

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund: A Good Return on Our Investment



☞ **The benefits of the Stewardship Program reach every corner of Wisconsin.** Since its creation in 1989, the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Fund has helped land trusts, local governments and the State protect almost 480,000 acres for outdoor recreation and natural habitat. Stewardship dollars have been used in 71 of Wisconsin's 72 counties for:

- **Urban green space** - Lakeshore State Park in Milwaukee;
- **Recreational trails** - the Great River Trail along the Mississippi, the Hank Aaron Trail in Milwaukee, the Green Circle Trail in Stevens Point and the National Ice Age Trail;
- **Once-in-a-lifetime purchases** - the Turtle-Flambeau and Willow Flowages;
- **Working forest easements** - 65,000-acre Wild Rivers Legacy Forest;
- **New state parks** - Straight Lake S.P. in Polk Co. and Tommy Thompson S.P. in Marinette Co.; and
- **Wildlife management areas** around the state.

The state's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan identified a statewide lack of sufficient recreational trails, parks and campgrounds to meet residents' and vacationers' needs. To meet this need will require land additional purchases of land, which can only be accomplished with a strong Stewardship Fund program that leverages state funds with private and federal dollars.

☞ **The Stewardship Fund makes economic sense.** Stewardship is less than half of 1 percent of the state's overall annual budget. For the same amount of money as it will take to update the stretch of I-94 between Mitchell Airport in Milwaukee and the Illinois state line, we can permanently protect nearly 30,000 acres of land for public hunting and fishing, bicycling and snowmobiling, camping and bird watching. This investment is critical to our state's \$11 billion tourism industry, our Northwoods forestry economy and our high quality of life.

☞ **In addition to funding state land purchases, the Stewardship Fund provides matching grants to local governments and nonprofit organizations, effectively doubling the amount of money available for land and water conservation.** The Stewardship Fund is one of only a handful of state budget items that leverage private and federal funds to match the state's investment of taxpayers' dollars. Land trusts alone have raised \$60 million to directly match Stewardship Fund grants. The importance of leveraging additional funding for land acquisition cannot be overstated.

☞ **The need for the Stewardship Fund is urgent.** Land protection is like a continuously closing window. We need to be able to act when important land comes on the market. If we are hobbled by lack of funding, we will lose our chance to protect these lands, probably forever. The demand for places to recreate outside far exceeds current opportunities and resources, especially near major population centers. At the same time, large tracts of land in northern Wisconsin that have been traditionally open to public access through the Managed Forest Law program are being split up and sold at an unprecedented rate with no guarantee of public access in the future.

☞ **The Stewardship Fund is widely supported by Wisconsin citizens from all walks of life.** Independent public opinion polling has consistently shown strong support for acquiring conservation lands among Republicans and Democrats, city dwellers and rural residents, business leaders and students. Wisconsinites recognize the key role this program has played and will continue to play in the long-term protection of Wisconsin's special places. The Stewardship Fund is funded solely by tax revenues from all of Wisconsin's taxpayers, and provides benefits back to every community in the state, from Milwaukee urban trails to Northwoods working forests.

☞ **The pristine open spaces provided by the Stewardship Fund are valued by Wisconsin's outdoorsmen and women.** In addition to hiking, bird watching, fishing and paddling opportunities, over 92% of all lands protected with Stewardship Funds are open to hunting and 96% are open to fishing and other passive uses. The 85% of Wisconsinites who enjoy walking in nature have local opportunities to do so, thanks to the Stewardship Fund's impact in communities across the state.