



January 29, 2016

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## Rural Wisconsin Initiative

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This week, I joined several of my colleagues in the Assembly to introduce legislation as part of the Rural Wisconsin Initiative. As part of a coalition of rural legislators, the goal of this initiative is to address the unique needs facing rural Wisconsin and ensure that the "rural voice" is heard in Madison. In total, there are seven bills associated with the RWI, and I am the Senate lead on four of them. Here is a little info on them:

- One of the biggest issues facing rural Wisconsin is declining population and its impact on the workforce in rural Wisconsin. It is important that rural Wisconsin be able to attract young workers - in a global economy that can be difficult. A concept that has been adopted in both Kansas and Oklahoma is the creation of rural opportunity zones. The program provides an incentive to young people looking to relocate after finishing college or other post-secondary education. This program has been working in Kansas for four years now, and has attracted more than 2,000 applicants.

In our vision of the program, Wisconsin would repay up to \$25,000 or 40% of a new resident's student loans, provided the new resident maintained a full time job, avoided public assistance, had attained a post-secondary degree, and settled in a county that fit the Federal OMB's definition of rural.

- If rural Wisconsin is to grow and be economically competitive, it is also important that students have the opportunity to study subject areas that will prepare them to pursue high wage, high demand careers of the 21st Century. STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education programs play a critical role in this opportunity as many of the high demand careers of the near future will require STEM education.

The legislation I introduced this week will help small school districts in rural Wisconsin to start, expand, and maintain STEM education programs. It would allocate \$1 million per year for the Rural STEM Grant program. The grant maximum would be \$20,000 and applicants would be required to provide a 10% match.

- Access to quality healthcare is also an important issue to rural Wisconsin. The baby boom generation will be retiring soon and this access will only become more important. With this in mind, the Wisconsin Rural Physician Residency Assistance Program was created in 2010. This program funds residency opportunities in rural Wisconsin, with the understanding that the physician would be more likely to practice medicine in a setting similar to the one where they received their training.

The legislation introduced this week would increase the program funding by \$250,000. This would allow the program to maintain its current service base and expand opportunity for doctors pursuing specialty areas of medicine.

- Finally, as many of you know, high speed internet access has become a necessity for many people. Students and educators rely on access to complete assignments, businesses need it to connect with consumers, and

many tourists require access to keep up with their day-to-day activities. Wisconsin currently has a broadband expansion program to help bring high speed internet to many underserved areas of the state. In total, \$6 million is available, and \$1.5 million is allowed to be allocated each year.

Under the legislation introduced this week, \$10 million would be available for broadband expansion - enabling more projects to be undertaken.

Speaking of broadband, I do want mention the Connect American Fund.

In September, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) authorized ten telecommunications carriers to get almost \$9 billion over six years for rural broadband deployment. AT&T, Centurylink and Frontier are the three telecommunications carriers that serve Wisconsin.

The \$9 billion is coming from the Connect America Fund (CAF) over a six year period. The exciting news is that Wisconsin will be receiving the 2nd most CAF II dollars of any state in the country.

Wisconsin carriers will be receiving \$95,438,696 per year for 6 years, which is an enormous amount. This money is expected to serve 230,451 homes and businesses.

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## **Towns Association Meetings**

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I'd like to extend a quick thank you to both Stella Westphal for the invitation to attend the Oneida County Towns Association Meeting and Lynne Black for the invitation to the Forest County Towns Association Meeting.

It was great to talk local issues with town officials. We discussed many issues including EMT staffing in rural Wisconsin, my proposed MFL bill, and even culvert permitting.

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## **Predator Hunt**

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Last Saturday, I attended the annual Predator Hunt in Argonne. Congratulations to the group in Argonne that put on the successful event. It was a record setting year for a great cause - the Crandon Booster club.



(Ed Hill and Senator Tiffany)

This has been a long time community event and I'd like to thank Ed Hill and everyone at Main Street Ed's as well as everyone who showed up to support the cause. I heard that people from around the state and even a few folks from out of state showed up.

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## Rotary Meeting

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Thank you for the invitation to the Rhinelander Rotary Meeting. Thanks to Diane Sowinski for the kind introduction. I enjoyed the discussion we had on a variety of issues.



It was great to see all those who attended.

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## DNR's Outdoor Report

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The entire state with the exception of the far southeastern corner received snow this week, with the heaviest band of 6 to 8 inches through central Wisconsin.

This allowed a few more counties through central Wisconsin to open snowmobile trails, with fair conditions, and conditions across the north are now good to excellent, on the Wisconsin Department of Tourism's [Snow Conditions Report](#). Quite a few parks and forests throughout central and northern Wisconsin and some in the south were able to groom cross-country ski trails and conditions are generally good to very good. However, temperatures rose late in the week and are forecast to be even warmer over the weekend, so snowmobile and ski conditions could change rapidly. A half-dozen candlelight events are scheduled for this weekend, including the Friday night [Red Cedar Trail event](#) that showcases a beautiful lit wall of ice on the bluffs along the trail. For a complete list of events search the DNR website for "[candlelight](#)."

Ice fishing pressure varies widely across the state as anglers in different regions experience challenges from seasonally finicky species, to accessible water. The walleye bite has still been inconsistent, while panfish were providing a more consistent catch rate. Moderate success has also been noticed for northern pike. Many of the more shallow and weedy lakes are starting to experience lower oxygen levels at greater depths, so those looking for northerns may want to move their bait closer to the surface. Early trout anglers have still been pretty much out of luck, as many streams are iced over, or remain heavily iced in on the banks.

Anglers at some southeastern Lake Michigan harbors have been catching some brown trout and steelhead on open water. Many anglers took to the ice along Door County with last weekend's nice weather. Anglers in Little Sturgeon were out in high number this week as the bite for whitefish was good at Lime Kiln Road and Big Rock Place.

Deer are moving in larger and larger numbers across the state and more bucks are dropping their antlers. Remember, these are the last few days of the archery deer season in metro units. Turkey, weasel and rabbit sign is also prevalent and an occasional opossum was seen during the recent warm-up. People in the north and central part of the state are catching an occasional glance of elk. Kentucky and Wisconsin staff and partners are currently in Kentucky trapping elk for the next cohort heading to Jackson County. Kentucky has authorized trapping of up to 50 elk annually as part of a five year effort to bring 150 elk to Wisconsin.

As we move into February, several other mammals, such as fox and coyote, are entering breeding seasons and raptors like eagles, hawks and owls are in the midst of their mating and egg laying seasons.

Common feeder birds now are hairy and downy woodpeckers, redpolls, black-capped chickadees, blue jays, white-breasted nuthatches, American goldfinches and red-breasted nuthatches. Decent numbers of winter finches including siskins and redpolls have shown up at bird feeders. These species are somewhat irruptive across the Upper Midwest. Now is a great time to confirm nesting great-horned owls pairs for the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas project. Winter waterfowl and bald eagle viewing is at peak right now with good ice cover and concentrated patches of open water. Lower Mud Lake in Dane County has more than 100 wintering tundra swans along with good numbers of gadwall, shoveler, mallards, Canada geese, common mergansers and goldeneyes.

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## Airport Upgrades Announced

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Last week, Governor Scott Walker announced a \$166,667 project to design pavement improvements at the Merrill Municipal Airport.

Ryan Donnelly, airport development engineer with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), said the project will upgrade the airport's 3,000-foot crosswind runway by designing a parallel taxiway and reconstructing crosswind runway pavement. Donnelly said the design work will set the stage for construction that will enhance safety and efficiency of aircraft operations along the crosswind runway.

Funding Breakdown:

- State = \$8,333
- City of Merrill = \$8,334
- Federal Aviation Administration = \$150,000

Following completion of the design work, actual construction is planned for 2017.

Governor Scott Walker also announced a \$1,631,164 project to extend a taxiway and repaint airfield pavement markings at the Rhinelander–Oneida County Airport.

Gayle Stearn, airport development engineer with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT), said the taxiway extension will enhance aircraft safety and operations by providing a full-length parallel taxiway along the airport's 6,800-foot primary runway. Repainting the airfield pavement markings will enhance their visibility to pilots.

Funding Breakdown:

- State = \$52,420
- City of Rhinelander and Oneida County = \$80,835
- Federal Aviation Administration = \$1,497,909

The work should be completed by fall 2016.

Rhinelander–Oneida County Airport and the Merrill Municipal Airport are two of 98 facilities included in the Wisconsin State Airport System Plan, which makes them eligible for state and federal funding. Airport improvement projects are administered through WisDOT's Bureau of Aeronautics.

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## Calendar of Events

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### Upcoming Events

| Start Date      |  | Location          |
|-----------------|--|-------------------|
| January 29 - 31 | <a href="#"><u>Women on Snow Weekend &amp; Tour</u></a>                    | Eagle River       |
| January 30      | <a href="#"><u>Blindfold Snowmobile Races</u></a>                          | Phelps            |
| January 30      | <a href="#"><u>Fibber's Annual Ice Fishing Tournament</u></a>              | St. Germain       |
| January 30      | <a href="#"><u>Ice Cold Beer Fest</u></a>                                  | Minocqua          |
| January 30      | <a href="#"><u>Langlade County-Wide Snowmobile Ride</u></a>                | White Lake        |
| February 3 - 4  | <a href="#"><u>Annual Groomer Show</u></a>                                 | St. Germain       |
| February 5 - 7  | <a href="#"><u>Labatt Blue US Adult Pond Hockey Championship</u></a>       | Eagle River       |
| February 6-7    | <a href="#"><u>41st Annual Red Arrow Fish A Ree</u></a>                    | Townsend          |
| February 6      | <a href="#"><u>2nd Annual Outhouse Races</u></a>                           | Athelstane        |
| February 7      | <a href="#"><u>Manitowish Waters Sno-Skeeter Breakfast</u></a>             | Manitowish Waters |
| February 13     | <a href="#"><u>Manitowish Waters Sno-Skeeter Winterfest Rendezvous</u></a> | Manitowish Waters |
| February 13     | <a href="#"><u>Northwoods Blizzard Blast</u></a>                           | Conover           |

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As always, if you have any comments or thoughts regarding the subjects of this e-update, please feel free to contact me.

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