

# STURGEON BAY NERR

A Proposal to Locate the  
Bay of Green Bay NERR  
Education and Visitor Center  
in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin



# Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Education and Visitor Center Sturgeon Bay, Door County

Regional Impact + Tourism + Education + Workforce Development + Quality of Life  
Through Research and Monitoring + Training + Education + Stewardship

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**Front Cover:** The heart of Sturgeon Bay with the Bay of Green Bay in the background.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Sturgeon Bay and Door County are uniquely suited to aid the Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) Education and Visitor Center to achieve its goals, including outreach and marketing, community support, stewardship, education and research. By choosing Sturgeon Bay for its location, the NERR Education and Visitor Center will be able to seamlessly plug into Door County's strong support base, infrastructure and ecology. With 300 miles of coastal shoreline, the Door County community has prioritized understanding how the coastal waters of Lake Michigan and the Green Bay estuary impact the peninsula's unique ecology. Governmental, non-governmental and research organizations, supported by the regional prosperity and generosity of our community, have a long history of protecting and stewarding the peninsula's natural resources and will immediately embrace the NERR Education and Visitor Center and the NERR goals. This prospectus describes the benefits of locating the Bay of Green Bay Education and Visitor Center in Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, the heart of Door County.



**This proposal is submitted by the Mayor and the Ad Hoc NERR Advisory Committee.**

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

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# A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED VISITOR DESTINATION

Annual Visitors

2.5 Million

Attracting visitors will be critical to the success of the Bay of Green Bay NERR Education and Visitor Center. As a nationally recognized tourist destination, Sturgeon Bay and Door County attract, on average, 2.5 million visitors annually. With the Bay of Green Bay NERR Education and Visitor Center located in Sturgeon Bay, NERR programs and initiatives will be able to plug into the thoughtful, strategic and powerful marketing provided by Destination Door County and Destination Sturgeon Bay, the marketing organizations charged with drawing visitors and guests to the Door Peninsula.



Sturgeon Bay, the only city in Door County, is home to the eastern terminus of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (one of 11 in the US), the Ahnapee State Trail and the Door County Coastal and National Scenic Byway, as well as 14 city parks. In addition, Potawatomi State Park, Crossroads at Big Creek, a 200-acre nature preserve and estuary, and the Door County Land Trust's 455-acre Ship Canal Nature Preserve are located nearby. All of these lands positively impact the environmental protection of our region's precious resources and are attractions for visitors who want to connect with the natural world. The city has strategically maintained public access to the waterfront including dockage capability to receive cruise ships and to support potential future tour boats to other Bay of Green Bay NERR natural areas.



For our visitors, Door County is their getaway, their connection to nature, and their opportunity to re-center. The values of many of our visitors align with NERR's values; there will be an enthusiasm to visit the NERR Education and Visitor Center in Sturgeon Bay.

Sturgeon Bay is also home to the Door County Maritime Museum and Lighthouse Preservation Society, which work to preserve Great Lakes maritime history, primarily focusing on Door County, Wisconsin, and providing interpretive and educational opportunities for current and future generations. The recently opened 10-story Jim Kress Maritime Lighthouse Tower located along Sturgeon Bay's working waterfront showcases the area's rich maritime roots and allows visitors to see the bay like never before.

Though Door County has 19 municipalities, each with its own personality, many visitors understand Door County as a single location to visit annually. Door County is their getaway, their connection to nature, and their opportunity to re-center. The values of many of our visitors align with NERR's values and so there will be an enthusiasm to visit the NERR Education and Visitor Center in Sturgeon Bay.



The travel sector is an integral part of the Door County economy. Visitors generate significant economic benefits to households, businesses and government and represent a critical driver of the county's future. By monitoring the visitor economy, policymakers can inform decisions regarding the funding and prioritization of the sector's development. They also carefully monitor its successes and future needs. In 2021, Door County visitors spent over \$423 million and generated \$42.7 million in local and state taxes.



# DESTINATION DOOR COUNTY

Visitors to Door County come from all walks of life, both nationally and internationally. Door County is known for its diverse vacation opportunities. Now Destination Door County (DDC) is taking a strategic approach to the next generation of visitors. Focusing on a more targeted message, DDC has already launched sustainability initiatives that include Care for Door County, a partnership with the Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics, and “voluntourism” opportunities.

## CARE FOR DOOR COUNTY



### Care For Door County

This is the sum total of Door County's cultural, quality-of-life and eco-focused initiatives and the actions we take to protect and care for the place we love. It includes a call to action to care for Door County by leaving natural areas undisturbed, using trails, and respecting the beauty and waterways of Door County. This initiative draws attention to our expectation that Door County will remain a beautiful and well-cared-for place for generations to come. It will attract visitors and residents who live for new and unexpected experiences that broaden horizons and afford a deeper connection with the communities and environment around them.

“Care for Door County.” [www.doorcounty.com/care-for-door-county](http://www.doorcounty.com/care-for-door-county). 2022.

## LEAVE NO TRACE



### Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics

Launched in 2019, the DDC partnership with Leave No Trace Center for Outdoor Ethics strives to ensure a sustainable future for Door County's outdoor spaces. Initiatives include the creation and promotion of 7 LNT principles for Door County, including hiking on trails to leave land undisturbed, packing out trash, and cliff and fire safety. The initiative also promotes access to research, training programs and educational programs as well as working with land managers to earn Gold Standard Site certification.

## GREEN DESTINATIONS



### Green Destination Certification

DDC has begun a multi-year certification process to audit and make improvements to the County's sustainability performance efforts to become a certified Green Destination. Once the certification is complete, DDC will join roughly 200 destinations throughout the world that have committed to sustainability. Adopting green values will help Door County enhance its quality, attractiveness and competitiveness, as well as attract respectful visitors who are searching for destinations supporting sustainable practices.

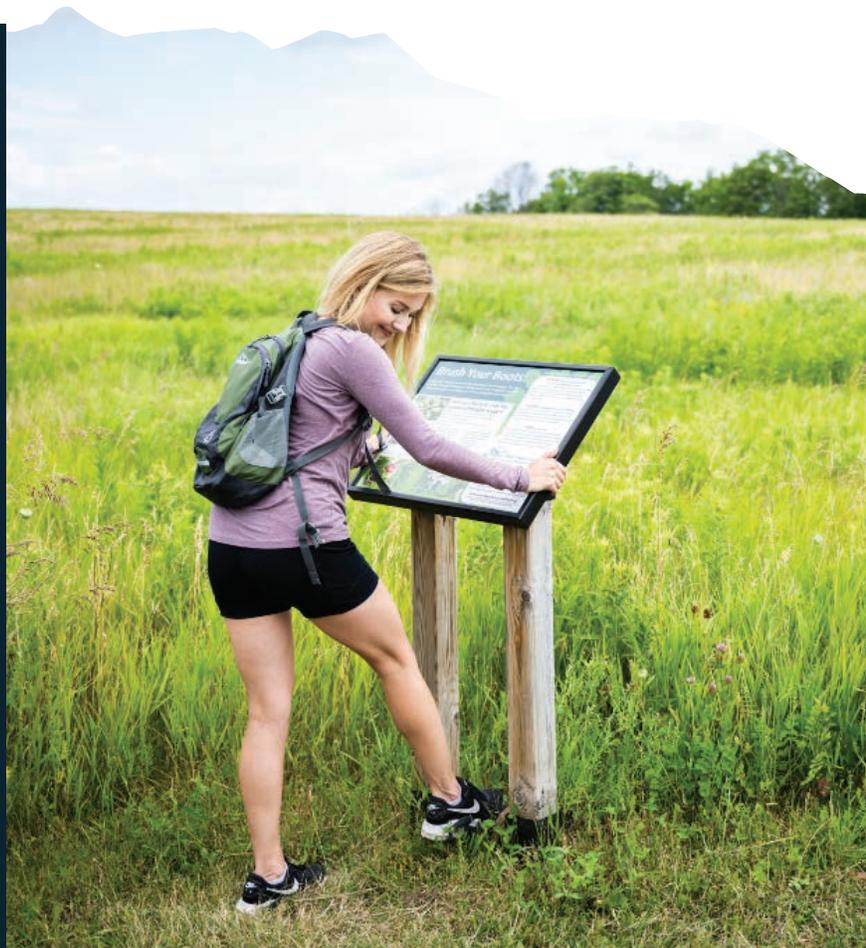
## Voluntourism



With over 350 nonprofit organizations and service groups throughout Door County, guests have numerous opportunities to go beyond the beach and interact with the communities they are visiting. “Voluntourism” is an increasingly popular travel style for young professionals and recent retirees. Door County has benefited by drawing experts in almost every area of environmental preservation and research. Door County offers high quality of life for both residents and our millions of visitors. A NERR Education and Visitor Center in Sturgeon Bay will benefit from DDC’s platform for voluntourism to provide a meaningful, hands-on way for visitors and residents to engage with NERR’s educational programs and research.

These ecotourism initiatives are already drawing a more purposeful type of visitor and guest, one that aligns with NERR’s values. When tourism focuses on the educational and sustainable protection of the county’s natural resources in this way, the positive impact goes well beyond the economy.

Door County’s robust and purposeful tourism will not only support the success of an Education and Visitor Center in Sturgeon Bay, it will also shine a light on the entire NERR System, providing a gateway for visitors to learn about NERR preserves around the Great Lakes and beyond. The urgent mission of the NERR to protect and study estuaries and coasts would reach a broad and powerful audience.



The Door County Coastal Byway is the only state and federally designated scenic byway skirting the waters of Green Bay. It provides visitors throughout the US with unforgettable coastal experiences.



# A CARING & GENEROUS COMMUNITY

Door County is a caring and philanthropic community. Door County Community Foundation (DCCF) President and CEO Bret Bicoy has called it “the most generous county in Wisconsin.” Door County residents give a larger percentage of their discretionary income (4.1 percent) than residents of other counties in Wisconsin — a full percentage point higher than other northeastern Wisconsin counties<sup>2</sup> But data doesn’t give the full picture. Door County’s robust seasonal population is also committed to generous support of the region’s initiatives. For example, when DCCF started to fundraise for its emergency response fund at the beginning of the COVID-19 shutdown, nearly 70 percent of the checks received were from donors outside the county.<sup>3</sup>



**"The most generous county in Wisconsin"**  
Bret Bicoy/CEO Door County Community Foundation

Bicoy wrote to Mayor Ward, “You can be confident that our commitment to protecting our water is unwavering and our enthusiasm for bringing a NERR facility to Door County is overflowing.” Upon hearing of the possibility that the NERR Education and Visitor Center might be located in Sturgeon Bay, Bicoy and a major donor scheduled a trip to the Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Naples, Florida, to better understand how the philanthropic arm of Door County could best serve a potential partnership with the NERR Education and Visitor Center. Though the trip couldn’t occur due to COVID lockdowns, the enthusiastic support for bringing the Education and Visitor Center to Door County is unwavering. DCCF has quietly raised nearly \$500,000 in pledges from private individuals and foundations to support the building of a new facility with a NERR Startup Fund. Should the NERR Site Coordination Committee select Sturgeon Bay as its home, we have every reason to expect this number to grow quickly and substantially.

When Mayor Ward describes Sturgeon Bay as ready to “plug in and play,” it is this kind of support that he is referring to. As soon as the decision is made, the NERR will be able to count on the proactive support of a community foundation that has already raised half a million dollars for its new building and is equipped to continue fundraising. Not only is Sturgeon Bay aligned with NERR’s stewardship, conservation, education and research goals, the philanthropic community is proactively anticipating the arrival of the NERR Education and Visitor Center.

<sup>2</sup> Bicoy, Bret. “Wisconsin’s Most Generous County.” Peninsula Pulse, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Bicoy, Bret, “We Must Hold Together as One County.” Peninsula Pulse, 2020.

Support for the NERR Education and Visitor Center is not limited to generous individuals and foundations. Our local businesses are also committed to supporting the Center coming to Sturgeon Bay.

Chris and Ann Renard of Renard's Cheese Store and Rosewood Dairy, a preeminent attraction for visitors and the go-to source of cheese for locals, speak to how agricultural businesses in Door County share NERR's research and education goals. "Both of our companies strive to support and promote Wisconsin agriculture," said the Renards. "We understand that research and education is vital in order to continue our legacy, similar to the mission of NERR. We relish the opportunity to educate locals and visitors about our natural resources."

The Rotary Club of Sturgeon Bay represents the flourishing and longstanding spirit of community engagement and volunteerism in Door County. According to Club President Sean Linnan, "Our club, through the years, has been very active in promoting the environmental and economic benefits of a healthy ecosystem." Their work has included financial support, volunteer hours and leadership for organizations and initiatives such as Crossroads at Big Creek and Healthy Water Door County.

The NERR Education and Visitor Center in Sturgeon Bay will be able to count on this kind of active and engaged support from community members. As donors learn about NERR's work through the Education and Visitor Center, we expect NERR to gain more recognition and financial support for its research from Door County donors, resulting in a regional impact to the entire Bay of Green Bay reserve.

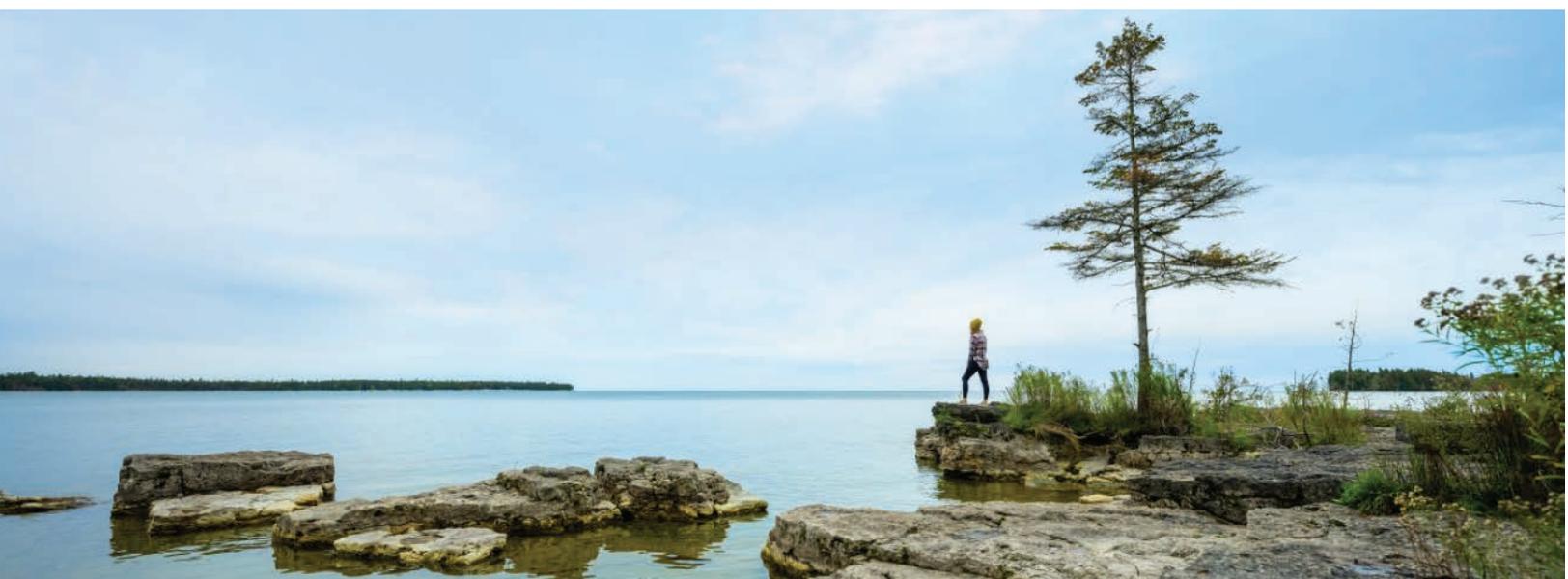


# A ROBUST EDUCATIONAL SETTING

DOOR COUNTY CALLS ALL VISITORS, RESIDENTS, LEARNERS AND SCIENTISTS TO A DEEPER APPRECIATION FOR AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT THROUGH EDUCATION THAT IS PARTICIPATORY AND ACTIVE.

Door County is a classroom of ecology — for the school-aged children who need only to walk outdoors or down the street, for the visiting researchers who collaborate and share their findings, for the college-aged students learning land restoration, for seniors doing citizen science, for community members picking up a shovel and planting a tree, and for the hundreds of thousands of visitors who connect with nature at the preserves Door County protects and shares. Door County calls all visitors, residents, learners and scientists to a deeper appreciation for and understanding of the natural environment through education that is participatory and active. The Bay of Green Bay NERR Education and Visitor Center located in Sturgeon Bay will immediately be a resource for this broad spectrum of learners eager to understand more about the Bay of Green Bay estuary.

“A Guide to Significant Wildlife Habitat and Natural Areas of Door County, Wisconsin,” a collaborative community project published in 2003, states: “Among the factors contributing to Door County’s unique and rare environments is its location as a major peninsula of the Lake Michigan coast and the effects of the dolostone bedrock on surface drainage and water chemistry. These and other factors, combined with relatively low levels of development, help to support habitats for numerous species of rare plants and animals, some of which are found nowhere else in the state. As notable as the county is as a site for rare species, it is also recognized for its diversity of more common and widespread species.” The Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal Preserve offers a study in ancient shoreline formation. A short drive away, Toft Point is a library of advanced botany. The parks and preserves are a living archive of biodiversity.



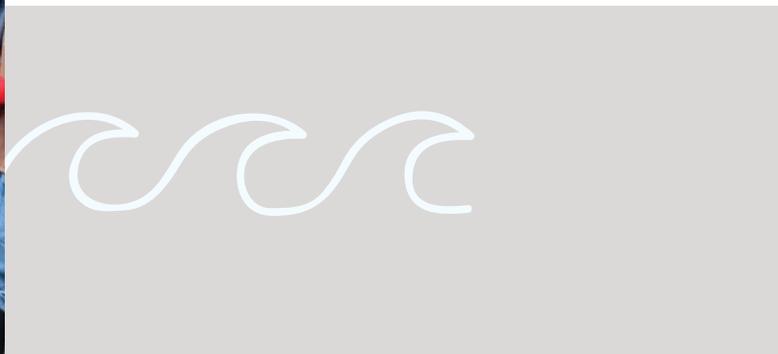
Door County's five school districts benefit from significant, regular, repeat and hands-on interaction with Door County's natural areas and with the entities named above, through Earth Day activities, archaeological digs, forest programs, lessons in composting, data collection for long-term research projects, and other programs.



The established and committed educational networks of learners, teachers and researchers in Door County will help the Center achieve its educational goals.

Education is also a primary component of the Door County Climate Change Coalition, Door County Maritime Museum and Lighthouse Preservation Society, Door Bird Sanctuary, Door County Master Naturalists and many other organizations and initiatives. One noteworthy initiative is the 2019 Celebrate Water Summit, a year-long series of educational activities organized by Healthy Water Door County, a fund of the Door County Community Foundation.

As illustrated by the previous examples, the whole of Door County is committed to education around ecological protection, preservation, restoration and understanding of the natural world. The Bay of Green Bay NERR Education and Visitor Center located in Sturgeon Bay will contribute deeply to the educational opportunities our residents, students, and visitors seek. The established and committed educational networks of learners, teachers and researchers in Door County will help the Center achieve its educational goals. In turn, the Center will provide unique insight, access to research, and understanding about estuaries and coastal wetlands in Green Bay and beyond.



Because of a deep desire to protect our unique ecology, many organizations in the county have founded keystone educational programs. For nearly a century, the Ridges Sanctuary has been educating Door County, the state and the region on the uniqueness of the Door Peninsula and its microclimates. It does this through land preservation, through small group instruction offered in its popular 20-year-old Festival of Nature, and through a robust partnership and forest education program with Gibraltar Schools.



The Clearing Folk School was founded in 1935 by Jens Jensen, considered by many to be one of America's most important landscape architects. It has taught care for the natural environment in the folk school tradition, which has no grades, degrees, or credits, but huge dividends and loyalty.

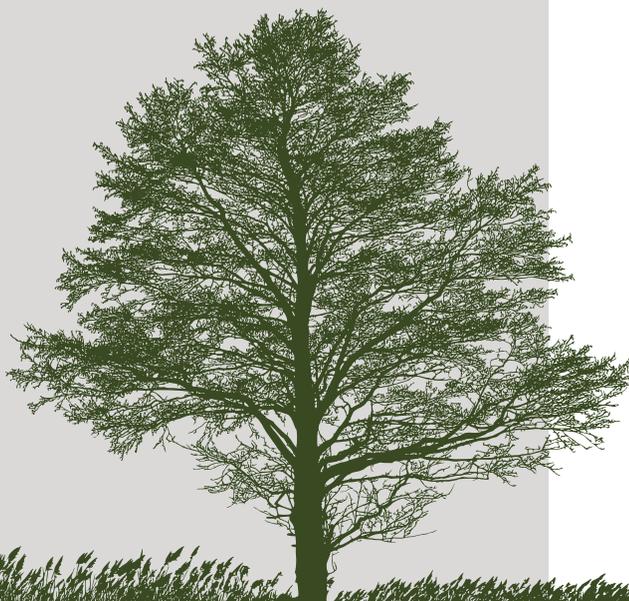
*"Everyone is entitled to a home where the sun, the stars, open fields, giant trees, and smiling flowers are free to teach an undisturbed lesson of life."  
-Jens Jensen*

Since 1992, Crossroads at Big Creek Learning Center and Nature Preserve in Sturgeon Bay has been inspiring environmental stewardship in learners of all ages. Located just off the highway and within walking distance of most area schools and residents, Crossroads' 200 acres and distinct ecosystems are an accessible gem. In 2022, Crossroads initiated the Land Restoration School, an immersive residential academic program that teaches the fundamentals of land restoration, training the next generation of land healers.





“In 2018, Gathering Ground was founded on Washington Island to teach sustainable food practices through ecological use of land. With its 40-acre teaching and demonstration farm implementing agroforestry techniques, Gathering Ground’s educational programs attract island residents, visitors and college-age students from around the country to learn about sustainable agriculture. Participants explore Door County’s many small farms committed to ecological restoration and protection.



The Door County Environmental Council has for decades been an active force in education, providing access to ecological maps of Door County created by Dr. James Zimmerman, securing federal listings of endangered species, and serving as a general resource for the many groups actively engaged in ecological care of Door County.

# A STRONG STEWARDSHIP ETHIC



The Door Peninsula defines the Bay of Green Bay. With 300 miles of shoreline and the geological presence of the Niagara Escarpment running its length, the Door Peninsula provides a full spectrum of coastal management issues to address. Because of the beautiful and fragile coastal ecologies of the Great Lakes, the City of Sturgeon Bay and Door County have a long history of environmental protection and stewardship. Federal, state, county, and town governments and non-governmental organizations have made significant investments, individually and in partnership, to protect and steward the coastal resources of the Door Peninsula.

This strong stewardship ethic makes Sturgeon Bay an ideal location for the NERR Education and Visitor Center. If the Center chooses to be located in Sturgeon Bay, it will be able to immediately connect with the network of stewardship-focused organizations that have a long and rich history in Door County. These organizations value collaboration and partnership building, understanding that conservation and environmental education anywhere is a win for the environment everywhere.

The Wisconsin Coastal Management Program (WCMP), the first Coastal Zone Management Act program established in the Great Lakes, has provided technical assistance and financial catalysts to balance environmental sustainability and public use since 1978. Through leadership by the Soil and Water Department of Door County with state support from WCMP, Door County was **one of the first counties to pioneer beach contamination** source tracking and restoration. This enabled the county to ascend from the Natural Resources Defense Council's Beach Bum list to its Beach Buddies list.<sup>4</sup> We understand the value of working together in partnerships across levels of government, nonprofit and research organizations.

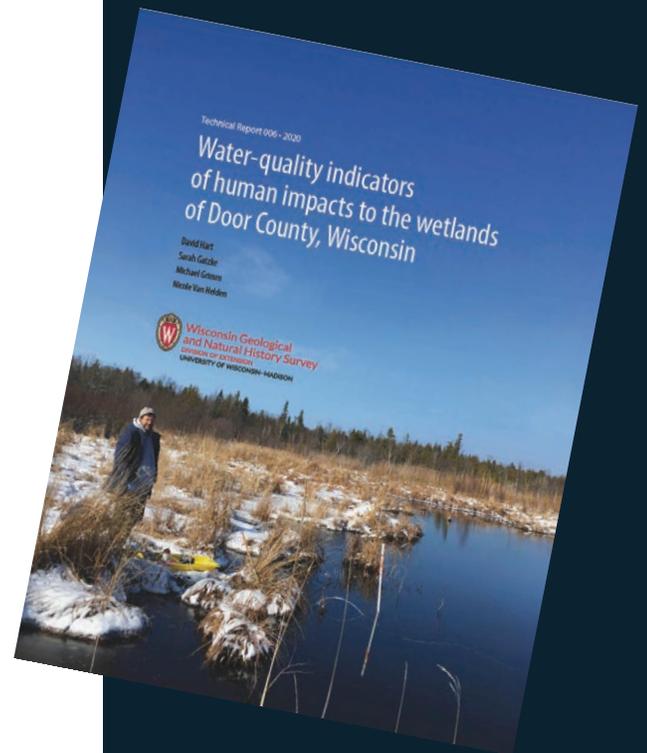
<sup>4</sup> Langdon, J.M. ed. "Great Lakes Chronicle: Essays on Coastal Wisconsin." WI Coastal Management Program, WI Dep of Admin. 208. pp 172-174





The Door Peninsula supports an abundance of significant, irreplaceable natural landscapes, microclimates and rare plants and animals, some found nowhere else in Wisconsin. As a national leader recognized for its stewardship and management programs, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resource (WDNR) was the first in the nation to establish a program of protecting scientifically important natural areas, supported by the work of notable ecologists such as Aldo Leopold and Norman Fassett. **The Door Peninsula is home to the pioneering protection and stewardship efforts of WDNR, with the establishment of 29 State Natural Areas, more than any other coastal county in Wisconsin, and five state parks.**

The Door County government has likewise established itself as a state leader, working intimately with local municipalities to foster stewardship programs to protect the environment. Door County was one of the first to establish a priority watershed based on groundwater and to engage geologists to study groundwater issues connected to the county's karst topography. Through partnerships, Door County has produced reports like "Water-Quality indicators of human impacts to the wetlands of Door County, Wisconsin" and created the Door County Invasive Species Team (DCIST) to implement educational and control efforts for invasive species.





Stewardship of Door County's coastal resources has been a time-honored tradition of residents and visitors through nonprofit organizations such as the following:

- **The Ridges Sanctuary**, the state's first land trust, was established in 1937. With the mission of inspiring the stewardship of natural areas through education, outreach and research, the Ridges protects over 1,600 acres.
- **The Nature Conservancy** supports a field office in Sturgeon Bay and has been conserving Door County lands and waters since 1962.
- Since 1969, the **Door County Environmental Council** has been fostering the preservation of Door County's natural resources through advocacy, education, and action.
- The **Door County Land Trust** has developed into one of the state's leading land trusts since its inception in 1986 and continues "to protect the county's exceptional lands and waters forever."
- Since 1991, **Crossroads at Big Creek Learning Center and Nature Preserve** has inspired environmental stewardship in learners of all ages through education, research, and outdoor experiences. In 2022, it opened a Land Restoration School.
- **The Clearing Folk School**, founded in 1935 by Jens Jensen, continues his legacy with classes that involve direct experience with nature, creative expression, thoughtful study and contemplation."
- The **Climate Change Coalition Door County**, established in 2012, is a non-partisan organization that, through education, outreach and civil dialogue, aims to increase public understanding of climate change and its many detrimental impacts at home and around the world.

With decades of experience building support for environmental protection and education, Door County's network of stewardship-focused organizations will be powerful partners of the Bay of Green Bay NERR, helping it to achieve its goals of engaging the local community and educating visitors. Not only will the NERR benefit from our history of stewardship, the NERR Education and Visitor Center will support and add immense value to these partnerships. As Laurel Hauser, Director of Crossroads at Big Creek reports, "We are extremely excited about the possibility of a NERR Center in our area and the scientists and researchers it will attract. We also appreciate that having a NERR here will have a positive impact on our natural environment."

The potential for partnership with Door County organizations will go beyond the NERR Education and Visitor Center in Sturgeon Bay to positively impact the entire Bay of Green Bay reserve.

# A COMMUNITY OF SCIENCE & SUPPORT

A NERR Education and Visitor Center located in Sturgeon Bay will connect with a community that welcomes, supports, and values research. The City of Sturgeon Bay and residents of Door County at large understand how critically important research is to achieve the level of protection and stewardship required to keep the ecology of Door County and Green Bay healthy and sustainable into the future.



Within the University of Wisconsin system, a broad array of programs and campuses partner to explore the environment and provide the scientific information required by decision-makers to manage ecosystem health. The Cofrin Center for Biodiversity, Wisconsin Sea Grant office, and the environmental science and policy programs of the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay campuses have long been a primary source of research support. Research partnerships with other University of Wisconsin schools include:

- UW-Madison staff from the Wisconsin Sea Grant office, the Limnology Lab and the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey programs have worked on a myriad of groundwater and aquatic resources projects on the Door Peninsula.
- The School of Freshwater Sciences at UW-Milwaukee has led studies on nutrient loading and dead zones in the lower bay.
- The Environmental Research and Innovation Center at UW-Oshkosh has been instrumental in researching and monitoring the health of Door County beaches and contamination of drinking-water wells, as well as monitoring marine debris and microplastics and experimenting with removal technologies.
- The Wisconsin Cooperative Fishery Research Unit at UW-Stevens Point, a partnership between the United States Geological Survey, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and UW-Stevens Point, has a long history of conducting research to determine the effectiveness of management regulations to sustain the valuable sport and commercial fisheries of Green Bay and Lake Michigan.
- The UW-Peninsular Agricultural Research Station has operated near Sturgeon Bay since the early 1920s to initiate fruit research and outreach efforts to support local and state fruit industries. The station serves as a National Weather Service reporting station receiving data from eight automated monitoring stations throughout Door and Kewaunee counties. Station research staff also coordinate projects with UW-Madison Departments, including Horticulture, Entomology, Agronomy, and Plant Pathology within the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences.





Dr. Karen Murchie, Director of Freshwater Research at the Shedd Aquarium, chose to base her sucker migration studies in Sturgeon Bay not only because of the richness of tributaries and volume of fish in the area, but also because of the "enthusiastic community of support for the studies."

The scope of research partners has expanded to include partnerships with organizations farther afield, such as:

- The Freshwater Research program of the Daniel P. Haerther Center for Conservation and Research at the John G Shedd Aquarium has been studying the migratory behavior of white and longnose suckers in Lake Michigan and Lake Superior, including Sturgeon Bay.
- The Chicago Botanic Garden has partnered with the Door County Land Trust at its Ship Canal Preserve to research, manage, and restore populations of the rare and threatened Pitcher's thistle to the dunes of the Great Lakes. These shorelines are one of the upper Midwest's most extensive linear ecosystems and an important landmark for founding the concept of succession and the science of ecology.



- The Ridges has partnered with the North American Orchid Conservation Center at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center to research and understand the specific environmental conditions and germination techniques required by each species of rare orchid that occurs within the Ridges Sanctuary.



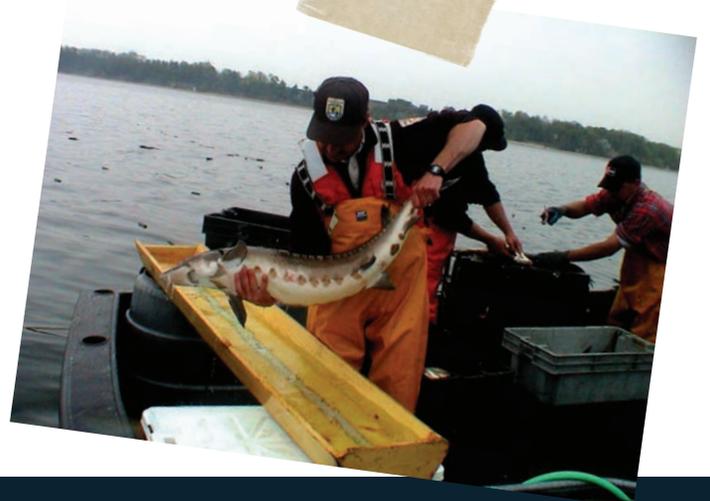
**There is a culture of citizen science and land preservation in Door County. An engaged community is especially valuable to the success of research efforts in Sturgeon Bay and throughout the NERR system.**



The commercial fishing industry on the Door Peninsula provides sustainable fish products to local, national and global markets and is very supportive of research efforts to ensure a sustainable harvest. Since the 1970s, Door County commercial fishers have contributed their experience, labor, and vessels in support of research to maintain the quality of the Lake Michigan and Green Bay environments and their own livelihood.

Further, Sturgeon Bay has served as the port of call for UW-Milwaukee's research vessel Neeskay, which researches environmental stressors in Green Bay that have disrupted Great Lakes ecosystems. This research has focused on the reoccurring hypoxia during the summer stratified period in the lower bay.

Sturgeon Bay serves as the home base for the research vessel Coregonus at the Sturgeon Bay field office and service center of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and has regularly served as a port of call for research vessels from the US Environmental Protection Agency, NOAA Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory, the Great Lakes Science Center of the US Geological Survey, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior.



**With the Education and Visitor Center in Sturgeon Bay, Door County will heartily welcome and support the research and mission of NERR. The potential for partnership is abundant, extending to the entire Green Bay reserve.**

# A THRIVING, COLLABORATIVE ARTS COMMUNITY



Door County is home to a productive and thriving arts community that makes Sturgeon Bay uniquely suited to achieving the level of reach the NERR desires for its education and interpretative programs. With the support of the arts, the NERR Education and Visitor Center will be able to celebrate holistic connections of the waters to our communities and ecosystems with a large, receptive audience.



From visual arts to creative writing, theater and music, every art form is represented by thriving nonprofits. All of these organizations are committed to and contribute to the wellbeing of Sturgeon Bay's natural beauty, economic development, education and tourist industry and provide a unique and successful interplay between the arts and science, allowing research to be communicated to new and broader audiences.



Because of the excellent crossover between the arts, the natural world and science, Wisconsin Sea Grant chose to commission an original mural celebrating its 50-year history on the facade of Sturgeon Bay City Hall. The mural highlights the history of its research in the Great Lakes. The City of Sturgeon Bay welcomes and actively supports this kind of civic engagement.



In its call to artists, Wisconsin Sea Grant described Sturgeon Bay's many assets: "Two downtown bridges connect a public walking path along much of the waterfront. Even when not on the water, there are multiple viewing points to look at the beauty of the bay and watch sailboats, kayaks, recreational fishers and power boats. Sturgeon Bay is a successful combination of recreational and commercial waterfront with a vibrant downtown. It is the county seat of Door County, Wisconsin."



With the addition of a NERR Education and Visitor Center, the artistic expression and interpretation connecting science to a larger audience is exciting and near limitless. We look forward to the art that will come out of partnerships with our local arts community to support the research and reach across the Green Bay estuary and beyond.



Arts-related organizations, venues and festivals:

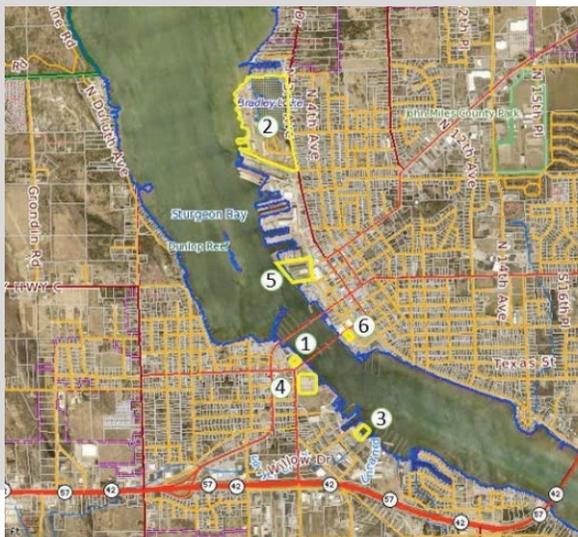
Peninsula Players Theatre \* Northern Sky Theater \* Third Avenue Playworks \* Rogue Theater \* Trueblood Performing Arts Center \* Door Community Auditorium \* Peninsula School of Art \* Write On, Door County \* Miller Art Museum \* Hardy Gallery \* Edgewood Orchard \* Popelka Trenchard Gallery \* Birch Creek Music Performance Center \* Steel Bridge Music Festival \* Midsummer Music Series \* Washington Island Music Festival \* Peg Egan Performing Arts Center \* Peninsula Music Festival \* Door Shakespeare \* and many more.



Many of these organizations directly impact and partner with our stewardship organizations. For example, Write On, Door County, a nonprofit dedicated to engaging writers of all ages, has a deep, abiding commitment to stewardship. With 59 acres of land with walking trails and ongoing ecological restoration, Write On collaborates with stewardship-focused organizations to produce workshops such as “Translating Nature: An Eco-poetic and Print-Making Workshop,” a program presented with partnering organization Gathering Ground, a nonprofit dedicated to sustainable agriculture education. Another prime example of collaboration between the artistic and environmental communities is the original play, “Me and Debris: A Play in Poetry,” commissioned by Wisconsin Sea Grant to celebrate its 50-year history.



# OUR FINANCIAL PLEDGE & SUPPORT FOR THE EDUCATION AND VISITOR CENTER



Sturgeon Bay has pre-approved four city-owned waterfront properties, any one of which would act as an in-kind contribution for the development of the Bay of Green Bay Education and Visitor Center. These sites compliment the many community attributes found in Sturgeon Bay and would provide exceptional visibility and accessibility for the facility.

Locating the Visitor Center on Sturgeon Bay's scenic and historic West Waterfront (1) would create a campus environment with the Door County Maritime Museum, the Door County Granary, and the City's new waterfront promenade. Situated between the historic Michigan Street Steel Bridge and the Oregon Street Bridge, this site provides a primary destination for the County's

2.5 million annual visitors, maximum visibility, views of tugboats and a working waterfront, and easy walkability to restaurants, lodging, shops and other downtown amenities. It is also within walking distance of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Field Station, the Sawyer Park Boat Launch facility, and the US Coast Guard Cutter Mobile Bay and is situated along the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

The remaining three city-owned properties pre-approved by the Sturgeon Bay Common Council for the Bay of Green Bay Education and Visitor Center are Sunset Park (2), water frontage near the Sturgeon Bay Yacht Club (3), and the Sawyer Park boat launch area (4). All of the City sites have water frontage, and three of them have access to deep water dockage for research vessels.

Owners of two privately-owned parcels have also expressed interest in serving as potential sites for the Educational and Visitor Center. These are located at 253 N 1st Ave (5) and at a parcel adjacent to Sturgeon Bay's Graham Park, on the corner of Oregon Street and S 1st Avenue (6). In addition to the valuable in-kind land contribution, a NERR Startup Fund at the Door County Community Foundation has received nearly \$500,000 in pledges to support the construction of a NERR Center in Sturgeon Bay. Once selected, that fund is expected to grow.



# CONCLUSION



Sturgeon Bay is strategically located near the center of the Bay of Green Bay estuary. Sturgeon Bay's working waterfronts attract many kinds of visitors, from shipbuilders and NOAA researchers to tourists and plein air painters. The city offers walkable amenities for all visitors whether they arrive by boat or car or foot, including over 30 restaurants and cafes, art galleries, farmers markets, historical societies, entertainment venues and shopping. The city's walkability and bikeability will add to the accessibility of the Education and Visitor Center and allow it to become a centerpiece of the city's many attractions.

A Sturgeon Bay, Door County, location offers the largest extent of Green Bay shoreline to address a myriad of coastal management issues. Sturgeon Bay is often the first stop for the 2.5 million annual visitors to Door County. A Center located here will seamlessly be connected with the marketing efforts of Destination Sturgeon Bay and Destination Door County to enhance public awareness and understanding of estuaries and coasts.

We believe that Sturgeon Bay, Door County, is the ideal setting for a NERR Visitor and Education Center. The elements for a successful Center are all here. Community support for this project is very high. Sturgeon Bay offers an exceptional quality of life with many amenities not found in similarly-sized communities.

We would be pleased and honored to share our home with the Bay of Green Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Education and Visitor Center. We look forward to discussing this proposal further.

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM LETTERS OF SUPPORT



“As a peninsula situated on the Niagara Escarpment, our thin soil layer, combined with the vertical and horizontal fracturing common in our bedrock, makes protecting our water a priority for us all. While it is too early to articulate a specific role that the Community Foundation will play, I share this so you can be confident that our commitment to protecting our water is unwavering and our enthusiasm for bringing a NERR facility to Door County is overflowing.”

- Bret Bicoy, CEO Door County Community Foundation



“This project will build upon the economic stability and diversification of the economy in Sturgeon Bay and it is a significant environmental and economic activity for Door County.”

- Ken Pabich, Door County Administrator



“The proposed Sturgeon Bay site provides critical habitat for birds, fish, and other marine and coastal species of plants and animals in the region and will add valuable scientific contributions to the national NERRS program. The proposed Sturgeon Bay, WI NERR site has received the enthusiastic support of state, local and private organizations and community leaders who recognize the benefits locally and nationally of additional research and knowledge regarding our estuarine environment.”

- Julie Gilbert, President CEO, Destination Door County



“The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources field office located in Sturgeon Bay would allow WDNR fish and marine biologists to work hand in hand with the team of the NERR, thus increasing the amount of research that can be provided.”

- Gary Nault, Owner, Gary's Guide Service



“We look forward to working with the UWGB NERR team in developing local partnerships and advancing the educational opportunities that will come as this project moves forward on the working waterfront of Sturgeon Bay.”

- Kevin Osgood, Executive Director, Door County Maritime Museum



“One of NOAA NERR’s guiding principles for both system and individual reserves is to ‘engage and inform local citizens, teachers, students, and communities in science-based stewardship.’ This principle meshes well with Shedd’s long-term citizen science sucker migration phenology program that has six long-term monitoring sites in Door County. Opportunities to link animal migrations through various habitats that all require stewardship would be a valuable collaboration.”

- Karen Murchie, Ph.D., Director of Freshwater Research, Daniel P. Haerther Center for Conservation and Research, John G. Shedd Aquarium



“Having a ‘living laboratory’ to showcase research, provide outreach, and educational opportunities would broaden the perspective as to what Door County has to offer.”

- Hans Lux, Chairman, Town of Washington



“There is great potential for collaboration with the Bay of Green Bay NERR and opportunities to forge new partnerships for continued stewardship of the estuary. The NERR designation will increase awareness of the value of the Green Bay watershed to the nation and foster a sense of pride for this natural resource treasure among the citizens of Wisconsin.”

- Emily Wood, Executive Director, Door County Land Trust

# ADDENDUM

We received Letters of Support from a diverse set of organizations, businesses, and interest groups. Our entire community is anticipating the opportunity to receive the Bay of Green Bay Education and Visitor Center in Sturgeon Bay.

The following organizations submitted letters:

- Climate Change Coalition of Door County
- County of Door
- Crossroads at Big Creek Learning Center and Nature Preserve
- Destination Door County
- Destination Sturgeon Bay
- Door County Community Foundation
- Door County Economic Development Corporation
- Door County Environmental Council
- Door County Land Trust
- Door County Maritime Museum and Lighthouse Preservation Society
- Door County Medical Center
- Gary's Guide Service
- Karen and David Studebaker
- Kewaunee School District
- Renards Artisan Cheese
- Rotary Club of Sturgeon Bay
- Shedd Aquarium
- Smithsonian Environmental Research Center
- Sturgeon Bay School District
- Sturgeon Bay Sport Fishing Association of Door County
- The Ridges Sanctuary
- Town of Egg Harbor
- Town of Sevastopol
- Town of Washington

To access these Letters of Support, visit [www.sturgeonbaywi.org/nerr/index.php](http://www.sturgeonbaywi.org/nerr/index.php)

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Jason Mann Photography

**Back Cover:** A view from Lake Michigan at the mouth of the Sturgeon Bay Ship Canal looking toward the City of Sturgeon Bay

## Citizen Science in Door County

"For many years my husband and I have monitored one of Door County's spring-fed creeks, both as amateur naturalists with scientific backgrounds, and as citizen scientists with the DNR.

"Here in Door County, there is a culture of citizen science and land preservation, that has been inspiring to us. It has been rewarding to work with professional naturalists and volunteers, as we all study and gather data from the county's forests, streams and wetlands. We count birds, bats, frogs, butterflies, orchids, fungi; most anything that grows or moves.

"Certainly, the location of the National Estuarine Research Reserve in Sturgeon Bay would enhance this already scientific and eco-sensitive community."

Lucy F. Klug, citizen scientist



