

WPRA member alert materials – Stewardship reauthorization 2021

Talking points: Why is the Stewardship program so integral to local communities?

- Overwhelming, statewide, bipartisan support: in a 2020 statewide survey, 92 percent of respondents supported continuing the program, including 88 percent of Republicans, 90 percent of independents and 97 percent of Democrats
- Excellent return on investment – every year, Stewardship-conserved lands return \$2 billion in natural services, twice what the state invests in the program annually
- Stewardship lands promote the physical and mental health of Wisconsinites; protect our communities from flooding; and promote a healthier environment
- Stewardship funds help communities leverage other funding sources, too, further reducing the burden on local governments
- Because planning and executive these projects can take many years, a 10-year reauthorization is needed to provide certainty

We are asking for reauthorization at a time when outdoor recreation is more popular than ever in Wisconsin – and a vital part of our economic recovery, including for the tourism industry

Key points from this recent article: <https://www.wisbusiness.com/2021/state-to-set-new-record-for-outdoor-recreation-in-2021/>

- Recently, the Wisconsin Department of Tourism announced that the state is on pace to break its 2019 record for outdoor recreation-related economic activity
- Even during the pandemic, Wisconsin outpaced the national average in travel spending; in 2020, travel spending provided \$2.5 billion to local communities in Wisconsin
- The number of planned trips to Wisconsin of two nights or longer is outpacing both 2019 and 2020 so far
- Outdoor recreation contributes \$7.8 billion to state GDP
- According to the Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation, GDP growth related to outdoor recreation is growing faster than the state's GDP as a whole
- An independent research group found that one dollar in every \$40 generated in Wisconsin comes from outdoor recreation-related activities
 - The group also found that outdoor recreation accounts for 93,000 jobs in Wisconsin – among the 50 states, that's the fifth-largest share of outdoor recreation-related jobs

Dear Senator/Representative LASTNAME:

As both a constituent of your district and a member of the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association (WPRA), I am writing to you to express my support for a 10-year reauthorization of the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Program, as well as continued robust funding for the local units of government (LUG) component of the program.

The LUG component of the Stewardship Program allows local governments to purchase, develop, and maintain land and easements for forestry, conservation, and recreation. Local governments in rural, urban, and suburban areas have used Stewardship funds for parks and trails, boat launches and aquatic plant management, hunting land and breakwater repairs, and more.

The program is supported by a broad cross-section of Wisconsinites. In a 2020 study, 92 percent of Wisconsin residents surveyed supported continuing the Stewardship Program, including 88 percent of Republicans, 90 percent of independents and 97 percent of Democrats.

What's more, outdoor recreation is more popular than ever in our state. Recently, the Department of Tourism announced that Wisconsin is on pace to break its previous record for outdoor recreation-related economic activity, set in 2019. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, outdoor recreation provided an essential outlet for Wisconsinites to relax, enjoy nature, and support their communities. According to Google's COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports, park and open space usage in Wisconsin increased by more than 300 percent in the summer of 2020.

As we begin to move beyond COVID-19, Stewardship lands will continue to provide recreational opportunities for our residents, while also supporting Wisconsin's tourism industry, an essential part of our economy that was particularly hard-hit in 2020. According to the Department of Tourism, outdoor recreation supports more than 93,000 jobs and provides \$7.8 billion annually to Wisconsin's economy. In fact, GDP growth related to outdoor recreation is growing faster than the state's GDP as a whole.

The return on investment for the Stewardship program is significant. Every year, lands conserved with Stewardship dollars return \$2 billion in natural services – twice as much as the state invests in the program annually. Yet for the LUG component of the Stewardship Program in particular, demand is high, but many requests go unfunded – in recent years, total requests have averaged \$19 million annually, but only one-third of requests were funded in 2019.

Local governments depend on Stewardship funds for many important projects; they also depend on the certainty that a stable funding source provides in order to plan and execute long-term projects. Thus, I respectfully request that you support a 10-year reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program at adequate funding levels.