

No Mow May

Impact Report



Impact Metrics

What is No Mow May (NMM)?

NMM is a community initiative encouraging property owners to limit mowing during May. This provides more foraging resources for pollinators at a vital time, especially in urban landscapes when few floral resources are available. With more resources available for pollinators, there is an increase in bee abundance and diversity. Mowing less can also lower water usage, reduce emissions & noise from gas powered lawn equipment.

342 Total Registrations (Residential, Condo Association, City-owned parks, Sun Prairie Area School District properties).

269 Residential Properties displayed on the participant map.

Strategies included (1) **not mowing in May**, (2) **not mowing several weeks**, (3) **mowing the front yard only**, (4) **mowing every other week**, (5) **mowing with a higher deck setting**. Most participants (228/342) opted for the full month "Now Mow May" approach.

Facebook: Reached **18,564 people**, **3,164** post engagements: **500** reactions, **156** comments, **113** shares.

LinkedIn: **1,081** impressions on LinkedIn with **795** unique impressions and **95** total engagements: **48** clicks, **40** reactions, **3** comments, and **4** shares.

165 Total Acres of Pollinator Foraging Resources Conserved

[No Mow May 2022 Registration Form](#)
[Link](#)

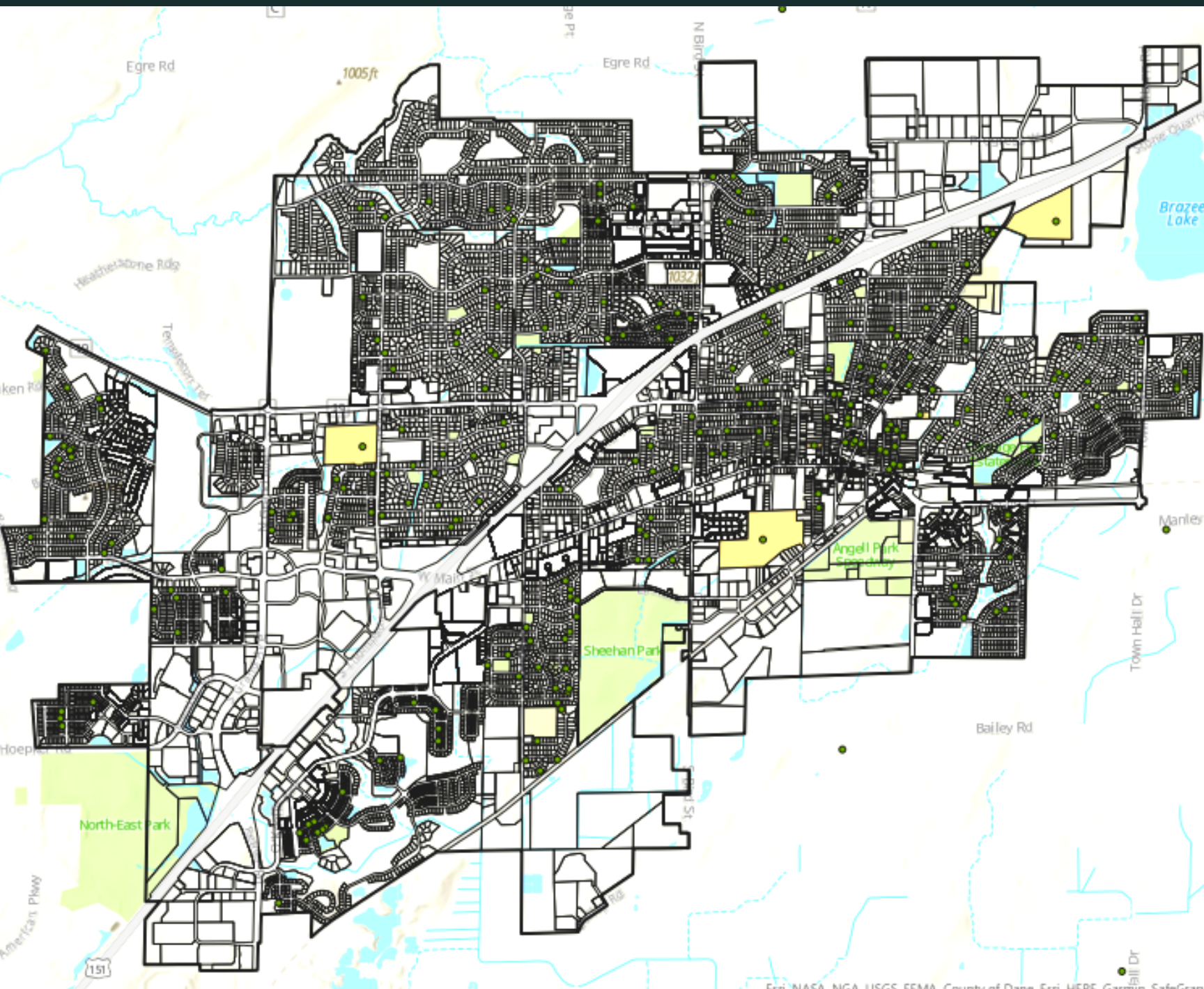
Lawn Care Practices During May	Responses
I may mow the front yard, depending on how it looks, but will leave my back yard alone	19
I will continue to mow regularly, but with a higher deck height setting to preserve cover	3
I will reduce mowing frequency to every other week	10
I will try not to mow my lawn at all during the entire month of May	228
I will wait to mow until I can't stand it any longer, hopefully a few weeks into May	78
Other	4
Grand Total	342

Participant Map



Sun Prairie would like to acknowledge the city departments, community stakeholders, and City Council that supported this project.

Impact Report Design Credit: Allie Isaak



Community Feedback



In general, feedback for this initiative was overwhelmingly positive. There were many appreciations, questions, clarifications, along with concerns & complaints. Participants provided suggestions, observations, & requested additional educational materials. Additional information was received from Building Inspection + Parks, Recreation, & Forestry Departments, which worked in coordination to provide residents information & address concerns. The community is also encouraged to submit feedback with the survey link included on this page.

[Community Feedback Survey Link](#)



Summarized Comments

Sun Prairie child, "I see a field full of wishes" (N = 1)

Great idea / well done / thank you (N = 30+)

Appreciation of helping pollinators (N = 5)

Wishing to learn more about native species to plant in yard (N = 6)

Concerns over neighbor's lawn height, dandelions going to seed, grass discharge into street, enforcement resuming 6/1; (inquiries came to several staff, estimated (N = 10, Building Inspection complaints N = 7)

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the difference between a weed, noxious weed, & an invasive species?



A. **Definition of a weed** – To identify a plant as a “weed” is a common act. It is an interchangeable term used by many, often referring to a plant growing where it is not wanted and/or in competition with cultivated plants. It is also a term often used when the identity of a plant is unknown. Ecologically, a weed is used to describe a plant that has certain characteristics that allow it to successfully colonize disturbed areas.

i. A weed can also be identified as a noxious weed and/or an invasive species, but not always.

ii. Resource: [Introduction to Weeds: What are Weeds and Why do we Care? \(psu.edu\)](https://psu.edu/)

B. **Definition of a noxious weed** – A noxious weed is a term used to identify a plant that is designated by federal, state, or local governments as hazardous to public health, agriculture, recreation, wildlife, or property. Once a weed is classified as a “noxious weed” authorities can implement actions to contain or destroy the weed and limit its spread. More specifically, a “noxious weed” is a legal term defined in the Plant Protection Act (Public Law 106-224) which states that a “noxious weed” is any plant or plant product that can directly or indirectly injure or cause damage to crops, nursery stock, other plant products, livestock or poultry, or other interests of agriculture, irrigation, navigation, natural resources, public health, or the environment.

i. A noxious weed can also be an invasive species, but not always.

ii. Resource: [Title 8 - HEALTH AND SAFETY | Code of Ordinances | Sun Prairie, WI](#) | [Municode Library](#)

C. **Definition of an invasive species** – As identified by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, invasive species are non-native plants, animals, and pathogens whose introduction causes, or is likely to cause, economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. They can disrupt and alter ecosystem structure and function by displacing native species.

i. An invasive plant can be native or non-native. The term “invasive” is an adjective that is used to describe a plant that has certain characteristics that allow it to successfully outcompete other plants. These characteristics align with those for weeds (rapid seed germination, rapid growth, nutrient uptake, prolific seed production and dispersal, the ability to adapt and persist in various environmental conditions, high tolerance to stresses, etc.).

1. For example, box elder (*Acer negundo*) has invasive characteristics, but it is native to Wisconsin; therefore, it is not listed as an invasive species in NR 40 (the Administrative Code that regulates and identifies prohibited and restricted invasive species in Wisconsin). Conversely, garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) is a non-native invasive species and is listed as a restricted species in NR 40. The key distinguisher here is if the plant is native or non-native to local ecosystems.

ii. An invasive species can also be identified as a noxious weed, but not always.

iii. Resource: [WDNR Invasive Species Rule NR 40](#)

D. **In Summary**, these terms [weeds, noxious weeds, and invasive species] used to describe or classify specific plant species are commonly used interchangeably; however, they all have specific definitions as well as different ecological and economic implications. To describe a plant as a “weed” is a subjective action that doesn’t necessarily mean the plant will have a negative impact. An example of this is a dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*). It is common in American culture to identify a dandelion as a weed. However, it is important to note that dandelions are not considered a noxious weed nor are they listed as an invasive species in NR 40. In fact, many people purposely allow or even cultivate dandelions on their property for medicinal and/or consumption purposes.

Frequently Asked Questions

Continued



Q: Are Dandelions Weeds?

A: During the 2022 No Mow May initiative, as well as throughout the year, city staff received comments from residents regarding dandelions on public and private properties. Comments received were both positive (e.g., when seeing a bunch of dandelions "...I see a field full of wishes...") and negative. As stated above, it is important to know the ecology of dandelions so that one can understand its potential economic and ecological impact prior to labeling it as something that should be regulated.

1. A dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) is an introduced, cool-season, perennial, herbaceous plant of Eurasian origin that has become naturalized throughout the United States. One flower head can contain between 100-300 ray flowers and for each flower that is successfully pollinated, a seed is then topped by a parachute of bristles that aid in wind dissemination of the seeds. Individual dandelion plants can persist for over 10 years; however, their seed does not remain viable in the soil for long (less than 5 years). Dandelions meet the nutritional requirements for many species of livestock, wildlife, and pollinators, and it is often sought after by these species. While dandelions are a common site in lawns and disturbed areas, it is considered a **low ecological threat** and provides **no real damage** to ecosystems. The main negative aspect of dandelions is the difficulty in exterminating them from yards or places where people do not want the plant to grow. Those that choose to control dandelions, often do so for aesthetic purposes.

2. More specifically, it is extremely difficult to prevent seed dispersal by dandelions through mowing. As mentioned above, dandelions can bloom multiple times a growing season, and even if one is able to mow their lawn at the precise timing (after flowering and before seeding) to prevent seed dispersal, the plant can respond by sending up another flowering stalk that blooms at a height below the lowest setting of a mower deck and subsequently produce and disseminate seed. Eradicating dandelions from an area is often done through the proper use of selected herbicides as well as minimizing the amount of exposed soil for seeds to colonize.

3. Resource: [University of California – Integrated Pest Management](#)

Q: Who participated in No Mow May 2022?

1 Registration, 6 Properties - City Parks, Recreation, Forestry

- Recycle Center
- Wyndham Hills Park areas under trees
- Shonas Park, N. access along Stonehaven Dr.
- Sheehan Park sledding hill only
- 3ft buffer along bike paths
- Area between Library & Community Garden
- Valley Park playground area mowed, all other greenspace left unmowed

3 Properties Sun Prairie Area School District

- Cardinal Heights Upper Middle School (CHUMS)
- Patrick Marsh Middle School
- Prairie View Middle School



338 Residential Properties,
of which **269** opted-in for
the participant map

Frequently Asked Questions

Continued



Q: Why didn't more city properties participate in No Mow May?

A: While the city couldn't participate with all properties (there are a variety of reasons including ordinances that require maintenance of public spaces such as right of ways, recreational uses for properties and many parks that require mowing, and several city staff/external vendors that conduct a variety of maintenance assignments, including mowing). The School District had similar considerations. With this being year one of our pilot the city included as many of these properties as was feasible.

Q: How do I participate most effectively in No Mow May? What are the general guidelines for year-round lawncare maintenance?

A: The intent of this initiative was to increase awareness of the importance of early season foraging resources for pollinators and empower residents to implement flexible lawn care practices that encourage (or prevent removal of) foraging resources for pollinator species during a crucial time of year. With any such initiative there are tradeoffs, and by mowing less frequently these foraging resources are more available for pollinators during a critical season for foraging. In general, year-round adhere to city ordinance which currently sets a maximum yard length of 8" in height (find the full ordinance in the "Additional Resources & Readings" section below). During No Mow May, the enforcement of this ordinance was suspended to provide flexibility in lawncare practices. The city also has a natural lawn permit available, which in 2022 is currently being updated. Properties that have an approved permit and natural lawn management plan may allow grass height to exceed 8". The provided resources provide guidance and education on how best to manage lawns depending on your goals.

Q: Do I have to go all month without mowing?

A: **No!** There are many options to participate, with balance and flexibility being the key considerations. With the significant challenges pollinator species face, any amount of increased habitat and foraging resources is beneficial. Participants had many options to participate, and for some a "**Low Mow May**" or more infrequent mowing option is the preferred choice. Each strategy will be unique to your property and your own lawn care goals. It is important to understand that what may work for one person, may not work for another. Any increase in foraging habitat for pollinators should be considered a successful implementation of beneficial and sustainable lawn care practices.

Q: What options are available for replacing pesticides, herbicides, or other chemical appliances?

A: The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) provides several resources and suggestions on this topic; Pests come in a variety of forms: weeds, insects, animals, molds, and fungi to name a few. The need to control outdoor pests varies. Having some weeds in your garden or some grubs in your lawn may be tolerable. However, certain pests present serious threats in some years. Some pests can damage human and animal health, such as mosquitoes that carry diseases. Pesticides provide relief from many pests, but they are not the only solution to pest problems. See [Lawn and Garden](#) | [US EPA](#) linked and below for more information.

Frequently Asked Questions

Continued



Q: What similar efforts are going on in the community to promote green infrastructure and biodiversity?

A: The city has been reviewing strategies outlined in the Sustainability Taskforce Final Report to implement the recommendations. Several examples include establishing a tree replacement fund, a tree preservation ordinance, becoming a Bee City USA and Tree City USA (which come with several commitments to actionable projects).

b. Reviewing applicable ordinances related to natural lawns, terrace plantings, native landscaping, and raingardens for residential properties to provide clear guidance, education, and resources.

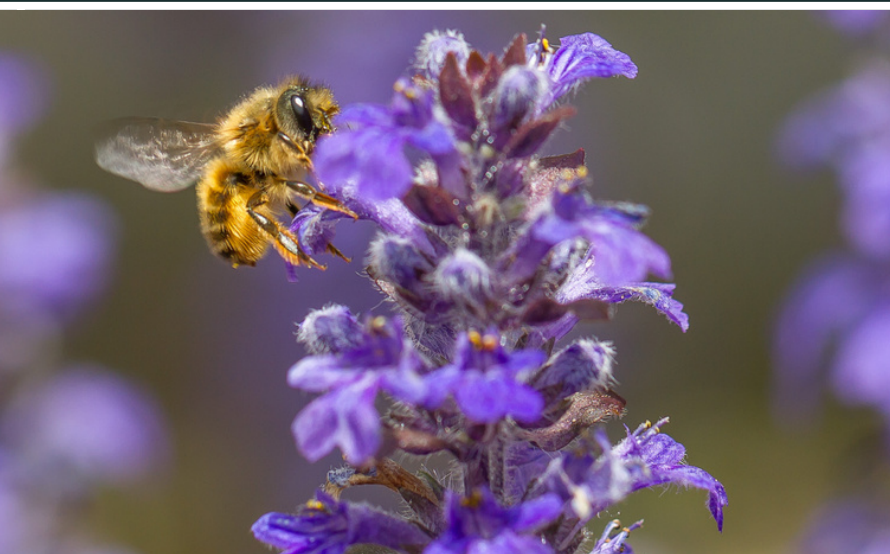
c. Ongoing education of the community and reviewing city operations projects for opportunities to conserve green infrastructure and biodiversity. For specific examples, see also the city's Parks, Recreation, and Forestry webpage.

Q: What about allergies, ticks, or other potential concerns related to No Mow May?

A: While these topics are reasonable concerns, currently there is **no data available indicating that No Mow May activities result in an increased prevalence of pollen or ticks**. These considerations are important to monitor as green infrastructure initiatives are undertaken, so as to minimize any potential unintended negative consequences.

b. Per the Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America (AAFA), there are three types of Pollen Allergies; Tree, Grass, and Weed. Most grasses are wind pollinated, and although **there is Pollen Count and Air Quality Index data available through many weather services, there are a variety of factors that have a far more significant effect on these metrics**.

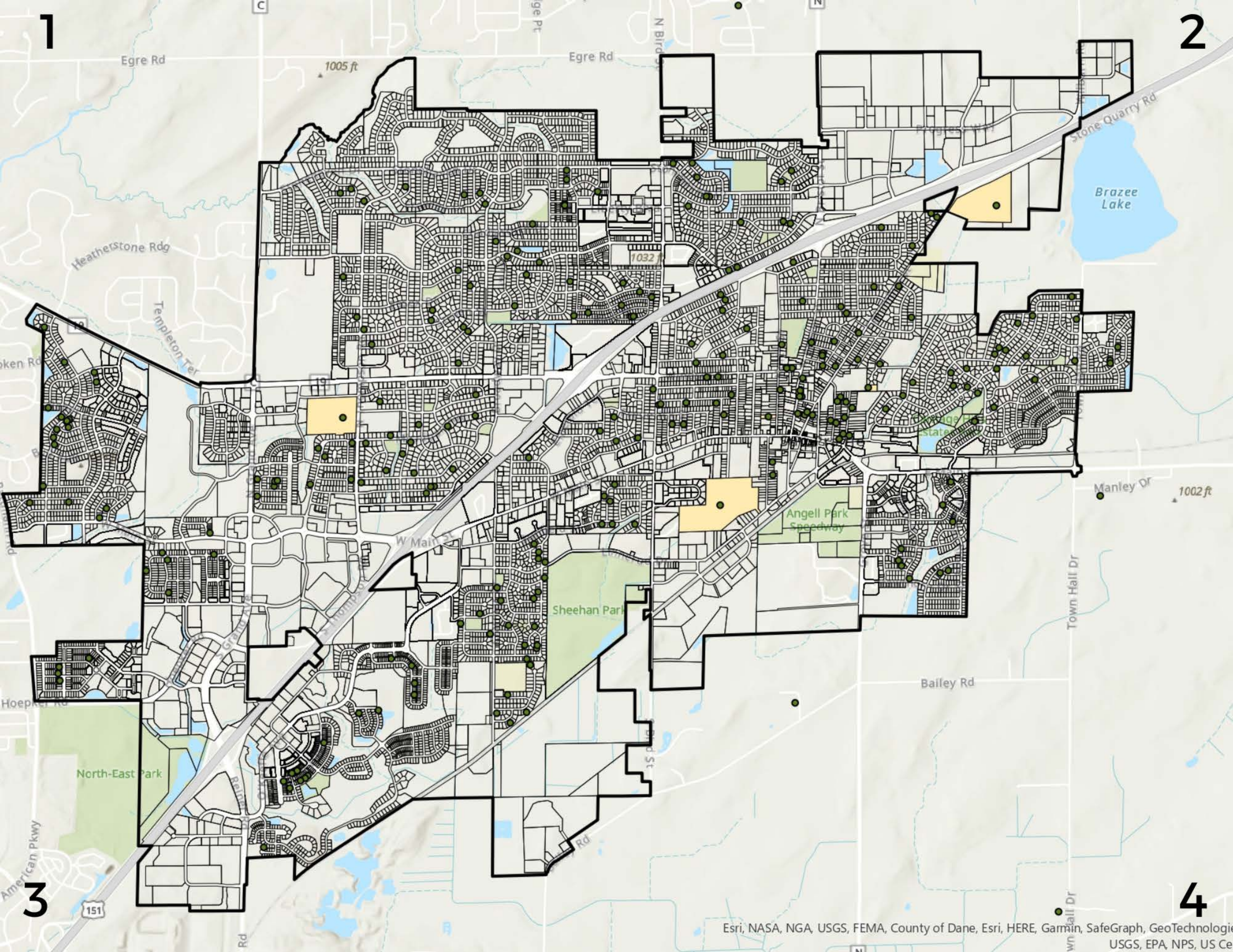
c. Per the WI Department of Health Services; There are many ways to prevent tick bites when spending time where ticks may live, including doing daily tick checks, showering within two hours after being outdoors, using insect repellent, and wearing long sleeves and pants to prevent ticks from getting on you.



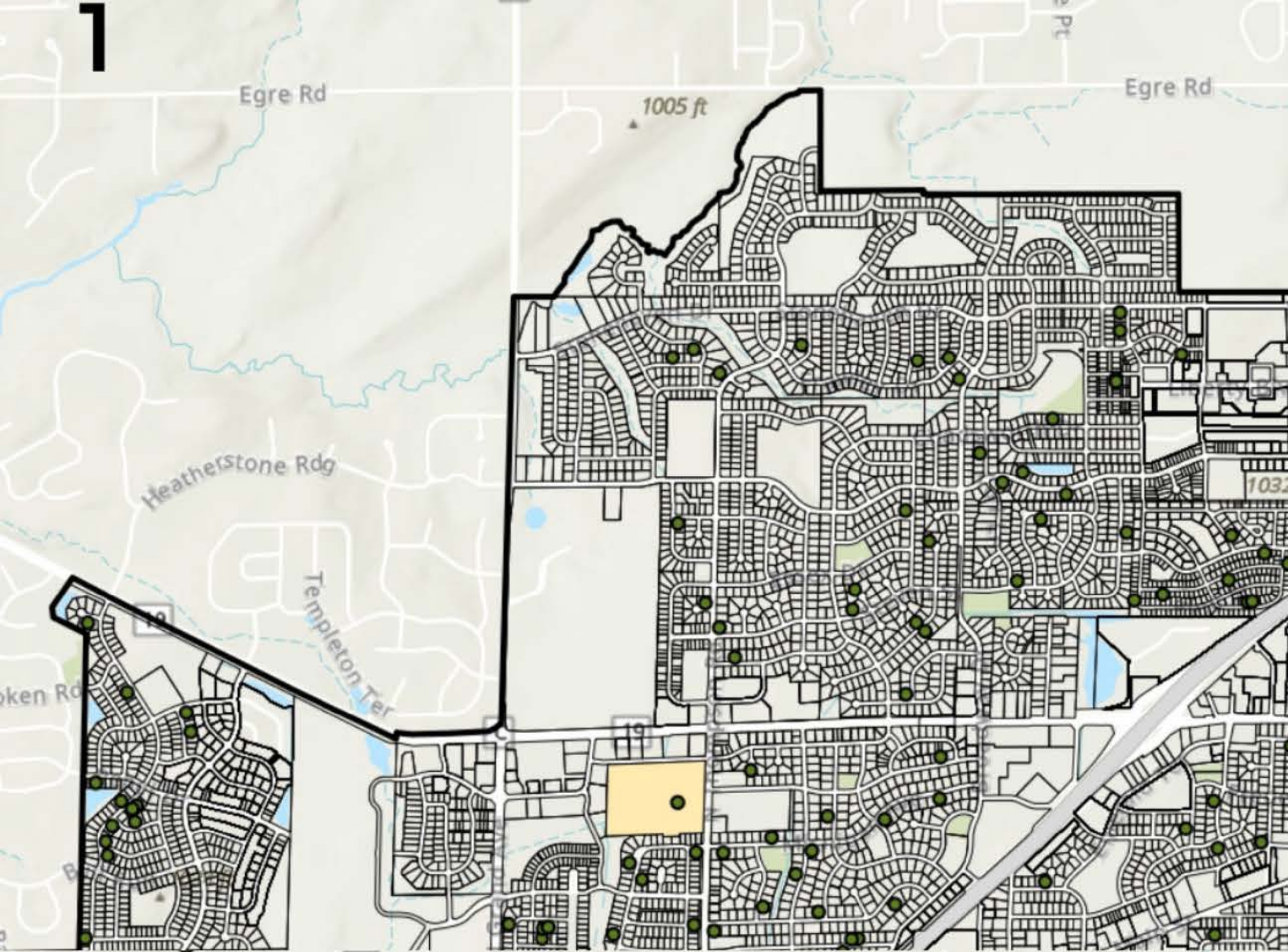
Additional Resources & Readings

1. [Scientific American – The American Obsession with Lawns](#)
2. [The Atlantic – The Life and Death of the American Lawn](#)
3. [USDA Forest Service – The American lawn revisited: awareness education and culture as public policies toward sustainable lawn](#)
4. [The New York Times – The Great American Lawn: How the Dream was Manufactured](#)
5. [History.Com - How the Perfect Lawn Became a Symbol of the American Dream](#)
6. [Lawns – Wisconsin Horticulture](#)
7. [No Mow May lawns have higher pollinator richness and abundances: An engaged community provides floral resources for pollinators \(semanticscholar.org\)](#)
8. [To mow or to mow less: Lawn mowing frequency affects bee abundance and diversity in suburban yards \(fs.fed.us\)](#)
9. [WPR: What you need to know about No Mow May](#)
10. [Modeling the status, trends, and impacts of wild bee abundance in the United States](#)
11. [United Nations World Bee Day](#)
12. [Michigan Pollinator Initiative - MSU](#)
13. [How Mower Height Affects Lawn Health \(thespruce.com\)](#)
14. [What to do with lawn clippings | UMN Extension](#)
15. [Title 8 - HEALTH AND SAFETY | Code of Ordinances | Sun Prairie, WI | Municode Library \(Noxious Weeds\)](#)
16. [Title 8 - HEALTH AND SAFETY | Code of Ordinances | Sun Prairie, WI | Municode Library \(Natural Lawns\)](#)
17. [Lawn and Garden | US EPA](#)
18. [Pollen Allergies | AAFA.org](#)
19. [Tick Safety Guide \(wisconsin.gov\)](#)
20. [Ticks in Wisconsin: What You Need to Know | Wisconsin Department of Health Services](#)





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