

The Future of Wisconsin's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program

Talking Points

Context

- The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program has protected more than 500,000 acres of Wisconsin's most beautiful lands and waters since 1990. Projects have ranged from 100-square-mile purchases such as the Wild Rivers Legacy Forest in northeast Wisconsin to 1-acre additions to the Hank Aaron State Trail in Milwaukee.
- The Stewardship Program will expire soon if the governor and the state legislature don't act during the next state budget.
- Wisconsin has a two-year state budget, which will be debated in the first half of 2019.
- The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is too important to allow it to expire.
- Stewardship helps to protect land in communities across Wisconsin.
- Protecting land is important for clean water, wildlife, and the Wisconsin way of life.
- The time for action is now.

The Ask

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program should be reauthorized and funding should be maintained at the current level of \$33.25 million annually.

- The Stewardship Program has several subprograms, each providing crucial support to projects across Wisconsin. Current annual funding includes:
 - \$9 million for DNR acquisitions (2/3 of which must be allocated to conservation easement purchases)
 - \$7 million for grants to nonprofit conservation organizations
 - \$5 million for grants to county forests
 - \$6 million for projects sponsored by local governments
 - \$3.25 million for DNR property development
 - \$500,000 for motorized trail development

Public Support

A June 2018 statewide survey of Wisconsin voters conducted by the bipartisan research team of Public Opinion Strategies (R) and FM3 Research (D) demonstrated overwhelming public support for the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.

- Nine out of 10 voters support continued conservation funding in Wisconsin
- 93% of voters support reauthorization of the Stewardship Program
- 89% of Republicans, 90% of Independents, and 100% of Democrats want the program continued
- Residents in every region in the state show strong support:
 - Northwest Wisconsin – 94%
 - Wausau-Rhineland – 88%
 - Green Bay-Appleton – 94%
 - Milwaukee – 93%
 - Madison – 96%
- 67% of voters say that they would have a more favorable impression of an elected official if they supported reauthorization

Benefits and Costs of the Stewardship Program

- **Wisconsin's \$18 billion outdoor recreation industry** is bolstered directly by public lands and conservation easements purchased through the Stewardship Program.¹
 - Wisconsin ranks 3rd behind our neighbors Minnesota and Michigan in state-owned public land that is publicly accessible for outdoor recreation.
 - Wisconsin's population is projected to grow more than 10% in the next 20 years, increasing demand for public recreation opportunities in all corners of the state.
 - Lack of public access is cited repeatedly as a major threat to our state's sporting heritage.
 - The **Ice Age Trail**, which benefits from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program funding, is visited by more than 1.2 million visitors annually, partially supporting more than 1,400 full-time equivalent jobs that relate to the tourism industry. Estimated labor income of \$35 million contributes \$113 million in direct sales from Ice Age Trail visitors.²
 - In the **Driftless Area, trout anglers** produce an economic benefit of nearly **\$1 billion** every year and stream-bank easements which are funded through the Stewardship Program provide the public access that helps to drive this activity.³
- **Wisconsin has a \$24 billion forestry industry.**⁴ This economic activity is directly supported by the Stewardship Program through working forest conservation easements and land purchases. Fragmentation of forestland is a significant concern in some areas of the state, as is access to timber. Stewardship helps ensure that large blocks of forests remain in sustainable production, keeping raw material available for pulp and saw mills.⁵ The Stewardship Program often protects forestland through the use of conservation easements allowing the public to purchase specific rights, like public access and limiting development and subdivision, while also maintaining the land in private ownership and keeping it on local tax rolls.⁶ Working forest conservation easements have become a vital tool for maintaining contiguous productive forestland in sustainable management.
- The Stewardship Program is funded using general obligation bonds, which, like a mortgage, requires the state to pay principal and interest over time **for an investment that will last for generations**. Debt service for Stewardship Program borrowing accounts for **less than 0.3% of the Wisconsin's state budget** and works out to a little more than \$0.30 per Wisconsinite per week or **approximately \$15 per resident per year**. **A resident gun deer hunting license costs \$24, a general fishing license costs \$20, and a state park sticker costs \$25.**⁷ Stewardship accounts for less than 15% of the DNR's overall budget, representing a crucial investment that supports Wisconsin's economy.

¹ <https://outdoorindustry.org/state/wisconsin/>

² <https://www.iceagetrail.org/economic-impact-ice-age-trail/>

³ [http://www.darestorage.com/documents/Economic%20Impact%20Report%20of%20Trout%20Angling%20in%20the%20Driftless%20Ar
ea.pdf](http://www.darestorage.com/documents/Economic%20Impact%20Report%20of%20Trout%20Angling%20in%20the%20Driftless%20Area.pdf)

⁴ <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/forestbusinesses/factsheets.html>

⁵ https://dnr.wi.gov/files/pdf/Brule-StCroix_Legacy_Forest.pdf

⁶ [http://www.apg-wi.com/spooner_advocate/free/walker-announces-nearly--acre-preservation-initiative-in-sawyer-
county/article_46fc029c-55ed-11e8-ba75-439563d93ff1.html](http://www.apg-wi.com/spooner_advocate/free/walker-announces-nearly--acre-preservation-initiative-in-sawyer-county/article_46fc029c-55ed-11e8-ba75-439563d93ff1.html)

⁷ [https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/informational_papers/january_2017/0061_warren_knowles_gaylord_nelson_stewardship_pro
gram_informational_paper_61.pdf](https://docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/misc/lfb/informational_papers/january_2017/0061_warren_knowles_gaylord_nelson_stewardship_program_informational_paper_61.pdf)