challenging. The council is likely to see a turnover in the next five years as council members retire or leave their positions. This is an opportunity to bring in new people with new ideas and perspectives to help advise the coastal program. The coastal program has recently provided recommendations to the governor's office for new council members to consider to fill existing and anticipated open positions. It can be challenging for a state to obtain the governor office's attention to staff councils. If the governor does not appoint new members, the department and coastal program may wish to consider pursuing changes in the nominating and approval process to ensure that the council remains staffed while allowing more regular turnover of members or reconsider and pursue changes more broadly to the council role and composition.

Recommendation: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the Department of Administration and Wisconsin Coastal Management Program to consider and pursue opportunities for ensuring the Wisconsin Coastal Council remains fully staffed.

The implementation of councils can be challenging. Council members need to understand and appreciate not only their role as representatives of the community but also the important role that national Coastal Zone Management Act priorities must play to guide spending of the federal funds under the act. The coastal program recently developed guidelines to help clarify project selection, funding expectations, and the role of the council which resulted in a smoother project selection process.

Grants Program

The coastal program manages a successful competitive grant program of approximately \$1.5 million a year that supports local communities and partners. Eligible applicants include local governments, state agencies, colleges and universities, school districts, regional planning commissions, Tribal units of government, and nonprofit organizations.

To encourage high-quality projects, the coastal program holds annual webinars to promote the grant program, and staff work with potential applicants during application development to ensure understanding of eligibility and project scope.

The council reviews applications and hosts a selection committee meeting with applicants. The secretary of the Department of Administration makes final selections. There are five grant categories, and each category is supported by a staff member and technical advisory committee.

Coastal program staff are responsible for the development, management, and reimbursement of the agreements and contracts between the agency and subrecipients for the grant categories

they manage. Grants administration adds significant work to staff members' portfolios. In addition, there have been changes to NOAA's federal award management software and NOAA's Acquisition and Grants Office expectations that have required adjustments. The coastal program also recently started using a multiyear award. The coastal program is working to address these challenges. For example, the program and policy analyst responsible for general grants management developed a budget spreadsheet for grantees to use ensuring needed budget details are included. The grant application form was also updated to address new NOAA requirements.

But there continue to be challenges with the coastal program not submitting documentation to NOAA for 306a projects with special award conditions at least 90 days prior to the official special award condition response date and submitting packages without completed 306a Questionnaires or with missing attachments that are necessary for project and environmental compliance review. NOAA must then ask for the remaining required information before projects can be approved which results in delays. Opportunities for improvement to the grant process include improving subgrantee understanding of required information, increasing efficiency in providing subgrantee support, and performing a detailed review of information before submitting to NOAA to ensure projects can be approved in a timely manner.

The coastal program has a collaborative relationship with the department's Bureau of Financial Management, and the accountant assigned to support the coastal program is knowledgeable in management of federal awards. The accountant and coastal program staff meet at least once a month to discuss the status of awards and address any issues.

Coastal program grant funding often fills a unique funding niche, supporting the initial development of initiatives and projects. Examples include Green and Healthy Schoolyards, which has transformed impervious schoolyards into healthy green spaces and led to higher attendance rates, and the Samuel Myers Park multiphase restoration that has brought together 23 funding sources.

There are opportunities to continue to reengage and strengthen relationships. For example, a Tribal unit of government was last awarded grant funding in 2019. The capacity of Tribal nations and the coastal program to engage has been impacted by staff turnover and losses. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the coastal program to engage and support sustained relationships with Tribal nations to identify high priority coastal management projects and continue to identify and meaningfully engage with new partners from underserved communities.

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program's Coastal Grants Program and associated technical assistance is highly valued by coastal communities and other partners and considered essential to their ability to implement coastal management. The grant funds can fill gaps that other funding sources do not cover, such as supporting the initial development of initiatives and projects.

Federal Awards

The coastal program has been very successful in competing for additional federal funding and addressing a finding in the previous evaluation findings (2018) to look for additional external funding. The program received three competitive awards under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and from capacity funding. This includes funding for two land acquisition projects, Sand River and Gile Flowage; restoration planning for the Valley Creek Corridor; the One Map project and several projects that should be awarded in early 2025; and capacity funds for a term-limited coastal infrastructure project coordination position to assist with communities of practice and other coastal resilience needs.

The coastal program was asked by the governor to coordinate Wisconsin's NOAA Climate Resilience Regional Challenge applications. This included sharing the opportunity with interested partners, identifying all the potential projects, and providing technical assistance to applicants. Nineteen projects were selected nationally, including one project from Wisconsin, *Accelerating National Flood Management in the Lake Superior Basin*.

The coastal program has also been successful in securing four Projects of Special Merit, including one that will be funded in the upcoming award cycle. These projects include two projects to build the *Wisconsin Coastal-Management Data Infrastructure*, a project to develop the Collaborative Action for Lake Michigan Coastal Resilience (CALM), and an upcoming project to create the Wisconsin Climate Leadership Academy.

The coastal program has also helped partners take advantage of other federal and state funding including the U.S. Geological Survey's 3D Evaluation Program, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, Fund for Lake Michigan, Great Lakes Protection Fund, Minnesota and Wisconsin Sea Grant, NOAA's Marine Debris Program, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Trash Free Waters Program. The coastal program partnered with the East River Collaborative, a partnership between The Nature Conservancy, Wisconsin Sea Grant, and NEW Water (the brand of the Green Bay Metropolitan Sewerage District), to help them secure funding through a Digital Coast Connects grant to host information sharing and technology transfer workshops on working with underserved communities to improve responses to flood events.

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program was very successful in competing for additional federal and state funding to support its projects and initiatives. The coastal program also supported its partners in developing successful grant applications which have funded projects and initiatives that are improving coastal management in the state.

Great Lakes Chronicle

The Wisconsin coastal program continues to publish an annual [Great Lakes Chronicle](#) that highlights projects, initiatives, and issues in the state and region. *The Chronicle* is distributed to the governor; state and federal legislative officials; Tribal, state, and local partners; public

libraries; and tourist centers. The magazine is a great resource and chronicle of the program's work and documents Great Lakes coastal issues.

Support of NOAA Partner Programs

The coastal program served as coordinator with the governor's office and co-led the development and submission of the Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary nomination. The coastal program supported an analysis of maritime heritage in Wisconsin's Great Lakes waters which led to a recommendation to designate the mid-Lake Michigan region as a sanctuary. After a process stretching over almost a decade, the sanctuary was designated in 2021.

The coastal program also serves as coordinator with the governor's office for the Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, which has been helpful in navigating challenges during the designation process. Coastal program staff also participate on the Site Coordination and Site Evaluation Committees. The coastal program's many long-term relationships, such as with the Wisconsin Harbor Towns Association, have benefited these efforts. The coastal program has provided funding for staff support and worked to engage the community.

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program's long-term support, staff engagement, and connections with coastal communities have been key in the designation processes for the Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary and Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

Federal Consistency

During the past few years, the coastal program's workload has increased with more time spent reviewing projects and working with its state and federal partners and Tribal nations to implement federal consistency. Several larger projects have drawn public interest and hearings have been held and large numbers of written comments received. For a recent pipeline relocation project, coastal program staff traveled to Lake Superior region for two Tribal consultation meetings with top agency executives and legal counsel, in addition to holding a public hearing and soliciting written comments.

The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program last updated its program document, which includes its federal consistency procedures, in 2007. The coastal program has not submitted a program change since. Changes to enforceable policies of the program that have occurred since that time cannot be used for Coastal Zone Management Act federal consistency review purposes. The coastal program must review legislative and regulatory changes related to its program and submit any changes to enforceable policies for incorporation into its federally approved coastal program. The coastal program may also wish to review its state federal consistency list. The coastal program is also encouraged to develop a regular schedule, annually or biennially, for reviewing legislative and regulatory changes and submitting them to NOAA.

States are required to provide a single point of contact for federal agencies and the public to discuss consistency issues. See 15 CFR §§ 930.6 and 930.11(o). Any appointment by the state agency of the state's consistency responsibilities to a designee agency must be described in the state's program document. In reviewing the program document (2007), NOAA believes it would be beneficial to include a clear and more detailed description of the role of each federal, state, and regional entity that has been designated with state consistency responsibilities, including how public involvement and the state's response to concerns raised is addressed through each relationship.

Coastal program staff, who also serve as Coastal Council staff, are responsible for federal consistency. The coastal program is in the process of updating their program document to reflect that it is the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program that implements federal consistency. There are associated documents, such as older memorandums of understanding with partner agencies, that still reference the Coastal Council as implementing federal consistency. The coastal program and Department of Administration should work with its networked state agencies to update documents to consistently reflect who is implementing federal consistency.

As stated in the Coastal Zone Management Act Section 306(d)(14), the coastal program must provide for public participation in permitting processes, consistency determinations, and other similar decisions. A coastal program's federal consistency website is an excellent method for communication with the public and applicants regarding the federal consistency process. Currently, the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program's website could be strengthened to better inform the public and applicants. For example, a website could provide the following information to enhance understanding of public involvement in federal consistency:

- Brief description of federal consistency
- State's enforceable policies
- State's federal consistency list
- State's procedures for federal consistency review
- Overview of public comment procedures
- Direct link(s) to opportunity to comment on all federal licenses, permits, and activities under federal consistency review.
- Include a link to NOAA's federal consistency website

NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the coastal program to consult with NOAA and have NOAA review the website text. The information in the updated Wisconsin Coastal Program Document, website, and any training materials should be aligned.

The coastal program was in the process of identifying a new federal consistency coordinator during the evaluation site visit. The coastal program is encouraged to look at needs and opportunities for training of personnel engaged in federal consistency. The coastal program is encouraged to use training delivered by NOAA's Office for Coastal Management and direct people to NOAA's online [federal consistency training](#) and other [federal consistency information](#) on NOAA's website.

Strengthening public involvement may necessitate implementing new technologies to manage receiving and posting of items for public comment and managing public comments. The coastal program is encouraged to have one entry point for information, such as through applicable software or an email address dedicated solely to federal consistency.

The evaluation team heard from a member of the public that the process for notifying Tribes of the opportunity to comment as part of the federal consistency process could be improved. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the coastal program to work with Tribal governments to improve and formalize the notification process. This could include creating a separate Tribal mailing list that is updated regularly, ensuring that the most appropriate technical contacts from each Tribe are included on the list. In addition, the list could be set up so that Tribal contacts could identify their regions of interest.

Necessary Action: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management finds that the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program must submit a schedule within 120 days of approval of the final findings for (a) reviewing legislative or regulatory changes to enforceable policies and submitting program changes and (b) revising its program document so that the implementing authority for federal consistency, and the involved organizations and processes, are clearly and consistently identified throughout the document including the three memorandums of understanding in the appendices. The coastal program should complete and submit these changes as agreed upon in the schedule.

Recommendation: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program to (a) update its website to better support public involvement in federal consistency; (b) work with our office to provide training on federal consistency as appropriate; and (c) have one entry point for information, such as through applicable software or a dedicated federal consistency email address.

Coastal Resilience

Overview

In recent years, coastal residents have experienced warmer weather and lake waters, large lake level fluctuations, historic storm events, extensive flooding, declining ice cover during the winter, toxic algal blooms, shoreline erosion, and infrastructure damage. The coastal program has taken a leadership role in convening and coordinating initiatives and participates in many others that are helping communities build resilience. The coastal program provides foundational technical assistance, tools, catalyst funding, and outreach to further the state's resilience efforts. The coastal program has also been successful in applying for competitive federal funding to support resilience efforts.

The coastal program has led the development of several communities of practice that are bringing people together to learn, promote regionally effective management practices, share resources, and develop and implement projects. The communities of practice have been instrumental in providing members with resources, tools, and networking opportunities.

Members' participation has resulted in enhanced plans, improved mapping capabilities, and understanding of potential solutions. The technical and social capacity created has helped members work across boundaries to navigate complex issues. The communities of practice have also helped connect communities to federal and regional efforts. There are opportunities to further engage and support vulnerable communities and add their perspective to leadership committees.

Southeastern Wisconsin Coastal Resilience Project

In 2018, the coastal program, University of Wisconsin Sea Grant Institute, University of Wisconsin–Madison Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, and the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission were awarded a three-year NOAA Regional Coastal Resilience Grant (Southeastern Wisconsin Coastal Resilience Project) to enhance community capacity in southeastern Wisconsin to build resilience to coastal hazards. The project brought together the four coastal counties and 22 municipalities in southeastern Wisconsin to create the Wisconsin Coastal Resilience Community of Practice. The participants worked to identify vulnerabilities to the region's bluffs, beaches, and infrastructure under a range of potential future conditions, develop guidance and plans, and provide risk communication and mapping resources. Project funding supported thirteen communities in completing a coastal resilience self-assessment, ten planning projects, and a website to host coastal hazards and resilience resources. Shoreline recession data was compiled, analyzed, and incorporated into the Wisconsin Shoreline Inventory and Oblique Viewer. Four guidance documents on risk reduction strategies were developed, and a monthly coastal resilience newsletter was initiated. The project laid the foundation for future coastal hazards projects including Collaborative Action for Lake Michigan (CALM).

Collaborative Action for Lake Michigan (CALM)

In 2021, through a competitive Project of Special Merit, the coastal program, Wisconsin Sea Grant, and Wisconsin State Cartographer's Office created the Collaborative Action for Lake Michigan (CALM), a regional network connecting the coastal resilience efforts in southeastern Wisconsin to those in Wisconsin's Green Bay and northeastern coastal communities. A J. Philip Keillor Fellow was able to serve as the project coordinator through September 2023. The Lake Michigan-wide network engages more than 160 coastal communities, practitioners, and decision-makers. The network aims to increase collaboration between communities, build capacity, support the development of local policies and plans, and coordinate the regional prioritization of needs. The network hosts quarterly meetings and field trips, issues the *Wisconsin Coastal Resilience* newsletter, develops case studies, and inventories funding sources for projects. The network hosts a [website](#) that provides coastal communities with a "hub of knowledge" on coastal hazards, regional organizations involved with coastal resilience, tools, and case studies from the CARES project. The website is tailored to meet member needs, and a funding inventory of grants for coastal resilience was included based on member's feedback. Although dedicated funding has ended, the collaborative is currently being led by the steering committee and the coastal program is continuing to invest staff time in supporting the initiative.

This community of practice provides a forum for communities to prioritize and map data to inform decisions such as local planning and permitting and emergency management in the wake of a hazard event. Having a formal network allows participants to maximize their efforts, avoid duplication, and share lessons learned across the region. The network also builds community capacity by sharing decision-making tools, resources, data, and case studies to support the development, revision, or adoption of local plans and policies that address coastal hazards and support community resilience.

Coastal Hazards of Superior (CHAOS)

In 2019, the coastal program helped develop the Coastal Hazards of Superior (CHAOS), a bistate community of practice with Wisconsin and Minnesota Sea Grants, Lake Superior National Estuarine Research Reserve, and Minnesota's Lake Superior Coastal Program. The network engages local community leaders; resource managers; decision-makers; researchers; state, federal, and Tribal government staff; and communicators in learning and preparing for coastal hazards through education, networking, and resource sharing.

Coastal Hazards of Superior hosts meetings featuring presentations from technical experts and coastal communities, sends a monthly newsletter to approximately 250 network members, and hosts field trips and events to facilitate the exchange of knowledge. The network also works to understand and meet the needs of its members.

Members emphasized that the CHAOS community of practice provides a valuable space for information sharing and learning about how to reinforce the resilience of coastal communities. A conversation in a breakout room at a webinar led to the idea of creating a culturally integrated planting guide. Members received a [NERRS Science Collaborative grant](#) and the guide, [Ganawenindiwaq: Working with plant relatives to heal and protect Gichiqami shorelines](#), was published in September 2023.

When the initial coordinator left, the coastal program, with Wisconsin Sea Grant, created another J. Philip Keillor Fellow position, who was able to serve as the coordinator from 2022 to 2023. Currently, the network is being run by the steering committee, and the coastal program is investigating opportunities for long-term support of the network.

Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts (WICCI)

The coastal program helps support the [Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts \(WICCI\)](#), a statewide collaboration of scientists and stakeholders formed as a partnership between the University of Wisconsin–Madison's Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The initiative's goals are to evaluate climate change impacts on Wisconsin and foster solutions. The initiative provides information and resources to coastal city planners, property owners, marinas, local officials, and coastal resource managers. The coastal program is a member of the Tourism and Outdoor Recreation,

Great Lakes, and Coastal Resilience Working Groups, which is discussed further in the *Tourism and Public Access* subsection.

East River Collaborative

The coastal program has provided funding through their annual grants program and helped to secure a Digital Coast Connects grant to support the East River Collaborative. The collaborative is a regional network within the East River watershed focused on building resilience of northeast Wisconsin's East River. Previous flooding events led to the creation of the collaborative. In addition to biannual meetings, key projects have included a needs assessment that looked at land cover, flood impacts, and data needs, community resilience self-assessment for seven communities, a baseline survey and flood modeling, and development of a resilience framework with seen goals. The coastal program funded a planning project for the East River Trail, looking at options for making the popular commuter and recreational trail more resilient.

Wisconsin Coastal Management Data Infrastructure

The [Wisconsin Coastal-Management Data Infrastructure \(WICDI\)](#) project developed a community of practice focused on sharing data and tools to improve and develop a consistent approach to mapping culverts and developing a database to make this data easily available within the Lake Superior Basin. As rain events become more frequent and intense so does the risk of damage to culverts. The data can be used to identify vulnerable culverts, justify the cost of replacing them before they fail, and respond quickly to culvert damage. The project was funded through a Project of Special Merit (2018), and a second project (2020) was used to provide training and develop a self-sustaining community of practice.

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program has led, and invested in, multiple communities of practice and collaboratives, including the Coastal Hazards of Superior (CHAOS), Collaborative Action for Lake Michigan (CALM), East River Collaborative, and the Southeast Wisconsin Resilience Project (CARES), which are bringing people from a wide range of backgrounds together to learn and work together to make Wisconsin's coast more resilient.

Grant Program

The coastal program has funded a number of grants that support resilience efforts. A few examples are:

- [Launching a Green Infrastructure Program in Bayfield, Wisconsin \(2019\)](#): The City of Bayfield reviewed codes for green infrastructure, assessed green infrastructure and coastal resilience needs and opportunities, developed recommendations to address needs and opportunities, and developed a site-specific plan for implementing resilience and green infrastructure at Halvor Reiten Park as a demonstration project.
- [Northeast Coastal Resilience Study \(2021\)](#): The Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission and University of Washington Sea Grant researched coastal hazards in Kewaunee, Manitowoc, and Sheboygan counties and developed a resilience plan to help communities mitigate coastal hazards and promote a prosperous coast.

- [Waterfront Planning Toolkit: Catalyzing Change \(2023\)](#). The Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission created a Water Planning Toolkit with example plans and case studies, tools, and resources to support communities in creating waterfront plans.
- [Planning for Resiliency in the East River \(2021\)](#): NEW Water, University of Wisconsin Sea Grant, and The Nature Conservancy partnered on a project to conduct an East River flood study and create the East River Watershed Resilience Community of Practice and a community-based watershed resilience framework.
- [Green Infrastructure and Outdoor Education Master Plan \(2022\)](#): The Michicot School District developed a green infrastructure and Outdoor Education Master Plan to reduce stormwater runoff pollution and engage teachers, students, and community members in environmental education and planning processes.

J. Philip Keillor Fellowships

The coastal program and Wisconsin Sea Grant cosponsor the J. Philip Keillor Coastal Hazards Fellowship, a one-year fellowship for recent masters or doctoral graduates focused on increasing the resilience of coastal communities. The coastal program provides funding through Section 309 and hosts the fellows in their office while Wisconsin Sea Grant administers the fellowship program. The coastal program manager and Sea Grant coastal engineering outreach specialist both serve as mentors. Since its inception in 2016, nine fellows (as of November 2024) have worked on the third edition of the *Coastal Processes Manual*, which demonstrates methods to assess the threat of hazards like flooding, shoreline erosion, and dangerous currents and waves to coastal properties and communities in the Great Lakes region. Fellows also have opportunities to pursue other work during their fellowship in support of Sea Grant or the coastal program. One fellow served as the project coordinator for the Coastal Hazards of Lake Superior (CHAOS) community of practice.

The fellowship program is highly valued by both partners, with Sea Grant's associate director stating it is the backbone of Wisconsin Sea Grant's state fellowship program. The fellowship helps address a capacity need for coastal hazard work for both programs. The fellows have been successful in writing a number of grant proposals including a NOAA Regional Coastal Resilience grant, NOAA Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grant, and NOAA Project of Special Merit awards. A fellow was also the lead author of [A Property Owner's Guide to Protecting Your Bluff](#).

The fellowship has been a valuable jumping-off point for professional careers in coastal management, Great Lakes management, resilience planning, and coastal engineering. Fellows moving to different agencies in the region has helped strengthen partnerships throughout the region and resulted in projects such as the upcoming Project of Special Merit (2024) to develop a Wisconsin Coastal Leadership Academy. The idea for this project came from discussions with a previous J. Philip Keillor Fellow implementing a similar program in Michigan.

The Keillor fellows have been working on updating the [Coastal Processes Manual](#) since 2016. The manual was first published in 1987; a second version was released in 1998. The manual

helps local decision-makers, developers, planning and zoning commissions, and others learn about coastal processes, identify and quantify coastal hazard risks, gain resources, and learn about resilience planning. The manual transforms highly technical knowledge on coastal engineering, coastal hazards, and resilience planning into a format that is easy for nonexperts to interpret and use. The final two chapters are expected to be finished with the next Keillor fellow. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the coastal program in its efforts to support completion of the *Coastal Process Manual* and to work with Wisconsin Sea Grant to consider the next coastal resilience priorities for future Keillor fellows to tackle.

Although the manual update is not complete, completed chapters are being applied as tools and resources to support state resilience efforts. For example, the Coastal Erosion chapter was used on a Coastal Hazards of Superior field trip to teach people how to assess a site for erosion risk; the Future Conditions chapter informed the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impact's changing climate assessment report; the FEMA Flood Maps for Coastal Flooding chapter is helping people interpret new FEMA flood zones and maps, and the updated content is being used in curriculum development for the Coastal Leadership Academy.

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program, in partnership with Wisconsin Sea Grant, continues to implement the successful J. Philip Keillor fellowship program that has brought needed capacity to the coastal program to address coastal hazards and climate resilience. The fellowship program has also created a valuable network of coastal professionals working in the Great Lakes region.

Recommendation: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management encourages the Wisconsin Coastal Program to work toward identifying sustainable avenues of support and leadership for the successful communities of practice it has helped create, particularly the Coastal Hazards of Superior (CHAOS) and Collaborative Action for Lake Michigan (CALM). There are also opportunities to bring in new energy through recruitment of new diverse members and leadership and to expand support of vulnerable communities.

Throughout the evaluation site visit, additional opportunities were noted.

- Exploration of professional development connections with NOAA federal staff for the J. Philip Keillor Fellowship program (e.g., professional development for people looking into federal employment).
- A continuing need to reduce the impact of coastal hazards, improve hazard planning in coastal communities, and create awareness of coastal hazards and the tools to address them.
- Continued partnership with national estuarine research reserves and other coastal programs on initiatives such as CHAOS and the upcoming Wisconsin Coastal Leadership Academy.
- Research of other academy models, such as Maryland's Climate Leadership Academy, to help design the Wisconsin Coastal Leadership Academy.

- Development of model erosion-based ordinances for shoreline and coastal bluffs to help communities be proactive in their approach to coastal resilience.
- Continued pursuit of opportunities to connect with local federal agencies working in the field of resilience including NOAA, National Resources Conservation Service (soils mapping), U.S. Geological Survey (coastal lidar, landslide mapping), and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Intersection of Economic Development, Tourism, Public Access, and Coastal Habitat

The coastal program supports the maritime and sustainable coastal tourism industries, public access, and habitat protection and restoration leading to environmentally sensitive economic development that benefits the state's coastal economy, people, and natural systems. The coastal program is an active partner in many initiatives providing guidance, technical assistance, information about funding opportunities, tools, catalyst funding, and outreach to support coastal communities. The coastal program helps raise awareness about the importance of stewardship and the need for sustainable tourism and recreational practices.

Economic Development

The director of the coastal program's Resource Policy Bureau serves on the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's Harbor Advisory Council, which runs a grant program for commercial ports. The council provides a venue for updating and including the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) on anything waterborne commerce, Great Lakes, and the environment. The transportation department also participates in the Wisconsin Coastal Management Council. The long-term relationship between the coastal program and commercial ports was valuable in building support for the new Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary and Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve. The sanctuary also brought in NOAA resources to map the sanctuary's 962-square-mile lake bed. The sonar-based, high-resolution mapping provided the Great Lakes shipping industry with updated charts to operate safely.

According to the director of the Port of Green Bay, the coastal program fills a unique and valuable funding niche for planning projects that support the state's commercial ports. Coastal program funding has been used to inventory Wisconsin ports' market conditions and trends, conduct modal shift analyses, and identify opportunities for growth. The coastal program has also brought NOAA's Working Waterfronts training to the region.

The coastal program provided funding to develop an end-use plan for Renard Island, a 55-acre island created with soil dredged for the Port of Green Bay. The island is one of the only areas in the Green Bay metropolitan area that provides direct access to bay waters. The project planning process gathered input through a group of stakeholders and through numerous public meetings. The final *Renard Island Strategic Master Plan* was adopted by the Brown County Board in late 2019, and funding is being pursued. The plan includes both passive and active recreational opportunities and parking.

The coastal program is a founding member of the Wisconsin Clean Marina Program, administered by the University of Wisconsin Sea Grant College Program in partnership with the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program, Wisconsin Marine Association, and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The Clean Marina Program has 22 certified marinas and 22 pledged, with most in the coastal region. The coastal program staff continues to support the Wisconsin Clean Marina program and participate in the Clean Marina Technical Team, Great Lakes Clean Marina Network, and national Clean Marina Network.

The Wisconsin Clean Marina Program has led to over 1,600 best management practices being implemented. The program provides an annual training workshop for marina managers and one-on-one technical assistance. Recently, the program was able to update the program website to include an updated “Wisconsin Clean Marina Best Management Practice Guidebook.” The program also addresses boater education and provides marinas with boater education materials, such as clean boater rack cards and signage indicating best management practices for boaters to follow.

During the evaluation site visit, the Wisconsin Clean Marina Program coordinator described how the coastal program has been crucial to long-term sustainability of the program and commended the coastal program coordinator for their leadership skills, knowledge, organization, and help in building team cohesion. The coastal program policy analyst helped write and obtain grants from the Fund for Lake Michigan that supported a part-time staff person for five years. In 2024, the coastal program provided bridge funding for a part-time staff person and development of a five-year plan that addresses the program’s long-term viability. Coastal program staff are providing planning support and helping identify sustainable avenues of support for the program.

As a voluntary, nonregulatory program, the Wisconsin Clean Marina Program provides technical assistance to marinas on regulations and permit requirements. Coastal program staff work closely with the Clean Marina Program to complete projects, including construction of a stormwater treatment wetland at Barker’s Island Marina in Superior, development of a Wisconsin Great Lakes Marina Resilience Assessment to help marinas be prepared for coastal hazards, and development of conceptual designs and engineering plans for flood reduction and stormwater improvements at Kewaunee Marina. The coastal program is also supporting the development of a statewide shrink wrap recycling program.

The Washburn Marina manager in Bayfield noted that the assistance and guidance of coastal program staff was immeasurable and that the coastal program helps keep public access in the forefront for marinas. Coastal program staff provided the marina manager with guidance and technical assistance in working with other federal and state agencies to complete projects, including a hiking trail restoration project, a breakwater, and a boat ramp rebuild.

Tourism and Public Access

The coastal program supports tourism through a number of efforts including participation in workgroups and regularly participating in meetings of organizations. The coastal program also works closely with communities and other groups to identify and fund a variety of projects that expand and enhance public access to natural areas and historical resources. The coastal program also works on tourism-related issues such as public safety at beaches and building the resilience of the tourism industry.

Coastal program staff served on the Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts' Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Working Group, which brings together academic, government, industry, and Tribal representatives with diverse expertise to focus on understanding how climate change will impact tourism and outdoor recreation activities. The work group is developing resources and initiatives that support the sector's mitigation and adaptation activities. Coastal program staff helped to recruit work group members, provided insights, and contributed to the group's development of a [tourism and recreation subchapter](#) that was summarized in the state's *2021 Assessment Report: Wisconsin's Changing Climate* for decision-makers. The document highlights how tourism businesses can plan and adapt to potential impacts of climate change.

With climate change, the region is starting to see more algal blooms and warming lake waters that are affecting currents and water safety. The coastal program is a founding member, and part of, the Wisconsin Coastal Beaches Workgroup which made Virtual Beach more accessible to Wisconsin communities. This free software program enables beach managers, public health professionals, and researchers to efficiently develop and operate water quality models to inform beach-specific decisions on swim advisories and closures. Wisconsin has 130 beaches in the state and the majority are monitored weekly. The software allows managers to make more informed choices on whether to close a beach. The workgroup also recently used a coastal program grant to update training materials with a greater attention to forecasting issues associated with E. coli.

The Wisconsin Harbor Towns Association is a nonprofit organization, developed by the coastal program, that includes the tourism offices of 19 Great Lakes harbor towns. The director of the Bayfield County Tourism Department cited the coastal program's ongoing technical assistance and funding as key to the association's success. A coastal program staff member is also assisting the association with writing their new strategic plan.

The coastal program supports the development of products to promote tourism. For example, Sea Grant used a coastal program grant to create the [Wisconsin Coastal Guide](#) which includes maps and information on maritime heritage, nature, recreation, boating public access, harbor towns, and driving routes along with podcasts and videos for everyone interested in visiting the coast. The coastal program also supported Bayfield County in the development of a [Bayfield County Hiking Guide](#), informational kiosks for the Wisconsin Scenic Byway, and a [Wisconsin Scenic Byway Brochure](#).

During the COVID–19 pandemic, many people moved to Wisconsin’s coastal towns, and there was an explosion of outdoor recreation. Wisconsin coastal areas continue to see a high level of recreational use. Small towns have relied on the coastal program to provide funding and technical assistance to meet recreational demands by increasing and enhancing public access to natural areas. Bayfield and Door County provide examples of how the coastal program assists local governments.

In Bayfield County the coastal program has funded and provided technical assistance for a number of projects promoting tourism and public access enhancement projects including:

- Improvements to a shoreline corridor trail in the City of Washburn that included making a portion of the trail ADA accessible. The trail highlights Washburn’s former waterfront industries and activities.
- Creation of a coastal lighthouse tour StoryMap.
- Production of a Discover Wisconsin episode focused on the Wisconsin coast.
- Design and planning for an expanded Bayfield Area Trail System in the Big Ravine Reserve and rehabilitation of areas impacted by social trails.
- Renovation of the City of Bayfield Harbor Walk including ADA access improvements; reconstruction of a precarious section at the north end; and installation of directional signs.
- Planning for Brownstone Trail to address eroding slopes along Lake Superior. This project examined the underlying causes of the slumping, identified options for restoration and protection of the nearby shoreline, and evaluated whether the continuation of the trail in its existing location is feasible.

The tourism director for Bayfield County Tourism, who also is serving as the mayor of the City of Washburn, expressed appreciation for the coastal program’s assistance in helping the county share the importance of natural areas so that these areas are treated with respect. A few years ago, the coastal program was able to bring NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management trainers to the state to conduct training on managing recreational impacts. State participants noted that there might be demand to hold a similar training again. If there is interest, the coastal program is encouraged to work with NOAA to bring a project management training tailored to managing recreational use or explore other alternatives to support communities with managing visitor use.

The coastal program has also supported tourism in Door County. Tourism is a primary economic driver in the county. Door County cited the Discover Wisconsin episode as a project that benefited the county and as a “great way to bring together both lakes.” The coastal program also provided funding support to the Wisconsin Historical Society’s survey of Long Piers entitled “Settlement Era Piers of Door County” and helped support a Destination Stewardship plan that looks forward and includes opportunities created by the future Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

The coastal program supports public access projects that increase accessibility of trails and coastal access points. One example is working with Friends of the Apostle Islands National

Lakeshore to implement an Access for All program at the national lakeshore. The coastal program funded the development of engineering plans for accessibility improvements, and staff served on the Access for All Advisory Committee. The committee's work led to enhanced National Park Service attention to accessibility improvements in the park, and funding was raised to design and implement the improvements.

The coastal program also continues to support efforts to increase water safety of outdoor recreationists through improvements to products like Wave-Watch, which provides real-time wave and water temperature data at five popular locations in the Apostle Islands, allowing paddlers to make informed decisions on water safety. The coastal program has also funded a study on the public's perceptions of boater safety and accessibility to measured data.

The coastal program collaborates with organizations and communities to celebrate Wisconsin's maritime and cultural heritage and provide the public and students with virtual access to these resources. One key partnership is with the Wisconsin Historical Society. The coastal program has supported the society's field training school for avocational archaeologists and local diver volunteers. The students learn how to conduct underwater archaeological surveys and work on specific projects.

Wisconsin Historical Society-led field schools have built a cadre of volunteers who continue to support the historical society and help encourage a preservation ethic in their communities. According to the state archaeologist, support for field school opportunities has multiplied the effectiveness of shipwreck preservation efforts throughout the region.

The coastal program funded another project that included the development of a mid-Lake Michigan Shipwreck Paddler's Trail with waterproof site and education content that was used in public outreach, kiosks, and web initiatives such as [Wisconsin's Great Lakes Shipwrecks](#). The shipwrecks layer for the Door County Paddler's Trail is on the [Lake Michigan Water Trail](#) website.

The coastal program also supported a project, *Hickory Dickery Dock: Archaeological Investigation of Historic Lumber Piers of Kewaunee County*, and the associated submerged cultural remains. The project focused on archaeological surveys at four pier sites and also identified and mapped the remains of the tug Thomas Spears, which sank in 1880. Extensive presentation, website, and interactive kiosk updates were completed. Two piers were listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

There are dozens of historically significant shipwrecks off of Wisconsin's Lake Michigan shoreline. Protecting the shipwrecks, providing access to them, educating the public, and promoting tourism to the communities near the shipwrecks led the coastal program and multiple partners to support the creation of a Wisconsin Shipwreck Coast National Marine Sanctuary. Co-managed with the State of Wisconsin, the sanctuary provides a national stage for promoting recreation and heritage tourism in partnership with local communities. In 2022, the coastal program helped fund a sanctuary-branded recreation and tourism podcast and digital

short. Produced by Discover Mediaworks, the pieces entice travelers to explore the heritage of mid-Lake Michigan's coastal communities.

Acquisition of Coastal Habitat

The coastal program continues to support increased public access through funding and technical assistance for acquiring lands that enhance public access, protect habitat, and support tourism and local economies. The coastal program awards funding and assists communities with applying for other grant funding. Examples include:

- Clay Bluffs Cedar Gorge Nature Preserve (2022): A 131-acre property in the City of Port Washington and Ozaukee County that includes three-quarters of a mile of shoreline along Lake Michigan to help reduce heavy visitation pressure impacts on nearby preserves and parks. (\$250,000 Wisconsin Coastal Management Program)
- Pebble Beach (2021): Pebble Beach, a 16-acre property, was a privately owned beach that was open to the public in an area with unique high-quality habitat and geological features. When the landowners were interested in selling the property, Door County was able to take ownership of the beach and preserve the public's access. The property's contiguous mature white cedar forest also provides critical habitat for migratory birds. (\$1 million Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program—NOAA)
- Siskiwit River Preserve (2018): The project protects 100 acres of coastal habitat along the Siskiwit River near its mouth at Lake Superior in Bayfield County. The property has over three-quarters of a mile of river frontage, scenic waterfalls, and rare boreal forest. The Siskiwit River supports spawning rainbow and brown trout, and its bay supports spawning whitefish. (\$194,773 Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program—NOAA)
- Door Bluff Headlands (2019): The 73-acre project in Door County expands existing parks and protects public access to the coast. The area is home to 46 different species of birds and nearly 100 species of plants. This acquisition now makes Door Bluff Headlands the peninsula's largest county park. (\$150,000; \$104,000 Wisconsin Coastal Management Program)
- Lost Creek Falls (2023): The 160-acre property in Bayfield County will be added to the adjacent Lost Creek Falls Special Management Area. The forest is a tier 1 migratory bird stopover area. (\$62,245 Wisconsin Coastal Management Program)
- Sand River (2023): The 2,001-acre property in Bayfield County protects ecologically significant wetlands, tributaries, and feeder streams critical to the health of Lake Superior. The purchase fulfills an agreement with the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, whose land borders the northern area, to reinvest proceeds from an earlier

land sale that returned nearby land formerly owned by Bayfield County to the Red Cliff Band. (\$1.96 million Bipartisan Infrastructure Law—NOAA)

- Funding for Fish Creek (TBD): This project will add 118 acres to expand Fish Creek Park in the Town of Gibraltar. (\$175,000 Wisconsin Coastal Management Program)
- Funding for Gile Flowage (TBD): This project in Iron County includes 1,055 acres of pristine habitat, 16.79 miles of shoreline, and protection of contiguous land tracts. It also expands federally protected treaty rights for Lake Superior Chippewa Tribes to hunt, fish, and gather by placing lands in public ownership in perpetuity. (\$4.1 million Bipartisan Infrastructure Law—NOAA)

Accomplishment: The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program provides exceptional support for coastal communities in the intersection of economic development, tourism, public access, and protection of coastal habitat. For example, the coastal program has supported numerous land acquisition projects; development of ADA-accessible facilities; development of outreach materials, activities, and sites that support tourism; and studies that are informing the economic development of the state’s ports.

The coastal program is encouraged to continue to look for opportunities to leverage partners to enhance outreach regarding coastal program-supported projects, particularly to potential new partners who may want to pursue similar grants and capacity building offered by the coastal program.

Evaluation Metrics

Beginning in 2012, state coastal management programs began tracking their success in addressing three evaluation metrics specific to their programs. The evaluation metrics include a five-year target and provide a quantitative reference for each program about how well the program is meeting the goals and objectives it has identified as important. In 2018, coastal programs began a new five-year period and set targets specific to their programs for two performance measures from the existing Coastal Zone Management Performance Measurement System and the coastal hazards performance measure.

Evaluation Metrics: 2018–2023

Metric 1

Goal: Improve and enhance public access to coastal resources.

Objective: Support local government's efforts to improve and enhance public access opportunities for Wisconsin residents and visitors, including underserved and disadvantaged communities.

Strategy: Wisconsin's shoreline is increasingly used for recreation at unprecedented levels due to increasing trends in coastal populations, increases in coastal tourism, and the development

of infrastructure and opportunities for coastal recreation. The demand for public access to coastal waters has outstripped the supply, especially in urban areas, and there is a need for expanded and improved recreational facilities and services. Promoting and enhancing public access to the state's Great Lakes resources continues to be a core principle of Wisconsin Coastal Management Program's (WCMP) mission, strategic plan, and section 306/306A activities. WCMP works to provide increased opportunities for public access, accounting for current and future public access needs, to coastal areas of recreational, historical, aesthetic, ecological, or cultural value. WCMP will provide funding support to local governments through our annual funding competition. The Wisconsin Coastal Management Council has identified public access enhancement projects as a funding priority. For this metric, the definition of public access sites and enhancements are the same as those under the most recent CZMA Performance Measurement System Guidance. Enhancements will be targeted to existing coastal zone public access sites. It is anticipated that the number of projects completed during this five-year period will be a little lower due to the NEPA review process delaying project approvals.

Performance Measure: Between 2018 and 2023, the number of existing public access sites enhanced with assistance from CZM funding or staff.

Target: Between 2018 and 2023, 20 existing public access sites enhanced with assistance from CZM funding or staff.

Results:

- Year 1 = 10 public access sites enhanced
- Year 2 = 2 public access sites enhanced
- Year 3 = 12 public access sites enhanced
- Year 4 = 8 public access sites enhanced
- Year 5 = 4 public access sites enhanced

Total: 36 public access sites

Discussion: The coastal program has successfully exceeded its target and enhanced 20 public access sites.

Metric 2

Goal: Improve coastal community resiliency to coastal hazards

Objective: Support state and local government's efforts to improve coastal community and coastal resource resiliency by being able to plan for, respond to, withstand, and adapt to hazards.

Strategy: Coastal hazards continue to be an area of high importance to Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (WCMP) and the state. There are significant development pressures on Wisconsin's coastal shoreline. Coastal flooding has impacted areas in the Lake Superior region as well as the southeast region of the state in recent years. And coastal communities are both concerned, and impacted by, fluctuating Great Lakes water levels and coastal storm events. Discussions with state, tribal and local decision-makers, planners, floodplain managers, coastal engineers, Wisconsin Emergency Management and other state agencies, and the Wisconsin Coastal Hazards Work Group (chaired by WCMP) have made it clear that WCMP should pursue

opportunities to address coastal hazards. The Wisconsin Coastal Hazards Work Group has identified coastal erosion, flooding, coastal storms, and changing lake levels as significant risks to public safety and property. WCMP continues to prioritize addressing coastal hazards through hazard mitigation planning, assessing coastal hazard risk, mapping, developing decision-support tools, implementing resilient practices, and training/outreach.

The WCMP anticipates a) 0 state-level policies and plans completed; b) 0 local-level policies and plans completed; c) 8 projects completed at the state-level; and d) 8 projects completed at the local-level to reduce future damage from coastal hazards with assistance from CZM funding or staff.

Performance Measure: Between 2018 and 2023, the number of a) state-level policies and plans completed; b) local-level policies and plans completed; c) projects completed at the state-level; and d) projects completed at the local-level to reduce future damage from coastal hazards with assistance from CZM funding or staff.

Target: Between 2018 and 2023, a total of 16 a) state-level policies and plans completed; b) local-level policies and plans completed; c) projects completed at the state-level; and d) projects completed at the local-level to reduce future damage from coastal hazards will be completed with assistance from CZM funding or staff.

Results:

- Year 1 = 6 state and local policies, plans, and projects
- Year 2 = 3 state and local policies, plans, and projects
- Year 3 = 2 state and local policies, plans, and projects
- Year 4 = 7 state and local policies, plans, and projects
- Year 5 = 7 state and local policies, plans, and projects

Total: 25 state and local policies, plans, and projects

Discussion: The coastal program successfully exceeded its target. As the findings discuss, the coastal program is engaged in a wide range of efforts at the state and local level to build resilience.

Metric 3

Goal: Improve coastal community planning

Objective: Support local government efforts to improve coastal community and coastal resource planning that promote the orderly and balanced development of coastal communities, with full consideration of economic, ecological, human resource, cultural, historic, recreational, and aesthetic values, and existing and future needs.

Strategy: Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (WCMP) continues to play an integral role in guiding state and local planning efforts in the coastal zone. In working with state and local governments and regional planning commissions on coastal community planning and development, WCMP actively promotes the orderly and balanced development of coastal communities, with full consideration of economic, ecological, human resource, cultural, historic, recreational, and aesthetic values, and existing and future needs. WCMP will provide

financial assistance to local governments through our annual funding competition. WCMP staff will also provide technical assistance through the Wisconsin Coastal Hazards Work Group, the NOAA Coastal Resiliency Program funded project, and the Project of Special Merit. For this metric, the definition of plans and coastal communities are the same as those under the most recent CZMA Performance Measurement System Guidance. Note: A community may be counted twice in one year, once for a sustainable development ordinance, policy, or plan (PMS 13a) and once for a port or waterfront redevelopment ordinance, policy, or plan (PMS 13c)

Performance Measure: Between 2018 and 2023, a) number of coastal communities that developed or updated sustainable development ordinances, policies, and plans; and b) number of coastal communities that developed or updated port or waterfront redevelopment ordinances, policies, and plans with assistance from CZM funding or staff.

Target: Between 2018 and 2023, a total of 26 a) coastal communities that developed or updated sustainable development ordinances, policies, and plans; and b) coastal communities that developed or updated port or waterfront redevelopment ordinances, policies, and plans with assistance from CZM funding or staff.

Results:

- Year 1 = 6 coastal communities
- Year 2 = 11 coastal communities
- Year 3 = 2 coastal communities
- Year 4 = 4 coastal communities
- Year 5 = 6 coastal communities

Total: 29 coastal communities

Discussion: The coastal program has successfully exceeded its target. As discussed in the findings, the coastal program works closely with local communities to assist them with the development of ordinances, policies, and plans to guide waterfront redevelopment and sustainable development.

Conclusion

This evaluation concludes that the State of Wisconsin is successfully implementing and enforcing its federally approved coastal management program, adhering to the terms of the federal financial assistance awards, and addressing coastal management needs identified in section 303(2)(A) through (K) of the Coastal Zone Management Act.

These evaluation findings contain one necessary action that is mandatory by the deadlines given and four recommendations that must be considered before the next regularly scheduled program evaluation but that are not mandatory at this time. Recommendations that must be repeated in subsequent evaluations may be elevated to necessary actions.

This is a programmatic evaluation of the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program, which may have implications regarding the state's financial assistance awards. However, it does not make any judgment about or replace any financial audits.

Jeffrey L. Payne, Ph.D.
Director
NOAA Office for Coastal Management

Common Access Card (CAC) Signature

Appendix A: Response to Written Comments

James Rasmussen
Wisconsin

The commenter provided the following attachments:

- Appendix C/Enforceable Policies of the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program
- Letter from Superior Councilwoman VanSickle to Michael Friis dated June 24, 2024
- Record request for NTEC public comments made June 4, 2024
- Wis Stat. 1.11, NR 150, NR404, NR 405, NR 406, PSC 112

“The biggest challenge now is to maintain the momentum (Wisconsin CMP introduction).”

Please accept this comment on the May 24th Notice by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (document number 2024-11438; 89 FR 45858). I am writing to make this comment in my personal capacity; please direct any inquiry to me directly.

As you know, evaluation of the State of Wisconsin’s Coastal Management Plan is underway by NOAA and Dept. of Commerce. On May 24, 2024, NOAA and DOC made a Request for Comments and published Notice of a “Evaluation of Wisconsin Coastal Management Program” public meeting in the Federal Register. Comments are accepted through July 19, 2024. It is crucial that the State’s CMP maintain compliance with the Coastal Zone Management Act especially to at least provide for:

16 U.S.C. § 1452(2)(A) the protection of natural resources, including wetlands, floodplains, estuaries, beaches, dunes, barrier islands, coral reefs, and fish and wildlife and their habitat, within the coastal zone,

16 U.S.C. § 1452(2)(C) the management of coastal development to improve, safeguard, and restore the quality of coastal waters, and to protect natural resources and existing uses of those waters,

16 U.S.C. § 1452(2)(I) the giving of timely and effective notification of, and opportunities for public and local government participation in, coastal management decision-making,

and

16 U.S.C. § 1452(3) to encourage the preparation of special area management plans [SAMP] which provide for increased specificity in protecting significant natural resources, reasonable coastal-dependent economic growth, improved protection of life and property in hazardous areas, including those areas likely to be affected by land subsidence, sea level rise, or fluctuating water levels of the Great Lakes, and improved predictability in governmental decision-making;

Notably, I have laid out some of the largest concerns and deficiencies in the state's Coastal Management Plan (CMP) that I feel should be considered in evaluation of the state's program and to include some considerations for recommendation.

Outline of deficiencies identified in Wisconsin's CMP:

1) Deficiencies in Federal Consistency Evaluation.

- a. Coastal Air Quality Enforceable Policies do not reflect current state law.
- b. Coastal Water Quality Enforceable Policies have not been updated since Governor Walker's administration
- c. Coastal Water Quantity does not appear to be addressed or considered.

2) Deficiencies in Coordination. The state must improve its management and considerations for coordination. There appears to be severe deficiencies and failures that have resulted.

- a. Government Interrelationships should improve. Staff diversity, especially in social-science educational backgrounds may help provide expertise necessary to improve government interrelationships.
 - i. Local Governments including Counties and Municipalities
 - ii. Participation and technical support for Tribal Governments and Treaty Rights
- b. Public Participation guidelines and laws must be bolstered and improved upon in the state's CMP; one way to accomplish this is more thorough evaluation of state's existing public participation requirements, such as in WEPA.
 - i. Public comment period
 - ii. Public hearing period
 - iii. Coordination and response to state law is lacking.
- c. Specific State Coastal Policies are long outdated and do not reflect changes in the state's laws. A process or procedure for updating the specific state coastal policies could be one way to improve this process.
 - i. Coastal water quality and quantity and coastal air quality
 - ii. Coastal natural areas, wildlife habitat and fisheries
 - iii. Coastal erosion and flood hazard areas
 - iv. Community development
 - v. Economic development
 - vi. Governmental Interrelationships
 - vii. Public involvement

I have provided a more detailed analysis of the issues identified in the outline above, below:

Deficiencies in Federal Consistency.

It appears the state has made no effort to update or protect coastal management goals and program objectives through its "federal consistency" review obligations and commitments reflected in the state's CMP since 2007 despite significant changes in state law. This is particularly concerning because it renders any decision or review of a federal permit less effective.

2a. Government interrelationships. I am particularly concerned about what appears to be deficiencies in coordination between municipalities and state agencies. For example, the Special Area Management Plan (SAMP) did not appear to be considered when the Wisconsin DNR issued a permit for the Nemadji River Energy Center, an energy development next to a mass Indian gravesite now owned by the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians.

The state's CMP does not address how Tribes with reserved rights in Wisconsin may participate in decisions that they have stated interest in and indicated may impact a reserved right. Notably, in the case of the Nemadji Trail Energy Center several regional Tribes, including the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians provided comment that the project may impact treaty rights. It's unclear how, if at all, this concern may be considered by the Wisconsin DOA. It could be recommended that emphasis on staff diversity, especially in social-science educational backgrounds may help provide expertise necessary to improve government interrelationships.

2b. Public participation. Concerningly, there appears to be a lack of coordination among state agencies that have resulted in inadequate ability for the public to participate in the state's Coastal Management Plan. It should be recommended that the State follow its own laws to assure proper participation of the public in accordance with its plan. It could be recommended that state laws that address public participation, including the WEPA, should be evaluated and included in the state's CMP.

For example, the Wisconsin Environmental Protection Act (WEPA) set forth in s. 1.11, Stats., requires a certain level of review and public participation in major agency decisions; agencies must complete certain steps before reaching a final decision on any action that significantly affects the quality of the human environment. In a letter to Michael Friis from Councilwoman VanSickle dated June 23, 2024, an understanding that Wisconsin DNR is the lead agency for the review of the "federal consistency" review is communicated. Among requirements under the state's WEPA is a WDNR Rule NR 150 that says the following of a public comment period in NR 150.10(4)(c) and 150.10(4)(e)

“(c) Public comment period.

1. Unless otherwise provided by law, the department shall provide a minimum of 45 days after the date the analysis is publicly announced to receive comments from other agencies and the public.

2. Unless otherwise provided by law, the department may grant reasonable requests from any person to extend the comment period for the analysis.

3. If a hearing is held under par. (d), the public comment period shall be extended for a minimum of 7 days after the date the hearing is held.2c.

(e) Consideration of public comments. Following the public comment period, the department shall summarize and consider all comments received within the public comment period. The department may revise the analysis based on comments received.

The comment summary shall be made public pursuant to s. NR 150.50 along with the final version of the analysis and any supporting documents.”

I have attached an example email reflecting public correspondence where in the case of a recent Federal Consistency evaluation, no summary of public comments or opportunity to review public comment has yet been provided. This request was made on June 4, 2024, and it is now June 19th, 2024. Under Wisconsin’s open records law, “as soon as practicable and without delay” and that “[s]imple requests should be answered within 10 working days.” Over 1 month has passed.

It may be necessary to further evaluate public participation in the state’s CMP, especially regarding Federal Consistency determinations and review; recommendations may be warranted.

2c. Specific State Coastal Policies. are outdated and a process to update these policies regularly when state law or policy changes should be recommended.

There are three considerations under the CZMA that include coastal water quality, coastal water quantity, and coastal air quality. One responsibility of the Wisconsin CMP is to review federal permits (i.e., 404 permit) and federal agency actions that impact the coastal zone as defined by the state's plan. For example, review may include evaluation of a 404 wetland fill permit and associated environmental impacts to build a pipeline or perhaps an air cooled 600 MW natural gas power plant adjacent to a mass Indian burial site (originally authorized as water cooled and necessitating proximity to water resource like a river or Lake Superior).

One potential concern I wanted to bring to your attention is relating to Wisconsin’s federal consistency review policies that are part of the state’s Coastal Management Plan. Notably, Attachment C: Specific State Coastal Policies of the plan (attached) appears to be last updated in October, 2007. It’s my understanding that there have likely been legislative changes or otherwise been updates to Wisconsin DNR air quality administrative rules that may have application to “Coastal Air Quality.” It is important that the Wisconsin Coastal Management Council update the Coastal Management plan as often as reasonably necessary, because it is my understanding that if a rule or law change is not updated in the state’s Coastal Management Plan that both the old enforceable policy and the new enforceable policy cannot be used as basis for an objection in the state’s review of federal permits and federal actions under that fall within the state’s federal consistency responsibilities as outlined in its plan. I'm sure there are folks at NOAA may be better able to answer how this works and does provide guidance documents on their website about the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA) of which authorizes the state’s Coastal Management Plan.

The Executive Order by Governor Earl incorporated into the state's CMP orders in sub 2 creating the Wisconsin Coastal Management Council to advise the Governor on issues pertaining to the Great Lakes coast and provide policy direction for Wisconsin's coastal

management efforts, with specific responsibility to: f. adopt and periodically update a state coastal management program;

The state's CMP includes enforceable policies in the state's CMP (see Attachment C of the CMP) for consideration in its plan that may be relevant to Coastal Air quality; These policies may include the following: Wis. Stats. §§ 16.95(12), 196.491(3)(i)-(j)-196.491(3b), 285.21(1), 285.60, 285.11 and Wis. Admin. Code ch. NR 404, 405, 406.03, and PSC 112) (See also managed use #28 and Wis. Stats. §, and Wis. Stats. § 1.11 also called Wisconsin Environmental Protection Act or WEPA). Additionally, you may be aware of new or relevant laws or regulations. For example, the notes (see attached Notes06042024.pdf) from the Air Management Advisory Group's June 4th meeting reflect "AM-05-21 as a NOx Reg - Updates to Reasonably Available Control Technology to control emissions of Nitrogen Compounds (effective 04.1.2024)" and this rule could have relevance to coastal air quality portions of the state's CMP.

I have attached NR 404, 405, NR 406, and PSC 112; you may find the legislative "History" notes with years under these Wisconsin CMP enforceable policies cited particularly helpful in consideration of evaluation of the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program. For example, NR 400 changes made in 2008 pursuant to CR 07-042 relating to ambient air quality standards and affecting small business may not be reflected in the state's CMP. Since 2007, there also appears to have been significant changes to NR 406.03 and NR 405 "Prevention of Significant Deterioration;" this includes a 2010 state legislative act recognizing protections for the Forest County Potawatomi Class I area (NR 405.19). I am writing to express concern that the state's "enforceable coastal air policies" may not be up to date in the state's current CMP jeopardizing coordination and review between state agencies and governmental bodies, including the Wisconsin DNR Air Management Advisory Group.

Please also take note that the Wisconsin DNR for the Air Management Advisory Group may play an important role in evaluation of the Wisconsin DOA's Coastal Management Plan (CMP), especially for coastal air quality. Regular updates and routine communication may prove to be effective between the Wisconsin DNR Air Management Advisory Group and Wisconsin DOA. NOAA and DOC should consider recommending that DOA attend biennial meetings of the Air Management Advisory Group and provide a report at least annually to the Air Management Advisory Group on Coastal Air Quality, addressing any necessary updates or changes to its "enforceable policies" that are incorporated into the state's Coastal Management Plan if this level of involvement and engagement with the Air Management Advisory Group is not currently happening.

NOAA Office for Coastal Management Response: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management thanks Mr. Rasmussen for his comments. The *Federal Consistency* section addresses a number of the concerns raised in this letter. Regarding the comment that the state's coastal management program does not address how Tribes with reserved rights in Wisconsin may participate in Coastal Zone Management Act decisions, the act does not require the states to have specific procedures for coordination with Tribes. However, as explained in the federal consistency section, NOAA encourages the coastal program to work with Tribal governments to

improve and formalize the notification process. This could include creating a separate tribal mailing list that is updated regularly, ensuring that the most appropriate technical contacts from each Tribe are included on the list. In addition, the list could be set up so that Tribal contacts could identify their regions of interest.

The commenter also raised concerns that the Special Area Management Plan did not appear to be considered when the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources issued a permit for the Nemadji Trail Energy Center. The commenter correctly notes that the Coastal Zone Management Act encourages states to create special area management plans, but the state's coastal management plan does not currently contain requirements for special area management plans nor incorporate any plan requirement as an enforceable policy.

With regards to improving the state's coastal program by requiring that the state apply its public hearing and comment procedural requirements of the Wisconsin Environmental Policy Act (WEPA) to federal consistency review, NOAA notes that Coastal Zone Management Act Section 306(d)(14) states that the coastal program must provide for public participation in permitting processes, consistency determinations, and other similar decisions. The state has discretion as to how it satisfies this requirement, as long as the state provides opportunity for public participation on federal consistency certifications and determinations. As explained in the federal consistency section, NOAA encourages the Wisconsin coastal program to strengthen their website to better inform the public and applicants of public comment procedures and opportunities.

Finally, NOAA agrees with the commenter that the state should continually review changes to new and updated state laws and regulations and consider whether these laws and regulations should be incorporated as enforceable policies. If the state does not submit changes to its laws to NOAA for approval, the state may not apply these changes as enforceable policies. As outlined in the federal consistency section, the coastal program must review legislative and regulatory changes related to its program and submit any changes to enforceable policies for incorporation into its federally approved coastal program. The coastal program is also encouraged to develop a regular schedule, annually or biennially, for reviewing legislative and regulatory changes and submitting them to NOAA.