



PARTNERS in FORESTRY COOP and NORTHWOOD ALLIANCE Inc. joint comments on

The Knowles- Nelson STEWARDSHIP FUND

Partners in Forestry Coop, along with Northwood Alliance Inc. is concerned about the budget proposals in regard to the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Fund. We have heard our membership voice concerns over provisions in the budget bill which many feel will render the fund essentially lame in practice.

The Stewardship Fund has a 20 year history of bipartisanship, as it has provided countless benefits to our state residents and visitors alike. Benefits include environmental and economic, traditional and intrinsic. This fund has created numerous cases of unique partnerships in land and water protection and assured perpetual public access for an untold number of recreationists. Benefits abound for hikers, anglers, hunters, bicyclists, snowmobiling and ATV users, as a result of these partnerships.

Be it the federal Forest Legacy program, grass roots efforts by local groups advocating conservation or in kind donations by private owners, the basis of the Stewardship Fund reaches very far indeed to supporting a quality of life we have enjoyed in Wisconsin.

This fund also supports the economic profiles of the forest product and tourism industries. For over a decade we have witnessed the sell off of vast acreages of industry lands, creating loss of habitat, forest resources and public access. The Stewardship Fund has mitigated significant portions of these losses, be it a fee simple purchase of sustainable forest lands in the state forests, Forest Legacy Easements on industry lands or partnering with local groups to conserve a select tract important for public values. Funding has assisted some struggling industry businesses by acquisition of their lands for the public, yet continuing sustainable management on these tracts in order for the industry to see a continued flow of timber.

The benefits of the Fund to clean water are priceless to a growing society, especially in this time of uncertainty and instability with climatic issues. The well managed forests involved in this discussion, in turn mitigate climate change.

Citing specific projects of benefit to communities would require volumes, and the value of the Fund has been loudly debated in recent years. The true bi partisan nature of support for Stewardship goes far beyond the current divisiveness gripping our political process.

Concerns from our members include the lapse of the PILT (Payments in Lieu of Taxes), the requirement of resolutions of support for state purchases by local units of government, as well as what appears to be micro management by the joint finance committee. Once the PILT is removed, it is difficult to imagine any local unit of government supporting a state purchase. We have listened to members comments liking this budget provision to being an underhanded attempt to cripple Stewardship, to render it worthless in practice.

I may summarize my comments by stating that even though these are trying financial times, this is no time to ignore the needs of future generations in regard to conserving our natural resources. When the economy turns around the Stewardship dollars will be much diminished by increasing land values.

We are also concerned about the vacancy rates in DNR, especially the Division of Forestry, and how this may jeopardize our natural resources.

Thank You for the opportunity to comment.

Joe Hovel, as representative of Partners in Forestry COOP and Northwood Alliance Inc.

Partners in Forestry is a Cooperative with members interested in and involved in sustainable forestry. Our members and board of directors is a cross section of land owners, foresters, loggers and other resource professionals. We appreciate and care deeply about the greater forest landscape, and respect the public-private land partnership.

www.partnersinforesy.com

Northwood Alliance Inc. is a 501 c 3 conservation group active in protecting the land and riparian resources in Northern Wis. and especially the Border Lakes region. Our mission includes education, strengthening conservation networking and assisting in local action.

www.northwoodalliance.org

office for both groups

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