

## President's Report – November 2023

We seem to be firmly in the season of winter. Briefly, I want to talk about our changing climate and what that could mean for our park system and how we activate it.

In a general sense, you think about climate change. We all do-- as individuals and as policymakers on this board.

I thought I'd offer some specificity about climate change as drawn from the [Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change report](#) (2021), known by its shorthand name of WICCI, and the tourism and outdoor recreation chapter in that report. WICCI is an effort involving state agencies and folks in academia.

- Projections are for more intense and more frequent rainstorms. The prediction is that they will occur at a rate of 1.5 to 2 times more frequently than they occur now. Trails and other recreational infrastructure will be affected. Amenities near our lakes will be more susceptible to flooding. The flooding also leads to harmful algal blooms (HABs), necessitating beach closures.
- Increases in winter rainfall will cause dangerous ice conditions on trails and within parks themselves.
- Heat could cause the summer recreation season to become doughnut-shaped, with active swimming, boating, recreational sports competitions and other in-park activities happening in the spring and fall but avoided during the peak of summer due to extreme heat. Statewide, the number of days with extreme heat are expected to rise. From 1981 to 2010 the number of days of extreme heat had been 0-15 a year; with climate change, the figures are expected to be anywhere from 10 to 40 days a year.
- That's heat and what about cold, or rather, a lessening of cold temperatures? Assuming a continuing and consistent medium-emissions scenario, by late century the number of days with maximum temperatures below freezing will decrease from the current 49 to 92 days to 26 to 61 days, which equates to a loss of about one month out of the year. How will that affect sledding hills, skiing, snowshoeing or skating?
- Snowfall will be 31-49% lower. Again, this will have an impact on sledding, snowshoeing and skiing.
- Ice. Annual records show ice duration on lakes Mendota and Monona have decreased by an average of 1.9 and 2.2 days per decade respectively since 1885. What does that mean for hockey/ice skating not just on the lakes but any rinks that the city may set up and try to maintain? Is that investment worth the payoff?

### Further Considerations:

- How Parks will continue and perhaps increase its interface with the health department on HABs and with the emergency folks—city and county—on flooding or extreme heat.
- How rescope the trails given how they might ice over or flood.
- How damage to infrastructure and access points might affect ADA compliance and the recreational experience of people with disabilities.
- How to address urban heat islands, which can be particularly pronounced in areas of underserved populations. More splash pads, for example? Add to the tree canopy?
- How to manage vegetation under a changing climate. What species will suffer and what will flourish? More prairies with native species? What is the impact on golf turf?