
To: All Legislators
Date: March 19, 2025
**Re: Support for long-term reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson
Stewardship Program**

Dear Legislators:

We write to express our support for a 10-year, well-funded reauthorization of the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Program. We represent hunting, fishing, forestry, and conservation groups as well as local governments, recreation, and business interests.

For over 30 years, the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program has helped protect Wisconsin's lakes and streams, develop parks and trails close to home, provide public access to world-class recreational opportunities, and conserve critical wildlife habitat. Named for a Republican (Knowles) and a Democratic (Nelson) governor, the program honors Wisconsin's long standing bipartisan commitment to conservation.

The program's success is clear. Local governments and nonprofit groups in every Wisconsin county have received state matching grants to conserve land and build outdoor recreation infrastructure. Each grant is leveraged with private philanthropy, local support, and other funding sources. Whether it's boating on Wisconsin's waters, riding motorized trails in the Northwoods, or enjoying neighborhood parks, Knowles-Nelson makes these experiences possible.

Wisconsin voters overwhelmingly support conservation funding, with 93% wanting legislators to continue dedicating public funding for land, water, and wildlife conservation. This support spans the political spectrum, with strong backing from Republicans, independents, and Democrats alike.

The benefits to our state's economy and quality of life are remarkable. Local parks, boat launches, and bike trails enhance communities, help businesses recruit workers, and attract new residents. Our working forests support the timber economy while providing recreational opportunities, and protected wetlands shield communities from flooding while ensuring clean drinking water.

The outdoor recreation economy has become a powerful economic force in Wisconsin, growing nearly 10% annually and generating \$11.2 billion in economic impact while supporting 96,000 jobs. These benefits flow from diverse recreational opportunities, strengthening local economies across Wisconsin.

Lands protected through Knowles-Nelson generate \$2.5 billion annually in natural services - nearly doubling our 30-year investment every year. These lands provide climate regulation, flood protection, water purification, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities.

We support two important changes to Knowles-Nelson in this reauthorization. First, a return to a 10-year authorization. Short-term funding extensions constrain the ability of local governments and nonprofits to plan, fundraise, and implement successful projects. Second, the addition of a land management fund, which is outlined in the Executive Budget. Habitat improvements, invasive species removal, streambank restoration, prescribed fire, and other management activities are vital to help Wisconsin's natural lands thrive.

We urge the Legislature to approve a 10-year reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program at \$100 million annually. This robust funding level reflects the program's demonstrated success and Wisconsin's ongoing conservation needs.