

# Dept. of Natural Resources: Announces new parks director

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**MADISON, Wis.** – The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) today announced that Steven Schmelzer is the department's new Parks Director. He started his new role July 19.

Managed by the DNR, the Wisconsin State Park system boasts 49 state parks, more than 500 boat launches, 15 state forests, 44 state biking trails, over 5,000 campsites, plus thousands of acres for adventures.

The DNR has logged more than 9.6 million visits to the 49 state parks so far this year – an 18% increase over last year and a 36% increase over 2019. As more people connect with the Wisconsin's great outdoors more than ever, Schmelzer is up for the task.

Schmelzer's 29 years with the DNR began in 1992, when he served as a Park Ranger at Devil's Lake State Park. In 1999, he was promoted to Devil's Lake State Park Assistant Park Superintendent and then served as the park's superintendent from 2008-2020. In 2020, he was selected as a District Park Supervisor to lead the Southwest District covering eight counties and 18 different properties.

"It has no doubt been a challenging year. Yet staff remained resilient, adaptable and committed to providing excellent customer service to a record number of visitors," said Diane Brusoe, Fish, Wildlife & Parks Deputy Division Administrator overseeing Parks and Recreation Management. "We are excited to have Steve continue the momentum. He's the right person to lead our state parks into the future."

While Park Superintendent at Devil's Lake, Schmelzer oversaw the management of

Wisconsin's largest and busiest state park with over 2.5 million visitors each year. He excelled at leading a large staff while managing a 10,000-acre complex work unit. He also worked to improve the water quality of Devil's Lake through a phosphorus removal project and the conversion of lands to native prairie to protect the park watersheds.

In addition to his contributions to Devil's Lake, Schmelzer worked for over 12 years to transform the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant to the Sauk Prairie State Recreation Area. His work with the Ho-Chunk Nation, the United States Army, USDA Dairy Forage Research Center and other local groups led to the collaborative management of the property which offers a wide range of diverse recreational activities.

"I'm very excited to lead the Wisconsin State Parks system and keep it moving it forward," Schmelzer said. "Our parks offer countless recreational opportunities for visitors. We must continue to innovate and look at new technologies to better serve our customers now and in the future. I look forward to getting out to the properties and interacting with staff and our partners to make our parks system better than we found it."

Schmelzer holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Natural Resources – Recreation Resource Management from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is also a graduate of the DNR Leadership Academy, the Sauk County Institute of Leadership and he served 14 years in the U.S. Air Force and the Wisconsin Air National Guard.

Schmelzer and his wife Julie live in Baraboo where they raised their three children. They enjoy many outdoor recreational activities including biking, trout fishing, hunting, gardening, hiking and exploring parks and trails across Wisconsin and the United States.

The Wisconsin State Park System provides places for outdoor recreation and for learning about nature and conservation. State parks, forests, trails and recreation areas see more than 20 million visits a year. [Find your adventure here.](#)