

THE STORY OF WATER: A WISCIFEST MINI EXPO

Jonas Tangen

WISCONSIN
SCIENCE
FESTIVAL
CURIOSITY UNLEASHED.

Learners of all ages flocked to the Discovery Building on Saturday, October 25th for the Story of Water Mini-Expo, part of the statewide Wisconsin Science Festival. The Mini-Expo was one of many STEAM-focused experiences across the University of Wisconsin-Madison campus during the Campus Open House, itself just one of many featured events during the ten day long Wisconsin Science Festival. In 56 Wisconsin counties, Science Festival events brought communities together to unleash curiosity with the festival’s feature: Rock and Roll highlighting music, motion, and the geology that shapes Wisconsin. The Story of Water Mini-Expo boasted offerings for everyone including three Wisconsin Book Festival Author Events, a lake sturgeon dissection, and a virtual reality penguin experience.



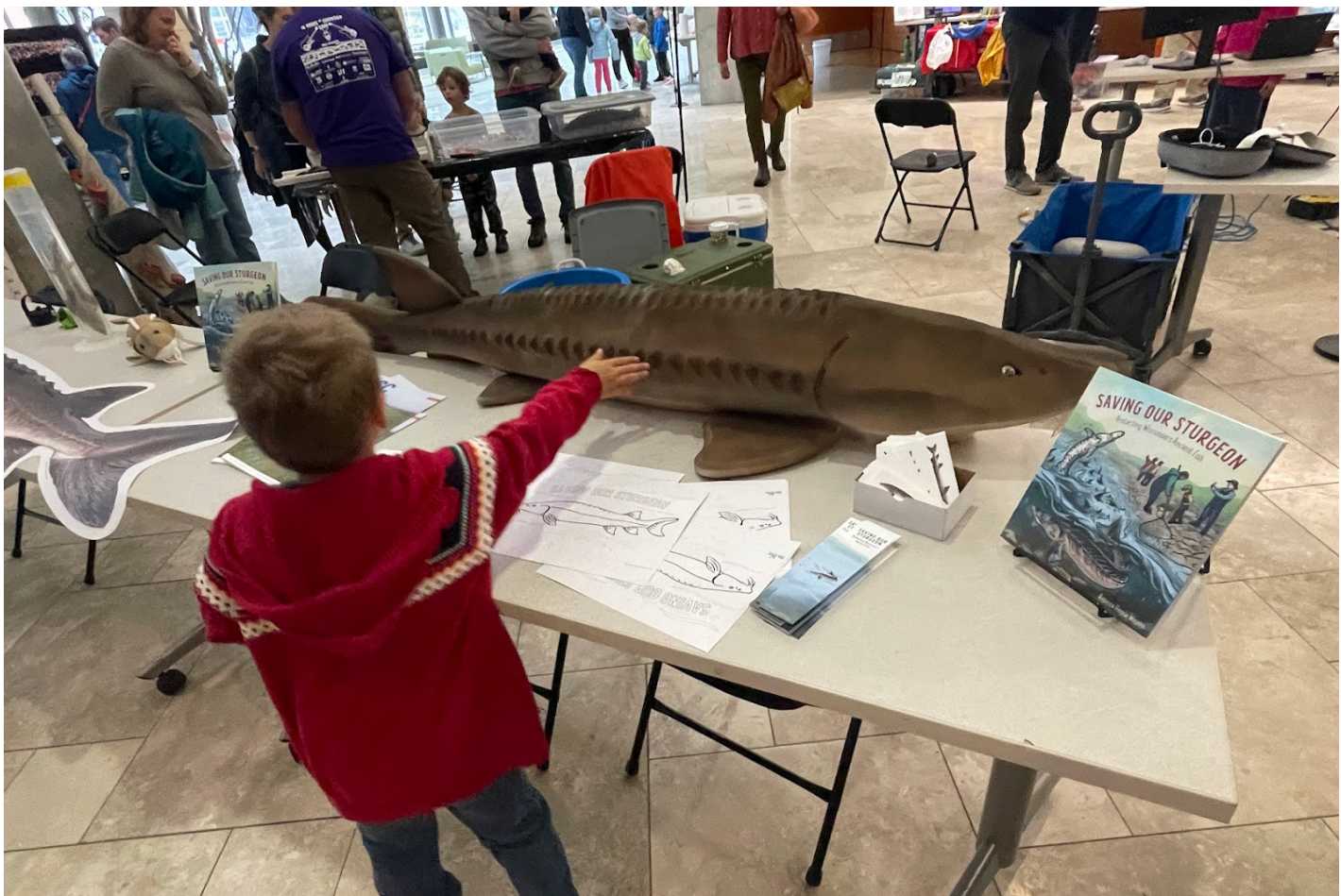
Jim Burris of the Morgridge Institute for Research explains his research on zebrafish to an expo attendee during the Wisconsin Science Festival. Photo Credit: Sam Mulrooney

At the State Historic Preservation Office table, visitors dove into maritime archaeology and learned about the steamships that sank to become Great Lakes shipwrecks. Mini-Expo attendees followed the story of water from Wisconsin’s history to groundbreaking research being done at UW-Madison. The Morgridge Institute Aquatics Research Center’s “Something Smells Fishy!” showed off live fish with different phenotypes and researchers explained how even small genetic differences can create significant changes in molecular processes. Young attendees enjoyed Waddle: A Penguin’s Tale, a virtual reality (VR) game showcased by Field Day Learning as part of their “Game on! Science Games for Learning” station. Set at the South Pole, Waddle immersed players in key moments of a penguin’s life, and bridged the gap between UW research and the citizenry of Wisconsin.



Jim Mathews of Field Day Learning showcases the VR game Waddle: A Penguin’s Tale at the Wisconsin Science Festival. Photo Credit: Sam Mulrooney

The Mini-Expo’s theme of water persisted as NOAA Marine Debris research transformed the molecular signatures of microplastics into music, turning nearly invisible pollution in the Great Lakes into an interactive musical experience for visitors. The “Coastal Engineering: Live at the Wave Tank” station, run by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the University of Wisconsin Sea Grant Institute, gave attendees the opportunity to explore how waves affect our coastlines. After scientists spoke on conservation efforts attendees tried their hand at designing engineering solutions to prevent erosion.



The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources’ 5 foot stuffed sturgeon at the Wisconsin Science Festival. Photo Credit: Sam Mulrooney

The University of Wisconsin Sea Grant presented a live dissection of an adolescent lake sturgeon to inform the public of the importance of continued, sustainable fishing practices for this vulnerable species of fish. The Sea Grants’ five foot long stuffed model of the ancient fish was also a big hit, along with information on acoustic tags and sturgeon spears. Rebecca Hogue Wojahn, author of Saving Our Sturgeon: Protecting Wisconsin’s Ancient Fish, and Joe E Meisel, author of The Marlin’s Fiery Eye and Other Tales from the Extraordinary World of Marine Fishes, shared fascinating information about the history of aquatic conservation in Wisconsin during their book talk event. This talk is available online as part of the Wisconsin Book Festival.



Dr. Fish from the Wisconsin Sea Grant Institute dissects a sturgeon during the Wisconsin Science Festival. Photo Credit: Sam Mulrooney

The Story of Water Mini-Expo gave attendees a chance to connect Wisconsin’s past, present, and future through a shared resource that touches everyday life. From hands-on science and immersive games to conversations with researchers and authors, attendees left with a deeper appreciation for water’s role in shaping communities, ecosystems, and innovation across the state. The Mini-Expo captured the spirit of the Wisconsin Science Festival by turning curiosity into understanding and reminding everyone, young and old, that science is most powerful when it is experienced together.

Join us in 2026 to discover more hands-on ways to explore science - visit [WiSciFest.org](https://wiscifest.org) to learn more about how to get involved!