

# The Door County Environmental Council News



September 2019



“Fostering the preservation of Door County’s rich heritage of natural resources for the health, welfare, and spiritual uplift not only of its inhabitants, but of generations to come.”

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## The Concept of Tourism Capacity in Door County

You’ve seen and heard it numerous times over the years: beaches closed, traffic backed up the hill entering Sister Bay, no place to park, and the continuing call for more workers and affordable housing.

Such experiences are not isolated. Crowds of cell phone photographers in Fish Creek, Ephraim, and Sister Bay causing traffic slowdowns, “where-to-park?” parking problems, and trampling on public and private property, all to get the “perfect” sunset photo.

This phenomenon is known as “mass tourism,” and like the many festivals in Door County, suddenly mass tourism is everywhere. A combination of economic factors and business trends has led to more visitors crowding onto the Door Peninsula. The relatively recent, large increase in

the number of visitors to Door County is straining our environment, producing dangerous traffic conditions, overloading our infrastructure, and creating economic hardships by “pricing-out” local residents in many places. Rental companies and properties have increased the supply of rentable rooms throughout the peninsula, increasing lodging capacity and bumping up rents for existing residents. So goodbye affordable housing, even if it ever existed in Door County.



*Sister Bay*

*Photo by Mike Bahrke*

Not only are business trends contributing to turning paradise into paradise lost, social media is at work as well, with Instagram and Facebook pages and groups leading tourists

to clog vital roadways in search of the perfect photo, and sites such as TripAdvisor, Yelp, and Google making restaurants, hotels, beaches, lighthouses, and parks more

“discoverable” and thus “ruinable.” Local Door County residents have complained about tourists for decades, and the tourists have frequently disrespected, thronged to, and damaged the natural beauty of the peninsula for as long as tourists have been visiting Door County.

All of this has local residents around the peninsula asking, “Are we loving Door County to death?”

### *Our Resources Are Finite*

Most would agree that our resources here in Door County are finite. Our air, groundwater, surface water, capacity to handle human waste, providing adequate and safe parking, maintaining and improving our roads, among others, are finite. We cannot just keep increasing the number of visitors every year by leaps and bounds. But how much is enough? While we want tourism-related businesses to do well, perhaps it’s time to discourage the new business boom, at least in northern Door County? Is everything about a quick buck for today with no thought of the future?

### *The Great Door County Balancing Act*

Door County is now one of the Midwest’s premier tourism destinations, attracting around 2 million visitors per year. In 2017, visitor spending in Door County increased by \$10.9 million, or 3.14% over 2016. Since 2009, visitor spending is up 39.5%, an increase of \$101.6 million over 9 years. In 2017, state and local tax revenue generated by visitor spending in Door County increased by \$1.1 million, or 2.95% over 2016. Mass tourism is a new thing and a very big thing.

Tourism, as we now know it in Door County,

was much more limited until recently as commercial mass tourism has been encouraged and developed. Mass tourism is the traffic jams, the lack of parking, the trampling of fragile natural habitats, and the traffic accidents, among others. Fish Creek, Ephraim, and Sister Bay accommodate only so many people, and summertime now seems like a test to find out just how many that is. Where is the tipping point?

### *What is Our Door County Tourism Capacity?*

Perhaps it’s time to begin thinking about the concept of capacity in Door County? This will be a very unpopular idea to many people as new businesses, of course, need new customers, or they draw from existing businesses. What responsibility does the Door County Visitors Bureau bear? Perhaps rather than using the room tax to promote only increased tourism, part of the tax should be used to reduce or redirect tourists to a given location and provide these locations with revenue to improve infrastructure and repair the damage that tourists inevitably cause. Perhaps the county, towns, and villages should better regulate tourism rather than just promote it. These regulations stand to become even more important in the future as travel becomes even more popular and affordable for more people.

Mass tourism itself is a media phenomenon that became apparent in 2017 with wall-to-wall coverage of the problems in Venice, Amsterdam, Colorado, and elsewhere, helping to drive backlash against tourists as well as blowback to the blowback.

As for the blowback to the blowback, some concerns about mass tourism may be overblown and many local complaints about visitors may not be valid. While many tourist destinations such as Orlando and Las Vegas

may have no problem with the number of visitors they receive, Door County is not Disney World nor the Vegas Strip. However, travelers and their investment remain vital to the Door County economy. And while many areas in Door County are not overcrowded, the problem is mostly one of villages, parks, beaches, and roads being overwhelmed. What to do?

Our concern about too many people wanting to visit Door County may draw complaints from some, but inevitably increased tourism will mean more complaints from local residents, more environmental damage, more and longer lines, increased cost of living, and more bad behavior. Do we keep bringing in more people until we have gridlock and permanently impair or destroy our environment? Do we just keep increasing the number of tourists until people have a lousy time here, and decide not to return? Where are the jobs and money then? The long-term money is in protecting our environment and the natural wonder of Door County.

This is not about being anti-business, but rather this is a call for long-term balance and quality of life for all. Yes, increased tourism also means more investment and greater exposure to the beauty of Door County, but do we really need another restaurant or campground? This is a matter of capacity and balance, especially with new Door County businesses.

Is there too much of a good thing in Door County and are we loving the Door County peninsula to death? Maybe it's time to do something about it.

*By Mike Bahrke*

*Resources:  
Door County Visitor Bureau, Wikipedia, Condé Nast Traveler, The Atlantic, CNN.*

## Implications of Ecotourism

**T**ourism is a major factor of the life, economy, and challenges of Door County. Let's explore what transmutation from the current state of tourism to ecotourism might look like and how it might come about.

Statistics from the Door County Visitor Bureau show that the amount of money poured into the Door County economy continues to rise, as does the number of rooms available and the number of rooms occupied each year. This raises the obvious question: where does it end? The Door County Peninsula north of Sturgeon Bay is bounded by water, not geographically capable of infinite expansion. The geologic structure includes Niagara dolomite with karst physical structure, making protection of the groundwater a challenge. People come to Door County for the arts and crafts, cultural activities, beautiful parks and views, access to beaches and water sports, and to retire. But as the appetite for enticing more tourists to spend time in Door County seems to be insatiable, the available space to accommodate them increasingly encroaches upon what makes Door County an attractive destination in the first place. Meanwhile, highway expansion projects, while arguably make travel safer, seem oriented toward increasing the traffic to and from the peninsula. Already, employing and housing adequate support staff for businesses in Door County has become increasingly challenging, and of course bringing in more waitresses, housekeepers, groundskeepers, etc. adds to the human footprint on this finite peninsula.

According to the Door County Visitor Bureau, visitors spent some \$366.6 million in Door County in 2018 compared to \$257.1

million in 2009. And the county collected \$4,115,300 in taxes from goods and services compared to \$2,903,389 in 2009. State and local taxes generated revenue of \$38.8 million in 2018 and \$29.4 million on 2009. What these figures don't tell us is the cost to the state, county, and its communities to provide services to its residents and visitors as a result of this influx of people and vehicles over those periods and the net economic impact.

Human waste, including both organic and synthetic waste substances, can quickly threaten the surrounding environment by introducing foreign substances and chemicals to streams, rivers, soils, groundwater, and the air. As human populations grow, so too does the consumption of goods, and in turn, the generation of waste products rapidly multiplies. The increase in traffic poses its own environmental threats. At what point does attracting more people to the peninsula become self-destructive?

Some have suggested turning to ecotourism as a partial solution. "Overtourism does not result from ecotourism, and **the principles of those who extol increasing tourism revenue to a destination at any cost are completely antithetical to those of ecotourism.**"\* Overtourism—which in its simplest form is tourism that harms communities by overuse or destruction of resources through overcrowding—stems from a lack of concern about destination community health and welfare. Again, this is entirely the opposite of the fundamental tenet of ecotourism." (The International Ecotourism Society) (\*The emphasis is mine.)

Like the definition of ecotourism, the principles of ecotourism are not unanimously agreed upon by all who tout the concept. For the purposes of this article we use those listed

by Green Global Travel:

1. Build environmental and cultural awareness
2. Design and operate low-impact eco tours and facilities
3. Provide financial benefits for conservation
4. Provide financial benefits for local people
5. Support human rights, economic empowerment, and democratic movements in the area.

What would this look like in Door County? First let's recognize what we have. Door County "is home to five state parks, nineteen county parks, and a large number of local parks, nature preserves, and state natural areas for recreation" (Door County Visitors Bureau). We have performance arts, hands-on arts education, live music and concerts, art galleries and studios, arts and crafts, and several cultural venues. That's a good start, and preserving and enhancing those resources is key to embracing ecotourism as a goal.

**We build environmental and cultural awareness in at least two ways.** We involve the local schools by including nature awareness and ecological principles from an early age. We emphasize ecological principles and the history of our local culture with tour groups and visitors, and in our marketing we recognize some of our local families with generations of local history as resources. In addition to those ways, we can emphasize the contrasts between Door County and where the tourists come from. We can remind ourselves and our visitors that this must never become Wisconsin Dells. We can ensure that development near our International Dark Sky Park at Newport doesn't impair the dark skies and lose its designation. We can work to abolish the

practice of placing bright lights below flag poles so that we can leave flags up all night, wasting electricity and money and impairing the dark skies at night which separate us from urban areas, and educate our neighbors and visitors on the rationale.

We build environmental awareness by having well-labeled recycling and waste containers in convenient locations, which is far more effective than “Recycle, Don’t Pollute” signs. We approach tourists in ways that directs them to buy into a culture of respect for the environment and appreciate that part of the environment which is uniquely Door County.

**We design and operate low-impact eco tours and facilities.** Good examples are the Ridges Sanctuary and the Crossroads at Big Creek in terms of facilities providing these activities. Trails and activities for those with impaired vision can be expanded. Providing eco tours needs work.

**Providing financial benefits for conservation:** “The idea of using the revenue generated by ecotourism to help fund the conservation of nature and wildlife is not a new idea. In fact, it dates back more than 100 years, to the creation of the US National Parks Service.” (Green Global Travel) Proponents of ecotourism maintain that people come for different reasons, stay longer, and make a positive impact on the economy in ways different from those who come to shop, take scenic drives, and leave. Birders, photographers, landscape artists interact with nature and the resident population in ways that are more constructive than tourists that come for different goals.

**Providing financial benefits for local people:** Policies that result in the cost of

living in Door County increasing to the point that local families move out because they can’t afford to live here anymore and not being able to afford to house needed employees must be avoided. “True ecotourism MUST provide financial benefits to local people, whether through direct (tours, admission fees, and donations) or indirect means (such as taxes on travel or accommodation). It generally works best when there is smaller scale, slower growth, and greater involvement by local communities in all steps of the tourism development process.” (Green Global Travel)

**Support human rights:** Although there’s no argument here, this principle applies especially where indigenous populations face the exploitation of their cultures for the financial gains of others and doesn’t specifically apply to Door County, although there was a time that Chief Oshkosh was living and operating his Egg Harbor location and a tourist was heard to say, “Where’s the Indian? He’s not an Indian, he’s white. I want to see the Indian!”

Can ecotourism save Door County from its own success? It’s a worthwhile discussion and consideration.

*By John Beck*

### **Please Send Us Your Current Email Address**

Our true DCEC strength lies in the good communication and involvement of our members. We are updating our email list and need your current address. Please send an email to [contact@dcec-wi.org](mailto:contact@dcec-wi.org). Your information is confidential and won’t be shared with any other entity.

## **“Forever” Chemicals Found in the Bay of Green Bay**

I was recently saddened to learn that two types of perfluorinated chemicals, collectively and commonly known as PFAS, have been detected in waters offshore in the bay of Green Bay. They have also been found in drinking water in Madison and in the Marinette area. These contaminants are sometimes called “forever” chemicals because of their ability to persist in the environment for very long periods of time.

In the case of Marinette, leftover sludge from Johnson Controls International’s Tyco Fire Products subsidiary was spread on more than 3,500 acres of farm land between 1996 and 2017. Sadly, it seems that Johnson Controls and its Tyco unit have known since 2013 that they were polluting area wells. Four years passed before neighboring properties were notified. Although Marinette officials had previously detected the chemicals in city sludge, the chemicals had already contaminated surface water and seeped into groundwater. Of course, groundwater percolates into the underlying aquifer from which surrounding neighbors draw their drinking water. So some neighbors were ingesting PFAS.

Tyco’s firefighting foams contain PFAS, which are key ingredients in smothering fires, particularly those involving petroleum that can occur at airports and military installations. PFAS have also been used by many manufacturers in an array of other products, including nonstick pans and water-repellent clothing, underscoring the ubiquitous nature of the chemicals.

So, why the concern? Epidemiologically,

studies cited in a federal report published last year suggested that these PFAS compounds can lead to increased risk of pregnancy-induced hypertension, liver damage, thyroid disease, asthma, decreased fertility, cancers, and a decrease in response to vaccines.

In response to this human health hazard, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources recently asked 125 municipal wastewater treatment facilities to voluntarily begin testing for the presence of PFAS. The agency is asking operators of treatment plants to trace potential sources of contamination from this group of compounds that are under scrutiny. The Wisconsin DNR believes that by testing wastewater before and after it has been treated, the department can begin to trace the source of the chemicals.

DNR officials report that they do possess the legal authority to require responsible parties to clean up the PFAS contamination in the environment, such as those in the TYCO case. At the present time, however, the agency is asking wastewater treatment plants to do the testing voluntarily and to take steps to get rid of the pollutants during the waste water treatment process.

The Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewage District said it intends to conduct the testing. MMSD spokesman Bill Graffin says, “This is a national issue and we certainly will help the DNR as it searches for solutions to a very complex problem.”

Separately, the initiative follows a proposal by the Governor Tony Evers administration in June that would set strict standards for safe levels of PFAS in groundwater. But, unbelievably, the standards would not become enforceable until after completion

of a state rule-making process, including a review by the Republican-led Legislature, which could take up to 30 months! It seems a trade lobbying group, the Wisconsin Water Quality Coalition, has raised questions about the pending regulations and the potential financial impacts of what it views as “extremely restrictive” standards.

I guess to some people, money is more important than other people’s health.

*By Steve Eatough*

*This article was adapted from an article written by Lee Bergquist at the Milwaukee Journal/Sentinel Newspaper.*

## **Vortechs Stormwater Treatment Unit Installed at the Fish Creek Town Beach**

**Y**ou may have noticed a lot of activity and large machinery at the Fish Creek Town Beach on Friday, June 7. We’re excited to report the Vortechs Stormwater Treatment Unit was installed.

In the past, the Town Beach would have to close periodically due to poor water quality. In conjunction with the rest of the beach renovation project, the Town looked for a solution to improve the water quality and minimize beach closings. The Vortechs by Contech Engineered Solutions LLC provides that solution by offering a better way to treat the stormwater before it enters the bay.

Vortechs Stormwater Treatment Unit is

a hydrodynamic separator that combines swirl concentration and flow controls into a shallow treatment unit that traps and retains trash, debris, sediment, and hydrocarbons from stormwater runoff.

The Vortechs Unit works like this: once placed below ground, the unit’s combination of swirl concentration and flow controls capture and retain debris in the stormwater. First, the untreated stormwater enters the unit’s swirl chamber through an inlet pipe. The swirling motion of the water creates gravitational separation of any solids, which then settle on the chamber floor. The stormwater exits the swirl chamber where a baffle wall traps any floatables and hydrocarbons. Once filtered, the stormwater then flows under the baffle wall into the flow control chamber that contains separate controls for both peak- and low-intensity flows. Finally, the treated stormwater flows to the outlet chamber and exits via the outlet pipe into the bay, significantly cleaner than when it entered the unit.



*Vortechs Stormwater Treatment Unit*

You can watch a video of the Vortechs Unit at work at <https://www.conteches.com/stormwater-management/treatment/vortechs>.

The Town thanks The Palmer Foundation and Fund for Lake Michigan whose generous grants totaling \$150,000 helped fund the cost of the Vortechs Stormwater Treatment Unit.

*Article and photo posted by the Clerk of Gibraltar on the Town of Gibraltar Spotlight website: <https://gibraltarwi.gov/2019/06/11/vortechs-stormwater-treatment-unit-installed-at-the-beach/>.*

## Pebble Beach Saved!

**P**ebble Beach has been saved! But it almost wasn't. To the public's surprise last December, the property owners, the Luber and Downey Families, were seriously considering the sale and potential development of this 600 feet of rocky shoreline and 17 wooded acres. The news that the families were putting this iconic property on the market sent shockwaves through the community. Everyone, it seems, wanted to keep the property as it is and open it up to the public.

Over the years, the families had graciously allowed trespassers to use their private beach undisturbed. So why not just have the public simply buy it? The problem was that the asking price was \$3.6 million. That price was just too steep for a local municipality to consider purchasing for public use.

Luckily, the Door County Land Trust received a very well-timed telephone call from the Wisconsin Department of Administration. The Department wanted to know if the Land Trust had any projects that would correspond to the requirements of a Coastal Management Program's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Grant!

As fate would have it, a southern Wisconsin shoreline project had fallen through, and \$1 million could be made available for a project that fit the grant parameters. Although the possible grant was not by itself sufficient to buy the property, it did serve as a catalyst to bring the Village of Sister Bay and the Land Trust together in talks.

The Luber family then stepped up and offered

to lower the selling price of the property by a whopping \$1.2 million under the express condition that the land was to be protected from any future development. That price reduction brought the potential purchase price down to \$2.4 million. The Land Trust and the Village of Sister Bay then agreed to combine their efforts to accomplish the purchase. The Land Trust agreed to try raising, through private donations, the \$510,000 needed to complete the purchase and provide long term care and management of the property. The village committed to funding \$1 million of the purchase price. The village is hoping to recover their investment through reimbursement via a grant from Wisconsin's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. There is no guarantee, however, that the village will receive the grant.

So, the village is making a \$1 million gamble, but in my opinion, the reward is well worth the risk. Meanwhile, the Land Trust worked hard to raise the needed \$510,000 through donations. Amazingly, the Land Trust accomplished that task quickly, as many people who love Pebble Beach stepped up to donate. The money-raising success of the Land Trust should allow the deal to close in September.

When the deal is finalized, the Village of Sister Bay will own and manage the property. The Door County Land Trust will hold a conservation easement which will ensure that the property will remain in a natural state. The Land Trust will cooperate and work with

the village to preserve the native plants and the natural wildlife habit. This purchase and cooperative agreement will help protect a local treasure and help retain the magical ambiance of Door County's natural beauty.

*By Steve Eatough*



*Pebble Beach*

*Photo by Mike Bahrke*

## Expansion of Door Bluff Headlands County Park

The Door Peninsula is known for more than marathons and festivals. It's the nature and the serenity that most people adore. In March of this year, approximately 72 acres of serene nature became protected when the acreage was purchased by the County for an addition to Door Bluff Headlands Park north of Ellison Bay. The property was owned by the Hidding Family Trust Fund.

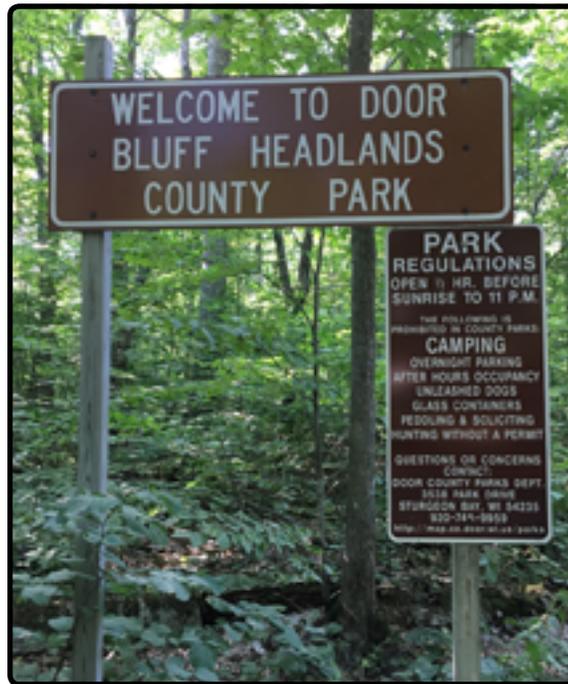
Not only does Door Bluff Headlands Park provide charming views of the bay, but it is also part of the Niagara Escarpment, a post glacial formation that remained after water levels declined millions of years ago. The escarpment was created during the Llandovery Period, 443.7 to 428.2 million years ago.

This era occurred at the beginning of the Silurian Period when much of the land was submerged under water known as the Silurian Sea. After many millions of years, the climate changed and the sea became small lakes, bays, and streams. Remnants of the sea remain, but only because the land has not been disturbed. Naturalists continue documenting the rare plants, fungi, and bacteria that exist within the area's limestone formations. B. BySura Njaa and Flora M. Langlois wrote and illustrated a poster for the Door County Environmental Council that depicts aquatic species alive during this time. (*When Door*

*County, Wisconsin Was a Tropical Coral Sea* is available from the DCEC.) In Wisconsin, the escarpment is a cliff running northeast, from Lake Winnebago through the Door Peninsula and extends over 1,000 miles into Canada. The escarpment can be seen at lookout points along Highway 42.

The Hidding property was acquired because it provides access to the water and adjoins Headlands Park. Included on the additional

land and Headland Park are 70-year-old hardwoods and conifers including sugar maple, American beech, white ash, basswood, hemlock, and red oak. To date, 46 species of birds, 92 species of flora, and 18 species of land snails have been identified in the park. In some areas the soil is less than an inch deep and dolomite bedrock juts out of the landscape. These ledges, crevices, and sink holes create an unfiltered path for



*Door Bluff Headlands County Park*  
*Photo by Mike Bahrke*

water. Exposed limestone formations on this property should be properly examined to determine if there are fossils such as cephalopods, brachiopods, crinoids, and various corals. The unusual features of this area are the primary reasons why this fragile ecosystem is now a protected park and should be documented and remain pristine.

Settlement history is also found in cliff drawings left behind by Native Americans who lived in the area around 1000-1499 CE. Also, just east of the park, and not far offshore, is the shipwreck of the schooner

Fleetwing. Many scuba divers have photographed the ship's ribs and keel in the shallow water.

To find this great getaway, take Highway 42 to Ellison Bay, then take Garrett Bay Road north for about 2 miles. Turn onto East Door Bluff Road and drive about 0.1 mile west. Take Door Bluff Park Road for about 0.5 miles. When you see the Headlands Park sign you are there! Primitive trails provide several hiking loops within the park.

Currently, there is no permanent center in Wisconsin dedicated to this unique escarpment and nature system. However, the Greater Escarpment Organization of Door County (GEO-DC), a nonprofit organization, is creating an escarpment interpretive center to display and educate visitors on the importance of this ecosystem. The GEO-DC began only five years ago, and much more work remains to be done. Private donations are being accepted at the organization's center at 11876 Hwy. 42, Ellison Bay. Consider donating today to establish a permanent center with artifacts and history for all to enjoy.

*By Renee McAllister*

*Sources:*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llandoverly\\_epoch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Llandoverly_epoch)

<https://onmilwaukee.com/visitors/articles/niagaraescarpment.html>

<https://www.geo-dc.org/>

<https://www.greenbaypressgazette.com/story/news/local/door-co/2018/12/20/door-bluff-headlands-county-park-expansion-unanimously-approved/2376017002>

<https://www.wpr.org/door-county-park-set-expand-more-70-acres>

## What Are Followers Following on the DCEC Facebook Page?

**W**ant to know what issues push the hot button for your fellow environmentalists? Here's a listing of some of the most popular DCEC Facebook Page posts during the past few weeks. And, if you would like more information on any of these topics, check out the DCEC Facebook Page at <https://www.facebook.com/DCwiEnvironmentalCouncil/>.

1. Great Lakes water levels at July record high levels.
2. EPA offers \$2 million for removing trash from Great Lakes shorelines.
3. Study: American White Pelican continues to expand across Great Lakes.
4. DNR positions will put priority on PFAS research near Marinette, Peshtigo.
5. Tony Evers targets polluted wells by pushing farmers to change their spreading practices.
6. Coke and Pepsi abandon the plastics lobby
7. Opinion: Why Line 5 must go, and what's being done to seek alternatives.
8. EPA approves bee-killing pesticide after U.S. quits tracking vanishing hives.
9. Has your doctor talked to you about climate change?
10. A call for more research on cancer's environmental triggers.



*Photo by Mike Bahrke*

## DCEC Leadership

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### U.S. Senator Ron Johnson

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### U.S. Representative Mike Gallagher

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<https://gallagher.house.gov>

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PO Box 114

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