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Plans to provide interpretive signage in Oconto Marsh wins AARP WI grant

OCONTO, WI – A proposal to provide interpretive signage at various points along the trail that winds through the Oconto Marsh has been selected to receive an AARP Wisconsin “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant.

The \$1,000 grant will enable the Oconto County Economic Development Corporation to purchase materials and supplies needed to launch the project, such as sign posts, signs, informational brochures, and related items. Up to 20 signs will provide visitors with information about the local plants and wildlife they will see from the walkways, bridges and viewing platforms along the mile-long trail in the 928-acre marsh.

Funds could also be used to hire professional help to design and install the signage and further publicize the project so that more people can be made aware of the importance of the Oconto Marsh and its significance to our area, said Samantha Boucher, tourism director for the corporation.

“We are beyond excited for this project to lift off and want to thank AARP for making it happen,” Boucher said. “Our goal is to enhance the Oconto Marsh and provide interpretive signage along the trails to help people gain a greater appreciation for nature and the wildlife they may encounter.”

AARP Wisconsin is awarding grants each month throughout 2023 to projects across the state that are designed to improve communities and make them better places for everyone to live, work and play as they age. Judges selected this project after reviewing dozens of proposals submitted from all over the state.

“We love it when communities apply what they learned from AARP resources in developing their projects,” said Darrin Wasniewski, Associate State Director of Community Outreach for AARP Wisconsin. “We look forward to seeing how insights garnered through AARP’s Parks and Public Spaces Collection result in implementations to enhance Oconto Marsh for all ages, especially its 50-plus visitors.”

The Oconto County Economic Development Corporation is a non-profit organization that was created to address economic development and tourism promotion in Oconto County. Currently, its funding is made possible through the proactive efforts of the Oconto County Board.

Boucher said planning of the marsh signage involved extensive community input. A group of volunteers representing various stakeholders was formed to coordinate the project and gather comments from the public, collaborate with local artists, and consult with experts to create interpretive displays that accurately represented the history and ecology of the marsh.

“The interpretive signage was designed to be accessible and engaging to all ages, with various ways to explore the marsh and connect with the natural history of the area,” she said.

The signage will include information about the importance of the marsh to wildlife, the flora and fauna found in the area, and how humans have impacted the marsh over time. It will also include interactive elements such as a map, audio recordings, and a self-guided tour, allowing visitors to learn more about the marsh in an engaging way.

The signage will provide an opportunity to engage in outdoor activities such as bird watching, nature photography, and nature walks. “It will also help to promote a sense of pride and ownership in the local environment, which can be beneficial for the health and well-being of the 50-plus community,” Boucher said.

Initial plans are to install 15 to 20 signs throughout the marsh by the end of June, but more funding is needed to complete the project. Anyone interested in donating funds to the project may call 920-834-6969 or email Boucher directly at tourism@ocontocounty.org

AARP Wisconsin’s launched its “Small Dollar, Big Impact” grant program in 2020 and is now in its fourth year of helping proposed projects move forward in rural and urban parts of the state.

“These grants are exactly what the name describes – short-term, low-cost solutions that could have a remarkable impact on the shaping of local communities,” Wasniewski said. “This project hits the nail right on the head.

The Small Dollar, Big Impact grant program is open to some nonprofits and government entities. For more information on the program, visit www.aarp.org/WIsdbi

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