

CENTRAL WISCONSIN JOINT AIRPORT BOARD MEETING
SPECIAL SESSION
Conference Room B – East Terminal Upper Level, Mosinee, Wisconsin
July 9, 2021, 8:00 a.m.

2020-2022 Board Members: Sara Guild, Chair- Marathon County, Dave Ladick, Vice-Chair - Portage County, Brent Jacobson - Marathon County, Ray Reser - Portage County, Chris Dickinson - Marathon County, Lon Krogwold - Portage County, Kurt Kluck - Marathon County.

Mission Statement: *The mission of the Central Wisconsin Airport is to be the airport of choice by providing a safe, efficient, and competitive operating environment.*

This Special Session of the Central Wisconsin Joint Airport Board will have the option for members and the public to call-in via telephone conference. Airport Board members and the public may join the meeting by calling 715-693-2147 and dialing extension 3000 when the voice menu system begins. The conference line will be open to calls five (5) minutes prior to the meeting start time listed above.

- 1) Call to Order by Chair Guild at 8:00 a.m.
 - a) Pledge of Allegiance
- 2) Public Comment Period: 15-minute time limit
- 3) Review and Possible Action on Providing Comment to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for Optimizing Recreational Opportunities at Rib Mountain State Park and Potential Impact on Travel at the Central Wisconsin Airport
 - a) Comment period deadline – Friday, July 9, 2021
- 4) Adjournment
- 5) Next Scheduled Meeting Date: July 16, 2021 at 8:00 a.m.

Any person planning to attend this meeting who needs some type of special accommodation to participate should call the County Clerk's Office at 715-261-1500 or e-mail infomarathon@co.marathon.wi.us one business day before the meeting.



June 11, 2021

Mr. Preston D. Cole, Secretary
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

Dear Secretary Cole,

On behalf of the Greater Wausau Prosperity Partnership, Ltd. (GWPP), we are pleased to submit to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources the **Rib Mountain State Park Mountain Recreation Needs Assessment**. The assessment was prepared by the SE Group, a renowned planning and design firm with extensive expertise in mountain recreation land planning.

The findings present to the state of Wisconsin and the Greater Wausau Region the perfect opportunity to balance the state's distinct natural resource assets with a catalyst to propel economic development for the Wausau area. Tourism is a primary driver of county tax revenues and spending in local hotels, restaurants and other businesses. There is strong desire from the community to maintain and grow the current annual visitation levels.

As you are aware, last fall the GWPP offered to support the efforts of the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board and the Wisconsin DNR in its desire to revise the 2005 master plan for Rib Mountain State Park (RMSP). These efforts will assist in evaluating the full range of recreational and habitat opportunities at Rib Mountain ensuring that the park continues to help support the ecological, social and economic needs of the area. Through a collaborative process that comprised a variety of different stakeholders, the SE Group developed an impartial and objective Mountain Recreation Needs Assessment for RMSP including alternatives that consider alpine skiing, mountain biking and a "no-change" analysis.

RMSP and Granite Peak Ski Area (GPSA) currently attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors per year, contributing approximately \$30 million in economic stimulus, 460 full-time equivalent jobs and \$2.2 million in local, state, and federal taxes.

Although RMSP and GPSA have many competitive advantages over other parks and ski areas, they face significant and growing competition due to downhill skiing, base mountain facilities, ski-in-ski-out lodging and competition for recreational tourism opportunities in Wisconsin and the upper Midwest. The assessment projects that over time, changes in temperature and precipitation will reduce the viable length of the ski season at GPSA from approximately five to three months. To remain relevant, competitive and financially strong, RMSP and GPSA should invest in long-term strategies that maintain visitation and attract new recreationalists by enhancing RMSP offerings with high-quality experiences, well-concentrated facilities and well-balanced amenities. As you will read, this can be accomplished with minimal impact to the environment.

As further background, in 2019, in coordination with TIP Strategies, a nationally recognized consulting firm, GWPP developed a five-year strategic plan focused on economic development. A significant component of the plan is to market the Greater Wausau Region as the Outdoor Recreation Mecca of the Midwest to attract and retain a skilled workforce and innovative companies. The proposed improvements and expanded recreation at RMSP would contribute to realizing this strategy and further enable the area to reach full potential as a nationally recognized outdoor hub, building upon its diverse menu of outdoor amenities including the world-class Wausau Whitewater Park, Nine-Mile County Forest and other local jewels.



Based on this background and the data from the Recreation Needs Assessment, **GWPP elected to formally endorse Alternative Concept #4**. This represents the full recreation potential for summer and winter activities at RMSP. Alternative Concept #4 presents the greatest potential to maximize the following priorities while seeking to fully minimize disturbance in areas with the highest ecological concern in the planning, design, and consideration of facilities.

Alternative Concept #4 – Key Advantages:

- Promotes the highest level of year-round visitation gains across all recreational uses, resulting in the greatest potential for added economic benefits to the state of Wisconsin and to the region.
- Provides the highest quality recreational experiences for shared users of all ability levels. It includes dedicated facilities for skiing and mountain biking and achieves the greatest increase in capacity.
- Offers a mix of new and diverse recreational experiences to create a differentiator within the market and the Wisconsin state park system. It will inspire family-friendly destination trips that enable longer stays and returned visits.
- Introduces gateway experiences and adventure-oriented features encouraging new recreationalists to visit the park, connect with nature and experience the outdoors.

It is important to note that in comparison to Alternative Concept #3, Alternative Concept #4 produces the highest quality recreational experiences for all users, generates over 40,000 more annual visits, contributes an additional approximately \$5 million sales impact, and impacts less than 1-acre difference to the areas of highest ecological concern.

Furthermore, the tourism industry has and will continue to play a vital role in reinvigorating the state post-pandemic. The Office of Outdoor Recreation, in partnership with the Department of Tourism, shared a report produced by Headwaters Economics that details the sizeable economic impact outdoor recreation creates throughout Wisconsin. *Outdoor Recreation: A Top Driver of Wisconsin's Economy:*

- Wisconsin's outdoor recreation economy contributes \$7.8 billion to GDP.
- Outdoor recreation helps attract and retain professionals, directly supporting jobs across diverse economic sectors.
- Outdoor recreation accounts for 93,000 jobs in Wisconsin, making it the fifth-largest share of outdoor recreation-related jobs in the nation.

In closing, we the undersigned, are hopeful your agency will accept and utilize the information in the SE Group study to propose to the public and the Wisconsin DNR Board a robust plan for maximized recreational opportunities at Rib Mountain State Park. **We are confident that you will find that optimizing the recreational opportunities, as demonstrated in Alternative Concept #4, presents the best future for RMSP and the state of Wisconsin.** For further discussion, we welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the assessment in greater detail. Please feel free to reach out to David Eckmann, President, with the Greater Wausau Prosperity Partnership, Ltd. at deckmann@wausauchamber.com or 715.370.3420.

Sincerely,

Dave Eckmann,
GWPP President

Chris Ghidorzi,
GWPP Placemaking Chair

Jim McIntyre,
GWPP Chairperson



Rib Mountain State Park Mountain Recreation Needs Assessment

LETTER ENDORSEMENTS

The undersigned express their support for Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to accept and utilize the information in the SE Group study to propose to the public and the Wisconsin DNR Board a robust plan for maximized recreational opportunities at Rib Mountain State Park. We agree that optimizing the recreational opportunities, as demonstrated in Alternative Concept #4, presents the best future for RMSP and the state of Wisconsin.

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