



BIRD CITY WISCONSIN: Making our communities healthy for birds ... and people

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Bird City Wisconsin celebrates recognition of Milwaukee as its 60th Bird City community

With Certification of 6 More Communities, 4 of 5 Largest Wisconsin Cities and the State's Most Populous Village Vow to Take Action to Benefit Birds

Bayside, Wis. – The City of Milwaukee has become the largest community to win recognition from Bird City Wisconsin (<http://www.birdcitywisconsin.org/>). The announcement today of recognition for six additional “Bird City” communities brings Bird City Wisconsin’s ranks statewide to 60. Each Bird City has been saluted for its long-term commitment to working with residents to make their neighborhoods a better place for people, birds and other wildlife.

The newest group of communities, joining the Bird City ranks just two years after its inaugural certifications were awarded, testifies to the diversity and scope of this conservation undertaking. The communities recognized today include the cities of Milwaukee, Marinette and Algoma, along with the village of Menomonee Falls and the towns of Spring Green and Three Lakes.

With recognition of Milwaukee, Bird City has now certified four of the state’s five largest communities. And with Menomonee Falls, it has attracted the state’s most populous village, while also embracing a wide range of other cities, villages, towns and counties in every corner of the state.

Modeled on the “Tree City USA” program, Bird City Wisconsin has developed 22 conservation criteria across five categories. If a community meets at least seven criteria, it becomes an official Bird City. In its effort, Bird City has recruited both public officials and interested citizens who belong to Audubon groups, nature preserves, bird clubs, natural history museums, conservation organizations and agencies, garden clubs, eco-minded businesses, and chambers of commerce that can be effective partners for developing and implementing Bird City strategies.

Here is how that played out in these six new communities:

- **Milwaukee:** Application for recognition was spearheaded by the Urban Ecology Center and Ald. Nik Kovac, while also involving the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Wisconsin Humane Society, Milwaukee River Greenway and the Milwaukee County Zoological Gardens.
- **Marinette:** Chappée Rapids Audubon Society led the way.
- **Menomonee Falls:** City engineering technician Nancy Greifenhagen led the effort.
- **Algoma:** Private citizen Cathy Pabich organized a local BCW committee to address the required criteria.
- **Three Lakes:** Bill Lamon, a member of town’s Natural and Cultural Resources Committee, was inspired to seek recognition after attending a public meeting organized by BCW and the WDNR in nearby Rhineland.
- **Spring Green:** DNR wildlife biologists helped assemble a committee that saw the Ferry Bluff Eagle Council, Friends of the Lower Wisconsin, The Nature Conservancy and the Spring Green Area Chamber of Commerce partner to win recognition.



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Seed funding for the Bird City Wisconsin program was provided by the National Audubon Society and Toyota through TogetherGreen Innovation Grants. Melissa Hopkins, director of Together Green for the National Audubon Society, stated, "The efforts of Wisconsin conservation groups are proving that this is a model program worthy of replication at the national scale."

Environment for the Americas, which coordinates International Migratory Bird Day events across two continents, has said of Bird City Wisconsin: "One of the requirements to become a Bird City is hosting an IMBD event. In just two years, the state has become a leader in promoting bird conservation actions and community education."

Schwartz said he had fielded inquiries already from conservation groups in five other states interested in launching a similar program. He attributed the interest to BCW's results. Participation has led to:

- Improved habitat conditions for breeding and migrating birds.
- Sound management of urban forests.
- Reductions in bird fatalities caused by domestic cats allowed to roam outdoors, and by window strikes.
- Improved public understanding and appreciation of birds and their needs.
- Broad recognition of International Migratory Bird Day and the annual life-cycle of neo-tropical migrant birds.
- Active and coordinated engagement in conservation activities.
- A strong sense of community pride in its conservation accomplishments and ethic.

Noel Cutright, Bird City Wisconsin Steering Committee member and founder of the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory, said: "Most people probably don't celebrate when they reach 60, but for Bird City Wisconsin, being able to recognize 60 communities that are working to protect birds is a real achievement made in a short period of time. Let's celebrate birds and the importance of partnerships in bird conservation efforts."

Kent Hall, another steering committee member and vice president of the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin, adds: "The Bird City Wisconsin initiative has done more to awaken municipal officials to the importance of bird conservation than any program I have been associated with in my 44 years in Wisconsin."

Bird City communities each receive a special Bird City Wisconsin flag, plaque and street signs to be erected at their boundaries, marking their conservation achievements.

Schwartz said Bird City accepts applications for initial certification three times each year. The next deadline is March 1, 2013. Efforts to earn Bird City status are under way in dozens of additional communities. Recognition is renewable annually with certification valid from April 1 to March 31.

With funding from Toyota and National Audubon, Bird City Wisconsin was launched in 2009 by a group of state conservation organizations led by the Milwaukee Audubon Society. Current financial support is coming from the Bird Protection Fund of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin. Other partners include the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, the Wisconsin Audubon Council, Aldo Leopold Audubon, Madison Audubon, Ozaukee County, the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin and the Riveredge Bird Club.

Schwartz said the Bird City project was using its web site, www.birdcitywisconsin.org, to guide communities through the application process. The site includes how-to details on implementing new conservation strategies. It also features details on how each of its current communities earned their recognition, providing tips for those who will follow. ###