

DNR eDigest

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The Bureau of Education and Information's goal is to publish "The E-Digest" bi-weekly on paydays. The bureau will publish additional issues, as needed. Contact "E-Digest" editor Diane.Brinson@wisconsin.gov or at 608/266-5215 to submit stories, story ideas and photos that communicate internally the department's work, policies and issues that matter to DNR employees.

December 30, 2009

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Governor signs several DNR-related bills into law at year's end

By: Paul Heinen, Office of the Secretary

The end of 2009 saw Governor Jim Doyle sign into law 17 DNR-related bills that made their way through the Legislature. A number of bills that have passed one house await the second house's final vote.

New laws include:

- a mandate for electronics recycling;
- a mentored hunting program;
- reauthorization of the Green Tier program;
- a ban on mercury products;
- stronger protection for the Brunsweller and Totogatic rivers,
- phosphate reductions;
- stronger invasives laws;
- 2009-2011 State Budget, one of the most difficult in history.

The ["2009 Bill Tracker"](#) contains a final status report on DNR-related Senate and Assembly bills introduced so far for fiscal years 2009-2011. Watch for updates to the "Tracker" after the Legislature returns January 19. I expect a great deal of debate on the two major issues of groundwater and climate change.

Footnote: *Paul Heinen is a policy initiative advisor for the Secretary's Office.*

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MacKenzie Center's seeks sugarbush volunteers

By: Ruth Ann Lee, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

It's as regular as spring itself. Tapping the maple trees, boiling the sap and processing the maple syrup comprise an annual experience at the MacKenzie Environmental Education Center, two miles east of Poynette on County Road CS. And, as also happens every year, volunteers are needed for these and other "sugarbush" duties.



Students tapped a sugar maple tree before tasting the sap and learning how to make maple syrup at the MacKenzie Environmental Education Center.

Wisconsin Wildlife Federation photo

Assisting with this educational program beginning in March, volunteers will receive training to conduct student tours and lead participants in the steps it takes to make maple sugar. No previous experience is necessary, but you're cautioned that this can be an "addicting" event. You could be considered a veteran by returning in subsequent years.

Training sessions are scheduled for February 18, 23 and 25 from 9 a.m. until noon. Much of the training is outdoors, so dress accordingly. If you're interested in helping out, email me, [Ruth Ann Lee](#) or call me at (608)635-8105 prior to February 12.

Visit the [MacKenzie Center](#) website for information and directions to the MEEC.

Footnote: *Ruth Ann Lee is the lead educator for the MEEC and chairs the education committee of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation.*



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Here's how to report your hours during the holidays

By: Roy Pedretti, Bureau of Human Resources

Because the week of December 27 through January 2 contains a mandatory furlough day, agency furlough guidelines require that **full time employees** report no more than 32 hours of work or paid leave hours. This means that for full time staff (with the exception of SEA members) work hours + furlough + holiday leave + any other leave types = 40 hours.

When a holiday falls on a normally scheduled work day, you must use leave to account for your scheduled hours on the holiday. See "**Recording use of leave on legal holidays clarified**" section, below. If you report between 32 hours and 40 hours of work or paid leave, you'll be compensated with a straight time cash payment. If you report more than 40 hours of worked or paid leave, you'll receive overtime compensation. Time reports that don't comply with these requirements will be returned for revision.

It's important to submit your time report for the pay period ending January 2 no later than 9:30 a.m. on Tuesday, January 5, so leave taken in 2009 will post correctly to the 2009 year. This will ensure your beginning leave balances for 2010 will be correct from the onset.

Less than full-time staff will record their holiday leave and furlough hours as allocated by their FTE. For example, if you're a .75 FTE (with the exception of SEA members) work hours + furlough + holiday leave + any other leave types = 30 hours. Employees on flex schedules may need to alter their schedule to accommodate the furlough requirements.

Recording use of leave on legal holidays clarified

The state's labor unions for represented employees have bargained use of legal holiday leave on the legal holidays. The same use of legal holiday leave on the legal holiday is provided to permanent and project, non-represented employees by the Compensation Plan. This means that holiday leave hours are intended to be used on holidays.

Employees, including LTEs, will not work on a legal holiday unless directed to work by their supervisor to meet a compelling business need of the Department. When an employee is directed to work on a holiday, compensation will be paid at the premium rate of time and one half for all hours worked on the holiday. Following is additional information on the use of leave hours on the holiday:

When a holiday falls on an employee's normally scheduled work day, **the employee must use leave to account for their full number of scheduled hours**. With prior supervisor approval, employees may change their schedule to use only the number of holiday hours allocated to them, then work the rest of the hours on another day during the week in which the holiday falls. For example:

- An employee working a compressed schedule of nine hours each day Monday through Thursday and four hours on Friday.
- If the holiday falls on Monday, the employee may use 9 hours of leave or obtain approval to change their weekly schedule to use 8 hours leave on Monday and work the extra hour on another day that week.
- If the holiday falls on Friday, the employee only needs to use 4 hours of leave and can use the other 4 hours of leave any other time during the calendar year.

Any adjustments to schedules must be documented in the comments section of the time report. Schedules **must not** be changed for the sole purpose of making the holiday a scheduled day off to avoid using leave on the holiday.

When a holiday falls on an unscheduled work day, employees do not record leave hours on the holiday.

Professional time cannot be used to account for any leave hours on a holiday. Guidelines found in "[Manual Code 9133](#)" explain how to use professional time on scheduled work days during the work week, other than the holiday.

Employees cannot use "sick leave" on a holiday, unless they had been scheduled and directed by their supervisor to work on the holiday to meet a compelling business need of the department and subsequently are too ill to work on the holiday.

Employees who are required to work by their supervisor to work on the holiday to meet a compelling business need of the department and who work their full number of scheduled hours on the holiday won't be required to use leave hours on that holiday. If an employee works less than their full number of scheduled hours, they'll need to record a combination of work and leave hours to account for their full schedule. Documentation for working on the holiday must be provided in the comment section of the time report.

If you have any questions about reporting your leave on a legal holiday, contact your [regional payroll specialist](#) or a [central office payroll specialist](#).

Footnote: *Roy Pedretti is chief of the Payroll and Benefits Section.*



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Annual "Bald Eagle Days" events scheduled for Cassville

By: Greg Matthews, South Central Regions

Cassville, noted as one of the nation's premier destinations for winter bald eagle watching, will host its 17th annual "Bald Eagle Days" January 30 to 31. The beauty and grandeur of this small Mississippi River town in southwest Wisconsin make it one of the best places to enjoy wildlife at its finest.



The majestic eagle's distinctive white head and tail stand out against the crisp, azure winter sky.

Photo from the Cassville bald eagle gallery

High concentrations of bald eagles are attracted to the Cassville area because of the river, which doesn't completely freeze over because of Lock and Dam 10 and the power plants in the area. Tall trees provide excellent perches and roosts. Bird watching enthusiasts come to view these magnificent birds feeding, roosting and engaging in aerial displays. Adult eagles are easy to spot in the winter because of their white head and tails, in contrast to their dark brown body. Bald eagles winter in this area of the state from November to March, depending on weather conditions.

"Bald Eagle Days" offers a unique and entertaining mix of indoor and outdoor activities. Volunteers assist the birders in finding these beautiful birds at the Observatory at Riverside Park along the Mississippi. On Saturday, January 30, a variety of wildlife programs for all ages will be held at Cassville High School. For more information and a schedule of events, visit the ["Cassville Treasure of the Mississippi"](#) website.

Footnote: *Greg Matthews is the public affairs manager for the South Central Region.*



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State updates information on benefits for adults to age 27

By: Department of Employee Trust Funds

The Department of Employee Trust Funds (ETF) recently updated its frequently asked questions about health insurance benefits for children age 27 and under who are covered under their parents' insurance.

You can find ["Benefit Eligibility for Adult Children up to Age 27"](#) on ETF's website. Revisions made on December 18 are flagged in red throughout the document.

Following is a summary of the changes by question:

- **Question #12:** More detail is provided on when a subscriber can delete an adult child from the policy, including information on rights to COBRA, the federal law that provides temporary coverage when an employee loses their insurance. **Note** that subscribers can submit applications during the special enrollment opportunity in January to delete the adult child from the policy effective February 1, 2010.
- **Question #13:** New
- **Question #16:** Revised wording, but overall intent remains the same
- **Question #17:** Revised to add the comment in "()" to clarify the impact of the gross income limit, as explained in question #19.

• **Question #19:** Revised to explain that the gross income limit test for a "qualifying relative" doesn't apply in determining tax dependent status for health insurance. In other words, if an adult child has gross income that exceeds \$3,650, but meets the three remaining tests for a qualifying relative, the child can't be claimed on the parent's income taxes. The parent also won't have imputed income* if the child is insured on the parent's health insurance policy. **Note** this question previously listed \$3,500 as the gross income limit for a qualifying relative for the 2008 tax year and that amount was increased to \$3,650 for the 2009 tax year.

*Imputed income is the addition of the value of cash/non-cash compensation to an employee's taxable wages in order to properly withhold income and employment taxes from the wages.



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