

# BUDGET PRIORITIES

*The mission of WCFA is to provide leadership uniting the interests of the world's largest county forest program while ensuring long-term forest health and sustainability.*

WCFA represents the 30 counties in Wisconsin with County Forest lands established under WI §28.10 and §28.11. Collectively, these 30 counties manage over 2.4 million acres of forests, the largest public ownership in Wisconsin. Our county forests are a major contributor to public land management and rural economic development in the State, and are highly valued because they provide a reliable source of raw materials for the forest products industry, as well as a tremendous amount of recreation opportunities and abundant wildlife habitat. We believe that **County Forests are vital to the State's overall wellbeing**, contributing to the economic, social and environmental health of the State and helping to provide a quality of life which everyone enjoys.

[WI §28.11](#) obligates the State of Wisconsin to compensate the counties for the work and services they provide to the public and for the betterment of the State. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) financially and technically supports the counties through their budget and with staff positions, which is important to the counties' success.

## BUDGET PRIORITY #1:

Increase funding for the County Forest Administration grant, Sustainable Forestry grant and Wildlife Habitat grant by a minimum of \$630,000 each year of the biennium.

Without the financial support of the DNR, through grants and loans, keeping pace with inflation and the complexity of the county forest system, both in scope and scale, the impact realized by our county forests is diminishing every year.

NOTE: The funds necessary for these grants already exists! An increase to the DNR's spending authority of the Forestry SEG account, under the DNR Conservation Fund, is all that is required.

- ✦ **County Forest Administration Grant** – Per [WI §28.11\(5m\)](#), the DNR agrees to “fund all of the following for one professional forester in the position of county forest administrator or assistant county forest administrator: 1. Up to 50% of the forester's salary. 2. Up to 50% of the forester's fringe benefits, except that the fringe benefits may not exceed 40% of the forester's salary.” The amount the DNR allocates for this grant annually is quickly consumed by the ever-increasing costs of salary and fringe. **REQUEST: Increase funding by \$250,000 annually.**
- ✦ **Sustainable Forestry Grant** – Per [WI §28.11\(5r\)](#), the DNR offers Sustainable Forestry Grants, which are used primarily for emergency and unanticipated work, but because the funding is also taken from the same Forestry SEG account as the County Forest Administration grant, as salary and fringe costs grow with inflation, there is less available for work accomplished through this grant. The grant is substantially over subscribed every year. **REQUEST: Increase funding by \$250,000 annually.**
- ✦ **Wildlife Habitat Grant** – The Wildlife Habitat Grant has been at \$0.05/acre since 2010. However, it has also been prorated for the last several years, as the funds are being redistributed elsewhere. Even so, \$112,600 doesn't go a long way on 2.4 million acres of publicly owned land. At a minimum, the Wildlife Habitat Grant should be made whole with no proration occurring. Secondly, the Wildlife Habitat Grant should be increased up to \$0.10/acre, as it states in statute ([WI §23.09\(17m\)](#)). **REQUEST: Increase funding by \$130,000 annually.**

## BUDGET PRIORITY #2:

Increase and stabilize the Department of Natural Resources staff commitment to the County Forest program given through “time standards” from 46,000 hours annually to 52,000 hours annually.

Time Standard hours are critical to the county forests’ mission. DNR Division of Forestry personnel complete essential tasks on behalf of the counties every year. The time standard allocation has been more or less 46,000 hours for 20 years. A recent needs assessment exercise, using calculation formulas established by the Division of Forestry, WCFA and the Counties, showed a need of over 52,000 hours.

However, due to other priorities and staffing shortages, the Division is still only able to supply 46,000 hours, leading to a proration of 88%. Given the increasing complexity of the county forest system, both in scope and scale, less work is being done with the same number of hours received.

**REQUEST: Fund an additional 6,000 DNR Division of Forestry hours annually for work on county forests by increasing the DNR’s position authority by 3.5 full time positions.**

## BUDGET PRIORITY #3:

Continued and increased support of the Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry operations and budget.

Because of the support the DNR supplies to the county forests every year, it’s important for the DNR itself, especially the Division of Forestry, to be healthy. In the last budget, we witnessed a decrease in the Division of Forestry’s budget, both in operating budget and for staff positions. Both of these things have negatively impacted the county forest system. We fully support their request to increase their operating budget.

In addition, we fully support replacing those staff positions previously removed, and increasing staff positions in forest products, forest hydrology and for county forest time standards.

Last, we fully support continuous funding for WisFIRS maintenance and upgrades, as the county forests rely heavily on that system for their work.

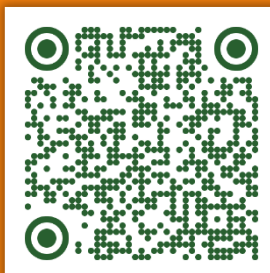
## OTHER BUDGET PRIORITIES:

- ✦ County Forest road infrastructure, transportation and aids ([WI §86.315](#))
- ✦ Wisconsin’s Council on Forestry initiatives
  - Initiatives for new wood markets are critical
- ✦ County Forest Acreage Share Payments ([WI §28.11\(8\)\(a\)](#)).
- ✦ Reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program

## LEARN MORE:

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## FAST FACTS

- 1<sup>st</sup> County Forest established in 1928 in Langlade.
- Currently there are 30 established County Forest Programs.
- Collectively the largest public landholder in Wisconsin.
- Collectively they manage over 2.4 million acres, roughly 14% of Wisconsin’s forested acres.
- 27 County Forests, with over 2.4M acres, are 3<sup>rd</sup> party certified by the Forest Stewardship Council and/or the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.
- Nearly 1,800 miles of ATV trails, over 9,000 miles of snowmobile trails exist across the system.
- Forestry is the #1 employer in 10 Counties
- Forestry is #1 in output in 14 Counties

*The annual forest certification audits continually find that the Wisconsin County Forest system operates at the highest levels of forest management, regularly meeting national and global best management standards. The system has been previously described as “the model” for public land management in the United States.*

