



Introduction

Rural communities in Wisconsin are facing many changes. Many people from urban areas are choosing to spend more time in rural areas. This community welcomes new homeowners and landowners. However, living in a rural area is in many ways much different than living in an urban community. This Rural Living Guide has been developed to inform those who are considering purchasing a rural property and those that already have. It is hoped that this information will help people consider issues that may affect them when living in a rural area.

Emergency Services



Law Enforcement and Rescue

The Sauk County Sheriffs Department is responsible for responding to calls in most areas of the county outside of the incorporated areas of Sauk Prairie, Baraboo, Spring Green, Reedsburg and the Wisconsin Dells/Lake Delton area. Response time tends to be longer than in urban areas and can be affected by inclement weather, illegible address signs, travel time, and poorly maintained and designed private roads.

Fire Protection

There are 15 fire districts in Sauk County that are served by volunteer fire departments. Each fire department has EMTs and First Responders to help provide emergency services. The level of protection provided depends on the access to water, distance of a structure from a fire station, type and number of vehicles, and number of volunteers and training. Your homeowner insurance rates will also be affected by these factors.

Ambulance Service



There are five ambulance districts in Sauk County. Service may be affected by distance, weather conditions, and condition of public and private roads.

911

In case of emergency call 911. Sauk County has E911 or enhanced 911. Responders will have access to your address as well as your fire or ambulance district when you call. Please ensure that your fire number is visible from the road.

Cell Phones

Due to the rugged terrain in the many parts of Sauk County, cell phones may not be reliable means of communication.

Weather

There are no sirens to warn you of impending bad weather in rural areas. It is important to purchase a weather radio.

Building/Development

Permits

Prior to building in a rural area, you must receive a land use permit and a septic permit from the Sauk County Planning and Zoning office (608-355-3285). Contact

your town for information on a building and driveway permit. Future additions, out-buildings or repairs may also require town permits.

Building/Development, cont.

Drinking Water

Most rural homeowners obtain their drinking water through a private well. It is recommended that well owners test their drinking water about once every 14 months. Testing kits are available through the Sauk County UW-Extension office (608-355-3250), the State Lab of Hygiene or private labs. Homes with pregnant women and infants can receive well testing through the Sauk County Public Health Department (608-355-3290) at a free or reduced rate. Many private wells also do not have fluoride. Check with the Sauk County Public Health Department for supplements.

Septic Systems

All villages and cities have sewer systems. Outside of those areas, private onsite wastewater systems or septic systems treat the wastewater from your home or business. Private septic systems are the responsibility of the landowner and they must be inspected at least once every three years and the Sauk County Planning and Zoning Department requires proof of pumping. Never dispose household hazardous waste in sinks or toilets and don't drive or park vehicles on any part of your septic system. To learn more about septic system dos and don'ts get a copy of "So Now You own a Septic System" available at the County Planning and Zoning office and online at: <http://www.co.sauk.wi.us/dept/pz/index.html>.

Natural Gas

Currently natural gas is provided within village and city limits, with a limited number of exceptions.



Propane

Propane, also known as LP, is the most common fuel used in rural settings. Propane tanks are set by the LP supplier and are filled on an "as needed" basis or on a "keep filled" basis. The major LP supply companies in Sauk County are:

- AmeriGas: (608) 356-6647
- Co-op Country Partners: (608) 356-2700
- Consumers Co-op: (800) 446-3301
- Ferrelgas: (608) 254-2227
- Hohl's Propane: (608) 356-2168
- Meyer Oil: (608) 524-3914

Electric Service

Electric service is provided by Alliant Energy, Adams-Columbia Electric, Oakdale Electric Cooperative or Vernon Electric Cooperative, depending on the area of the County. Some interruptions may occur. Call your electric utility company to report a power outage or an electric emergency.

Zoning

Zoning determines how land may be used, the minimum size of lots, the height of structures, the set backs required from roads and from property lines, and other features. The purpose of zoning is to provide for an area's orderly development and to minimize conflicts between incompatible land uses. In Sauk County most of the towns follow county zoning regulations. The Towns of Delton, Fairfield, and Merrimac have developed and enforce their own zoning and the Town of Washington does not have zoning.

County government zones lands within 1,000 feet, of lakes, ponds and flowages and lands within 300 feet or the floodplain of rivers and streams. Waterfront properties must maintain a natural shoreline. DNR regulations also apply near rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands. Check for permit requirements before doing any work near a water body. For more information read Protecting Your Waterfront Property Investment at: <http://s142412519.onlinehome.us/uw/pdfs/GWQ044.pdf>.

In addition to general zoning and shoreline rules, floodplain regulations may also affect a rural property. The program is designed to provide additional insurance and relief when natural disasters occur. Please contact the Sauk County Planning and Zoning Department (608-355-3285) for more information.

Lake Associations vs. Lake Districts

There are two main types of lake organizations, lake associations and lake districts. The same lake may have both a voluntary association and a public management district. Generally the purpose of a lake district or an association is to protect, and improve the quality of a lake.



Lake districts are special purpose units of government that can enact regulation and levy taxes.

Lake associations are non-profit organizations that are involved in educational programming and information sharing. To learn more about lake issues visit the UW-Extension Lakes Page at: <http://www.uwsp.edu/cnr/uwexlakes/>.

Public vs. Private Roads

The county or towns are responsible for the upkeep of public roads. It is the responsibility of the owners along a private road to build, maintain and plow snow.

Wildlife



Driving

Each year thousands of deer are killed and injured by automobiles. Extra caution is needed when driving, especially at night. Seasonally, deer activity increases starting in early October through November. During this rut (or mating season) bucks chase does more frequently and through all hours of the day and night.

Pets and Stray Animals

Pets need to be licensed and current on their rabies vaccinations. Contact your town clerk for regulations regarding your pets. Stray animals can be taken to the Sauk County Humane Society. For more information contact (608)356-2520.

Living with Wildlife

Living in a rural area requires thoughtful consideration of wildlife. Deer can ravage a garden. Carefully consider which plants you will use in your landscaping or your garden.

Wood and deer ticks are parasites that suck blood from people and animals. The deer tick can spread Lyme Disease. The symptoms vary in degree and include a bull's eye bite rash, muscle pain and swelling and fatigue. It is usually treated with antibiotics. Awareness is key and tick checks should be done daily on people and pets. Mosquitoes, deer flies, and black flies also part of living in rural areas.

Government Services

Town Government

All unincorporated areas are governed under "town" government. Most town boards have three to five members and they are elected in the spring of odd numbered years. Many town officials are nominated for office through a caucus process. Towns also have an elected or appointed clerk, treasurer or combined clerk-treasurer. Town government is typically responsible for road maintenance, snow removal and local land use policies.

County Government

County government serves two purposes. It provides certain services at the local level for the state, and it is also a unit of local self-government. The Sauk County web site at www.co.sauk.wi.us is filled with information regarding the services county government provides to rural residents including: a skilled nursing facility, a human services department, a law enforcement agency, a state circuit court system, a highway department, a tax administration and collection effort, planning and zoning, conservation, and other government related functions.

Mailboxes

Customers must use *only* approved traditional, contemporary, or locked full- or limited-service curbside mailboxes for new installations or replacements. Mailboxes are to be 41—45" from the roadbed to the bottom of the box and set back no more than 6—8" from where the tires would set along the side of the road.

Garbage

The Sauk County Landfill permanently closed on April 2005, having reached its final capacity. Many towns in Sauk County have curbside garbage pick-up. The remaining towns either have drop off sites or in some cases residents must take garbage to one of the following transfer stations:

Town & Country Sanitation: (608) 375-5856
Veolia Waste Services: (608) 356-3911
Waste Management: (608) 355-3100



Transfer stations may accept appliances, tires and other bulky materials for a fee.

Recycling and Yard Waste

All cities, villages and towns either have curbside pickup or drop off locations for recycled materials. However most towns do not have pick up or drop off sites for yard waste. Many rural residents must compost these materials. Contact your Town Chair or Clerk to find out specific information for you community or visit the Sauk County Solid Waste website:

<http://www.co.sauk.wi.us/dept/solidwaste/index.html>

Snow Plowing

Outside of the incorporated cities and villages snowplowing can take some time. Do not expect your road to be plowed before you have to leave in the morning. Major roads such as state highways and county roads get first priority. If you live on a private road, snowplowing may be your responsibility.

Agriculture, Forestry and Resource Management

Manure

Manure is an inevitable and valuable by-product of livestock production. Unfortunately the odor does not smell like money to some people. Some farmers have a nutrient management plan for their farm, which is based on a soil test and the crops grown. Manure applications are done to grow crops efficiently and reduce run off. Sauk County has a manure management ordinance which spells out procedures required to build new manure storage facilities.

Fences



State law (Ch. 90 of State Statutes) states that if livestock is present on one property, BOTH property owners must share the expenses of maintaining a fence on the property line. Other accommodations can be made if both parties agree. Fences make good neighbors. See the University of Wisconsin Extension **Country Acres** publication for more information (<http://cecommerce.uwex.edu/pdfs/G3309.PDF>).

Leasing Ag Land

For sample leasing agreements, estimated rental rates, and available land rental contact the Sauk County UW-Extension office at (608) 355-3250.

Logging

Sauk County has over 18,000 acres of publicly owned forests and many more of private forests. Both public and private woodland owners participate in logging for both revenue and habitat improvements. Your neighbor's mature woods may not be that way for long.

Slow moving vehicles

Farm vehicles are allowed on all roads and may back up traffic. Please watch for and be patient with slow moving vehicles.



Pesticide Application

Farmers are not required to report their pesticide applications or post warning signs on recently sprayed fields. They are required to complete pesticide applicator training in order to purchase and use restricted use pesticides. Most herbicides are not on the "restricted use" list.

Invasive Species

Non-native, exotic, alien, non-indigenous—no matter what you choose to call them, non-native species are plants and animals present in an ecosystem beyond their native range. Some of these species become "**invasive**", and may threaten native species and interfere with commercial, agricultural or recreational activities. In their native environments, there are typically predators, parasites, pathogens and competitors that keep these invasive species in check and create a balance. For information on how to identify and remove invasive species, contact the Sauk County Land Conservation office at (608) 355-3245 or the Sauk County UW Extension office at (608) 355-3250.

Resource Management

So you bought some land, now what? The Sauk County Land Conservation Department (608) 355-3245 can help you create a resource management plan and identify possible funding sources to help you make the most of your property.

Recreation



Hunting, fishing and trapping

Harvesting game and fish through hunting, fishing, and trapping is a tradition. There is a season for many species some of which are open the entire year. Most hunting however is done in

the fall. Wisconsin has hunter harassment laws that make it criminal to interfere with legal hunting. Contact the DNR for additional information on access to Managed Forest Law (MFL) and wildlife damaged lands.

Trespass

You are criminally trespassing on private land unless you get permission from the owner. Land does not have to be posted with signs unless it is adjacent to public land. Respect private property and ask before you use.



ATV Use

The Department of Natural Resources enforces strict rules that are in place for ATV use on public lands and roads. Currently there are no public ATV trails that are groomed or maintained in Sauk County.

Fire Danger

Housing in Forested Areas

Living in the forests of Sauk County is very rewarding. However, those trees can also be threats to your home. Maintain a 30—100 foot non-flammable buffer between your house and the forest to reduce the fire danger to your home. Some towns have limits to tree cutting near new construction, check with your town for more information. To learn more contact your local DNR Forester at (608) 355-4476 or visit: <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/forestry/Fire/index.htm>.



Fireworks

Restricted fireworks require a permit from the Town Chair or Village President.

These permits are only issued to groups or organizations and restrict fireworks use

to a certain time and place. Restricted fireworks are defined as those that move, jump, explode or emit balls of

fire and include such types as bottle rockets, firecrackers, jumping jacks, and roman candles. Restricted fireworks are much more likely to cause a forest fire or injury because of their erratic and unpredictable behavior.

Outdoor Burning

Wildfires happen most often during the months of April and May. The primary cause of these fires is debris burning. Permits are required anytime the ground is not snow covered during the months of January, February, March, April, and May. Free burning permits may be obtained from an emergency Fire Warden, Ranger Station, or DNR office by calling 608-635-8121 in Poynette or 608-588-2591 in Spring Green. Cooking, warming or campfires do not require a burning permit and are allowed anytime, except during emergency forest fire regulations.

Tribal Governments

Tribal Hunting, Fishing, Spearing

The Ho-Chunk Nation has treaty rights that give tribal members different hunting and gathering rights than non-tribal members. Gun deer hunting may also occur outside of the typical nine-day hunt around Thanksgiving.



For More Information

For more information on rural living read the following University of Wisconsin Extension publications:

[Country Acres](#) (G3309)

[Care and Maintenance of Residential Septic Systems](#) (B3583)

[Outdoor Hazards in Wisconsin](#) (G3564)
A guide to noxious insects, plants and wildlife

[Sauk County Agriculture: Value and Economic Impact](#)
<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/wisag/documents/Sauk.pdf>

Conclusion

This information is by no means all-inclusive. There may be issues that you may encounter that we have overlooked. Look for the unexpected and surprises when purchasing rural property. For comments or questions on this document contact the Sauk County UW-Extension Office at (608) 355-3250.