



Wisconsin Lake Ice

Authors: Josh Bendorf

What Is Lake Ice? Things can get quite chilly in the Badger State once winter rolls around! As the temperatures drop below freezing, Wisconsin's many lakes begin to freeze over. Lake ice is important for winter tourism, local climate, and lake ecology.

Why Lake Ice Matters

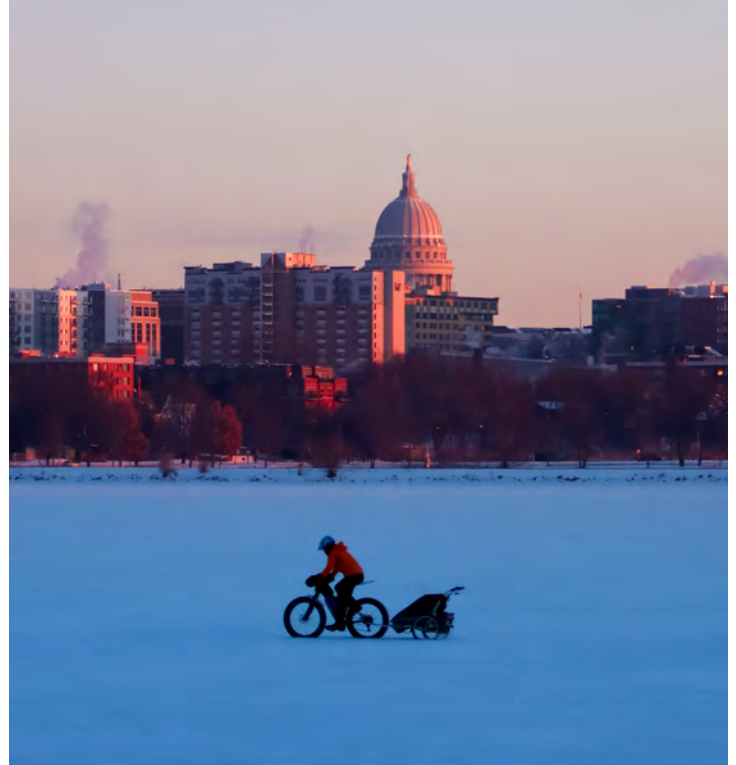
1. During the late 1800's, Wisconsin lake ice was highly sought-after by breweries and meatpacking companies in Milwaukee & Chicago.
2. In 2023, boating and fishing (including ice fishing) contributed **\$928 million** to the state's GDP.
3. Lake ice can help protect species of fish and plankton from harsh winter conditions.

Changes in Lake Ice

As winters have gotten warmer in Wisconsin, there has been a reduction in lake ice coverage and duration. Long-term data at Lakes Mendota and Monona indicate a declining trend in annual ice coverage duration. Likewise, on the Great Lakes, there has been a declining trend in annual lake ice coverage since the 1970s.

- Reductions in lake ice duration is leading to a reduced ability to go ice fishing, which has ripple effects on the local economy.
- Fish eggs from species that spawn in winter will be more susceptible to fluctuations in winter weather if there is no ice cover.
- Warming water temperatures are detrimental to species that are adapted to cooler temperatures.

Enjoying Lake Ice Safely Falls through the ice on Madison lakes have become more common as winters have warmed. If you plan to venture onto the ice, avoid thin or cracked ice, bring your cellphone with you, and be equipped with gear to get yourself out of the water if you fall through.



A person rides a fat-tire bike across frozen Lake Monona in Madison, WI, with the Wisconsin State Capitol in the background (Credit: Allison Gallepeau).

Learn more at: go.wisc.edu/2L1W1Z



Wisconsin State Climatology Office
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON