WINTER MAINTENANCE AT A GLANCE 2025 - 2026



Introduction

Snow and ice control is a critical element of operations on our state highway system. To meet level of service goals in this area, Wisconsin DOT contracts with the state's 72 county highway departments for winter maintenance on these highways, which is a unique and mutually beneficial partnership. WisDOT receives the services of a skilled, experienced workforce, and supports the counties through training, research initiatives, and testing of products, equipment and methods.

This summary document highlights key aspects of the 2025-2026 winter, including weather, materials and equipment use, performance, and costs. The complete Annual Winter Maintenance Report, which provides further data on these areas and others, is available at: http://wisconsindot.gov/Pages/doing-bus/local-gov/hwy-mnt/winter-maintenance/default.aspx.

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Winter by the Numbers

In 2025-2026, Wisconsin experienced a more normal winter to slightly above average. Compared to last year's winter costs of $89,046,744, this winter's costs totaled $125,419,307, an increase of 41 percent. The state experienced an average of 33 winter storms this winter, resulting in an average of 74.6 total inches of snowfall. This average represents a 51 percent increase from last year's statewide average of 49.3 inches of snow. In terms of Tons/Lane mile, salt use increased from 9.6 tons to 13.1 tons.

Table 1 below summarizes key facts and statistics from this winter in several core areas. The 2025-2026 Annual Winter Maintenance Report provides more data on all topics in this table.

Table 1. Statewide Summary: This Winter by the Numbers

		2024-2025 Winter	2025-2026 Winter
Infrastructure	Lane miles	34,697	34,686
	Patrol sections[4]	754	754
	Average patrol section length[4]	46.0	46.0
Weather	Average statewide Winter Severity Index (100=normal)	54.4	83.0
	Number of storms, statewide average and range across counties	Average: 26 Range: 12 - 48	Average: 33 Range: 13 - 60
	Snowfall (in), statewide average and range across counties	Average: 49.3 Range:16.2 – 141.0	Average: 74.6 Range:37.3 – 186.1
Materials[1]	Salt used	332,458 tons 9.6 tons per lane mile	454,718 tons 13.1 tons per lane mile
	Average cost of salt	$94.27 per ton	$98.98 per ton
	Total liquids used (prewet, anti-icing, direct liquid application)	17,657,518 gal.	20,921,648 gal.
	Sand used	4,511 cubic yd.	8,280 cubic yd.
Costs, Equipment and Performance	Total winter costs[2]	$89,046,744	$125,419,307
	Total winter costs per lane mile	$2,566	$3,616
	Average crew reaction time from start of storm	2.87 hours	2.89 hours
	Percentage of roads to bare/wet pavement (Within WisDOT target times)	70%	64%
	Road Weather Information System (RWIS) stations	75	75
	Counties that used anti-icing agents during the winter season	64 out of 72 (89%)	66 out of 72 (92%)
Labor and Services	Regular county winter labor hours[3]	111,594 hrs.	150,988 hrs.
	Overtime county winter labor hours	98,000 hrs.	145,677 hrs.

1. All material usage quantities are from the county storm reports except for salt. Salt quantities are from WisDOT's Salt Inventory Reporting System.
2. Costs refer to final costs billed to WisDOT for all winter activities, including activities such as installing snow fences and thawing culverts.
3. Labor hours come from county storm reports, and reflect salting, sanding, plowing and anti-icing efforts.
4. Patrol sections and average length include hybrid sections in some counties which may include a portion of county highway.

A "Normal" Winter Season

2025-2026 leaned more towards normal coming off an extremely mild last 2 winter seasons. We saw the state get hit how one would expect a Wisconsin winter to go, a little more severe in the North and less severe in the South. FIGURE 1 shows the winter severity index for each county throughout the state, the winter severity index is calculated from a formula entered in the Maintenance Decision Support System (MDSS) to be able to compare varying winter conditions.

During the 2025-2026 winter season, county highway departments responded to:

- A statewide average of 33 winter snow events per county, 7 more than the previous winter. The high was 60 events in Ashland County and the low was 13 events in Adams County.
- A statewide average of 2 frost events.
- A statewide average of 11 freezing rain/sleet events.

FIGURE 2 shows the total snowfall received in Wisconsin this winter based on storm report data. Snowfall varied significantly across the state; the highest snowfall recorded was in Iron County, at 186 inches; the lowest was in Iowa County, at 37 inches. This winter's statewide average total snowfall was 75 inches, 26 more inches than last year.

Figure 1. 2025-2026 Winter Severity Index

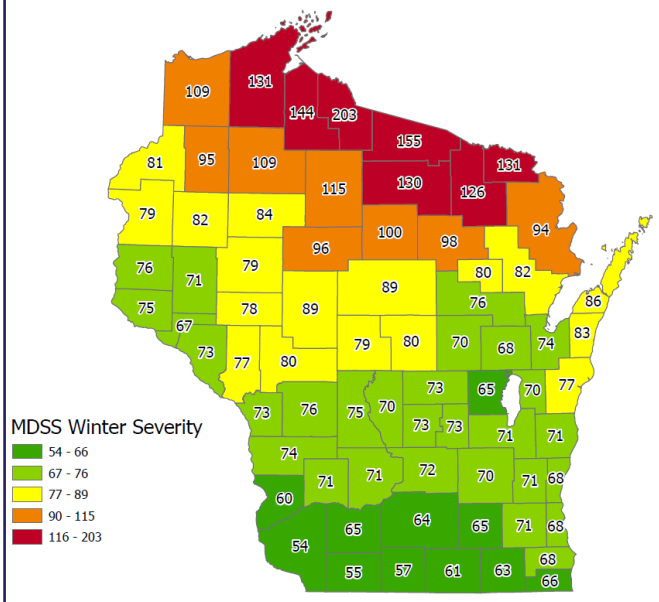
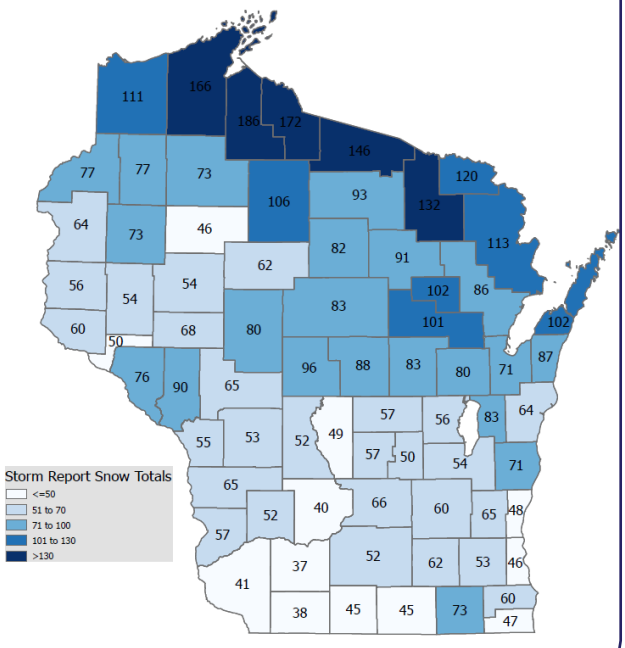


Figure 2. Statewide Snowfall, 2025-2026

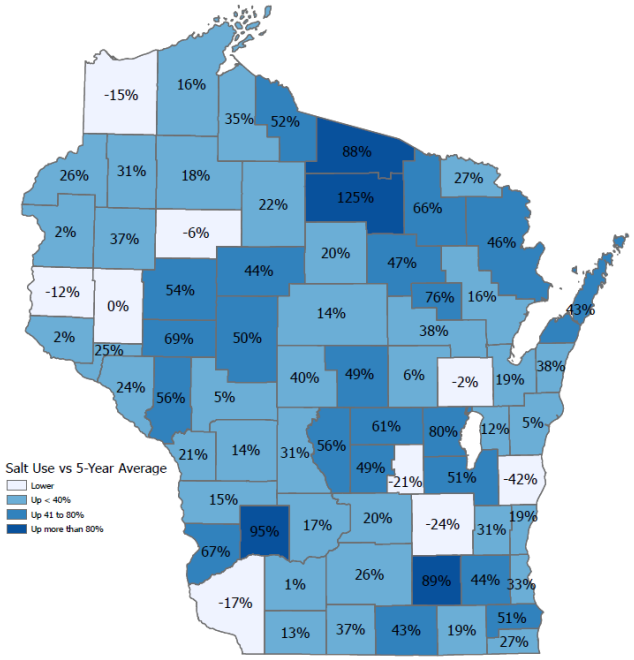


Salt and Brine Work Together

Salt use was nearly 37 percent higher than the previous year, at 454,718 tons. Figure 3 shows county 2025-2026 salt usage per lane mile versus 5-year averages. This increase could be due to an increase in freezing rain events we experienced this winter as well as a lot more snow fall. Figure 4 shows statewide historical salt usage per lane mile overlaid with average severity index. WisDOT encourages counties to use salt efficiently by making use of best practices such as anti-icing, prewetting, and direct liquid application. Use of anti-icing materials was down 10 percent over last year, with counties using 2,787,107 gallons of anti-icing liquids, 66 counties made at least one-anti-icing application. Use of pre-wetting materials increased 13 percent from last year, with 70 counties using 8,396,069 gallons.

Direct liquid application (DLA) is a relatively new best practice in Wisconsin. During the winter of 2025-2026, 30 counties used 9,738,572 gallons with this technique, an increase of 36 percent from last year. Liquids applied directly to the pavement for deicing replace rock salt as the primary storm management tool. This reduces the amount of salt applied and has been found to more effective than just dry solid salt. WisDOT hopes to continue to expand use of DLA in the future.

Figure 3. 2024-2025 Salt Use per Lane Mile vs 5-Year Average

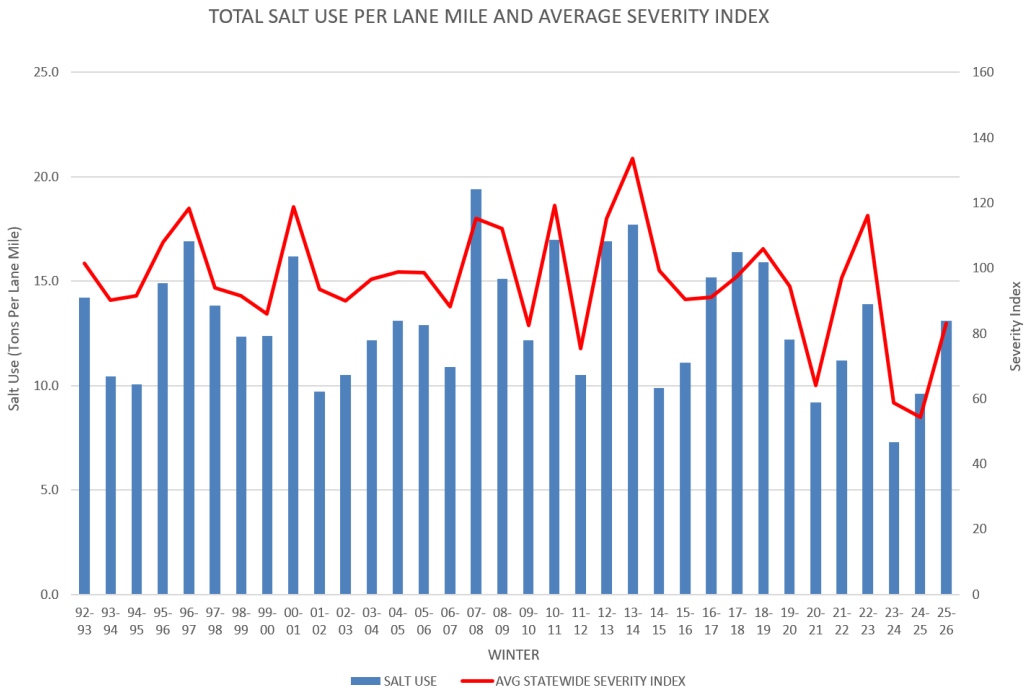


In contrast, WisDOT actively discourages counties from using sand on the state trunk highway system. Sand is not effective at high traffic speeds, negatively impacts the environment, and ultimately decreases the level of service provided. Counties used 8,280 cubic yards of sand on state highways this year, which is right on the average of the five previous winters (8,299 cubic yards).

Wisconsin counties applied a statewide average of 13.1 tons of salt per lane mile, a 36 percent increase compared with the 2024- 2025 winter.

Figure 4. Salt Use per Lane Mile and Average Severity Index

From Salt Inventory Reporting System, 1992–2026



Salt, Labor, and Equipment Costs

The total cost of statewide winter operations this winter was $125.4 million, making it 41 percent more costly than 2024 - 2025. Figure 5 shows where winter costs increased or decreased from the average of the previous five years. This winter's statewide average cost per lane mile of $3,616 was 41 percent more than last year's cost of $2,566 per lane mile.

In 2024-2025 WisDOT spent $45.2 million on salt, $44.5 million on equipment-related expenses, $28.7 million on labor, 3.8 million on county supplied materials, and $3.2 million on administration costs.

Total salt expenditure increased by 44 percent compared to the prior year. Labor costs increased by 29 percent and equipment costs increased by 49 percent. Salt continues to be a large expenditure, accounting for 36 percent of all costs (see Figure 6). Figure 7 shows historical salt prices for Wisconsin and for 39 states nationwide.

Figure 5. 2025-2026 Winter Costs vs 5-Year Average

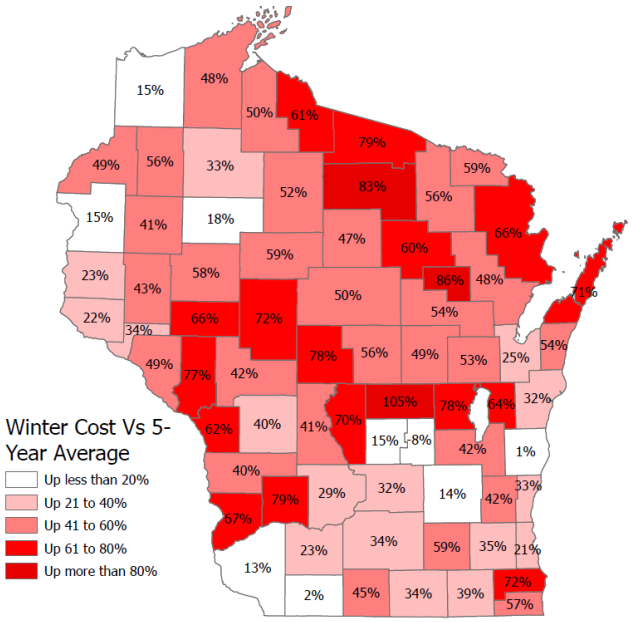


Figure 6. Expenditures by Category, 2025-2026

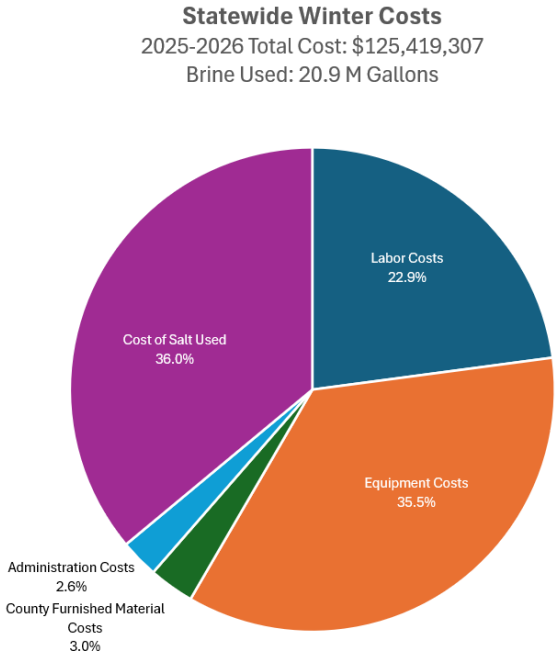
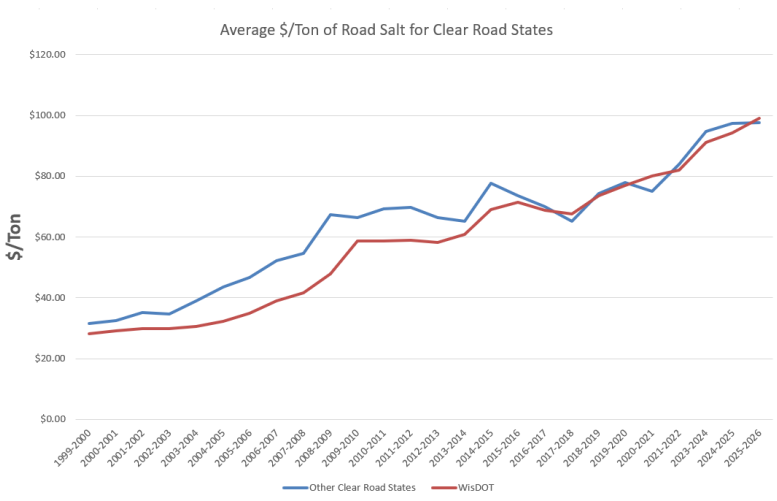


Figure 7. Salt Prices Over Time (through 2025-2026)

Historical data supplied by Clear Roads. From 1999 to present, the number of states reporting data has increased from 14 to 39 states.



Coordinating Counties' Response

This winter WisDOT continued its emphasis on close communication between the counties and WisDOT regional staff. Before each event, regional staff worked with the counties to coordinate available materials, staffing and equipment, and regional staff assisted the counties in managing shifts for long events.

Response Time

The counties continue to work on becoming more proactive in responding to winter storm events. Average response time this winter was 2 hours and 53 minutes, which was 3 percent slower than the 10-year average. See Table 2 for reaction time by Winter Service Group. Winter Service Groups reflect the difference in the level of service provided on roads in these counties.

Tracking the Winter

Each week during winter, representatives from the 72 county highway departments complete winter storm reports. These reports give WisDOT the tools to manage statewide materials use and maintenance expenses as the winter progresses. Winter storm reports are also used to compile data used in the annual report and other statewide performance measures.

"Time to bare/wet pavement" is measured from a storm's reported end time until bare/wet is declared on the roadways. Heavily traveled urban highways tend to be returned to a bare/wet condition sooner than rural roads. WisDOT expects 24-hour roads to be clear within four hours of the end of the storm and 18-hour roads to be clear within six hours. The 2025-26 percentage of roadways cleared to bare/wet pavement remained similar from the previous year.

Table 2. Maintenance Crew Reaction Time

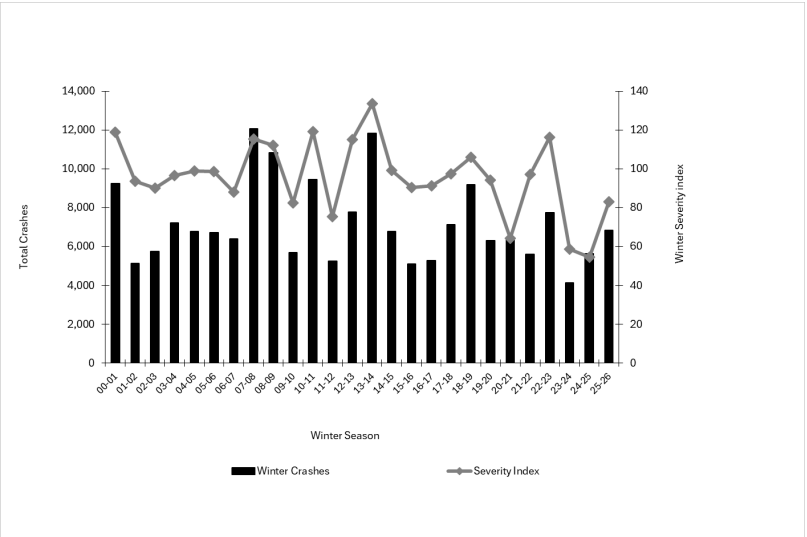
	10-Year Average reaction time (hours)										10-year Average	Average reaction time (hours)	Percent change
Winter Service Group	*2015-2016*	*2016-2017*	*2017-2018*	*2018-2019*	*2019-2020*	*2020-2021*	*2021-2022*	*2022-2023*	*2023-2024*	*2024-2025*	2015-2016 to 2024-2025	*2025-2026*	*2025-2026 vs. 10-year avg.*
A	1.21	0.37	0.52	0.48	1.01	0.23	1.15	0.10	0.39	1.60	0.71	*0.60*	*-15%*
B	2.4	1.07	1.34	1.16	1.26	1.30	1.13	1.15	1.21	1.57	1.36	*1.33*	*-2%*
C	3.19	2.22	2.61	2.16	2.24	2.66	2.29	2.40	2.76	2.65	2.52	*2.92*	*16%*
D	3.91	2.06	2.7	2.61	2.90	3.02	2.53	2.37	3.01	2.50	2.76	*2.81*	*2%*
E	6.72	3.94	5.04	4.4	4.29	4.39	3.98	4.73	4.43	4.30	4.62	*4.55*	*-2%*
F	8.62	3.64	5.13	3.91	5.27	5.04	4.30	4.58	4.07	4.58	4.91	*5.10*	*4%*
Statewide average (unweighted)	*4.34*	*2.22*	*2.89*	*2.45*	*2.83*	*2.77*	*2.56*	*2.56*	*2.65*	2.87	*2.81*	*2.89*	*3%*

Analyzing Travel and Crashes

By keeping roads as clear as possible within their expected level of service (18- or 24-hour coverage), maintenance crews have an opportunity to help prevent crashes. This year, there were 6,837 winter weather crashes (those that occurred on pavements covered with snow, slush or ice from November 1st, 2025, to April 30th, 2026).

The statewide average crash rate (number of crashes per 100 million vehicle miles traveled) increased from 18 during the 24/25 winter to 21 in the 25/26 winter, a 15 percent increase over the previous winter. Last year in the 24/25 winter 5,635 winter crashes were reported. Figure 8 shows the trends in total crashes statewide over the last 20+ years overlaid with the Winter Severity Index.

Figure 8. Crashes and Winter Severity Index



Using Performance Measures

Performance measures for winter operations were established in 2003 and continue to this day. Please visit the WisDOT Mobility, Accountability, Preservation, Safety, and Service (MAPSS) performance improvement program website to see more details on the Mobility- winter response measure.

Table 3. Statewide Winter Performance Measures for Winter

	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Percentage of Roads to bare/wet pavement (Within WisDOT target times)	72%	73%	75%	70%	64%
Cost per lane mile	$2,457	$3,420	$2,080	$2,566	$3,616
Winter Severity Index	97.1	116.2	58.7	54.4	83.0
Cost per lane mile per Winter Severity Index point	$25.30	$29.43	$35.44	$47.17	$43.57
Winter weather crashes	19 per 100 million VMT	25 per 100 million VMT	13 per 100 million VMT	18 per 100 million VMT	21 per 100 million VMT

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