

Midwest Environmental Advocates: Files appeal in legal dispute over public's right to access Great Lakes shoreline

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Appeal follows municipal court ruling upholding trespassing ticket issued to Shorewood resident walking along Lake Michigan

Milwaukee, WI—Today, Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA) [filed an appeal](#) on behalf of Shorewood resident Paul Florsheim in a case that could have significant implications for the public's right to access and enjoy the Great Lakes.

Mr. Florsheim is appealing a January 28, 2026 [municipal court decision](#) that found him guilty of trespassing for walking along a stretch of the Lake Michigan shoreline north of Atwater Beach in the Village of Shorewood.

The case stems from an incident last summer in which a lakefront property owner confronted Mr. Florsheim, accused him of trespassing, and later called the police. Although Mr. Florsheim explained that the state constitution and the public trust doctrine protect the public's right to walk on dry land between the ordinary high water mark and the water's edge, he was issued a \$313 trespassing ticket by Village of Shorewood police.

When Mr. Florsheim appealed the fine in municipal court, the court ruled in favor of the Village, pointing to *Doemel v. Jantz*, a 1923 Wisconsin Supreme Court decision involving public access to Lake Winnebago, which found that members of the public are subject to trespassing laws unless their feet are in the water.

The municipal court acknowledged that Wisconsin courts have expanded the public trust doctrine over time to protect recreation, scenic beauty, and other public interests connected to water, but concluded that only higher courts have the authority to revisit the *Doemel* decision.

Rob Lee, Senior Staff Attorney at Midwest Environmental Advocates, said, “This case raises fundamental questions about how Wisconsin’s public trust doctrine applies to accessing the Great Lakes, questions the Wisconsin Supreme Court has never answered.”

Mr. Florsheim’s appeal to Milwaukee County Circuit Court is the next step in a series of legal proceedings that could go all the way up to the Wisconsin Supreme Court.

“Wisconsin’s lakes and shorelines are some of our most treasured public resources,” said Florsheim. “This appeal is about ensuring that the public trust doctrine continues to serve the public—not just as it was understood a century ago, but as it should function today.”