



Driftless Area Land Conservancy

PRESS RELEASE

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Governor Doyle's Plan to Reauthorize Stewardship Fund Seen as Critical to Preserve the Unique Landscapes of Wisconsin's Driftless Area

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Governor Jim Doyle's call to reauthorize the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund as part of his 2007-09 Budget is drawing applause from the Driftless Area Land Conservancy.

“Thanks to the Stewardship Fund, our land trust has been able to protect the historic and natural treasures in our community, like the Historic Thomas Stone Barn and the high quality prairie pasture now known as the Barneveld Prairie State Natural Area,” said Doug Cieslak, Executive Director. The Stewardship Fund’s matching grant program has made it possible for the land trust to protect this cherished landscape and make it available for current and future generations to enjoy. More than 700 people attended a recent open house to tour the historic barn and celebrate its preservation. “None of this would have been possible without the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund,” said Cieslak. “Through the generosity of local citizens, we’ve matched these state grants dollar-for-dollar with private and federal contributions”

Established in 1989 in honor of former Governors Warren Knowles and Gaylord Nelson, the Stewardship program has helped protect more than 477,000 acres of high-quality recreation and environmentally-sensitive land in Wisconsin from development – places like the Historic Thomas Farm and 85 acres formerly owned by the Thomas family that is now a Nature Conservancy preserve. The Nature Conservancy preserve is open to the public for hunting, hiking, wildlife viewing and other outdoor activities.

The Stewardship program sunsets in 2010, but Doyle's new budget includes \$105 million a year through 2020 for Stewardship, a program that has enjoyed historically bi-partisan support in the state Legislature.

Vicki Elkin, Stewardship Campaign Director for Gathering Waters Conservancy, the statewide umbrella organization for land trusts, noted that Republican Governors Tommy Thompson and Scott McCallum

adjusted the Stewardship Fund several times from its original funding level of \$25 million annually to reflect soaring land values across the state.

"With the cost of forest lands quadrupling over the past ten years, Governor Doyle has recognized that it is time, once again, to increase the Stewardship Fund so that our conservation efforts can keep pace with inflation," Elkin said. "The matching grant program is an incredibly popular component of the Stewardship Program," explained Elkin. To date, land trusts and municipalities have raised over \$135 million to match state grants.

"This commitment of local and private funds demonstrates the broad public support for land conservation and the urgent need for additional lands for outdoor public recreation," said Elkin. "In many parts of the state, we have a very small window of opportunity to protect the best of what remains of outdoor Wisconsin. Citizens across the state understand that and are united in their support of the Stewardship program."

Under the Governor's budget, land trusts would be eligible for \$14.5 million a year in grants. "We are thrilled to have the opportunity to double the state's money by matching public dollars with privately raised funds," said Cieslak.

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About the Driftless Area Land Conservancy

The Driftless Area Land Conservancy is private, non-profit land trust dedicated to protecting the unique natural areas, cultural resources, and rural landscape of America's Driftless Area. The Conservancy is the area's leading advocate for farmland conservation. The Conservancy was formed in 2001 by a conservationists concerned about the loss of rural land to development. For more information on the Historic Thomas Farm and other farm projects that utilized the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, go to <http://www.driftlesslandtrust.org>

About Gathering Waters Conservancy

Gathering Waters Conservancy was founded in 1994 with the goal of establishing a statewide network of local land trusts – citizen-run organizations, dedicated to protecting trails, parks, nature preserves, access to rivers and streams, working lands and wild places. To date, Wisconsin's 55 land trusts have a combined membership of 45,000 individuals and families and have protected over 200,000 acres for the benefit of current and future generations.