

# BUDGET PRIORITIES

## | Supplemental Report

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. [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.

**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. Forecasts show that the County Forest Administration Grant will have to be prorated in just a couple of years if funding isn't increased. Without the assistance of this grant, some counties would not be able to staff a forester to manage their county forest or be able to retain good employees. Also, without this grant keeping pace with the need, many counties may have furlough or lay off staff and/or cut salaries. This could make employee retention much more difficult. In these times of depressed wood markets and financial stress on county budgets every little bit of financial support helps!

**REQUEST: Increase funding by \$250,000 annually.**

- \* **Sustainable Forestry Grant** – Per [WI §28.11\(5r\)](#), the DNR offers Sustainable Forestry Grants to the County Forests, which are used primarily for emergency and unanticipated work, but because their 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 funding available for work accomplished through the Sustainable Forestry Grant. In addition, the grant is substantially over subscribed every year. **REQUEST: Increase funding by \$250,000 annually.**

Work accomplished through this grant includes, but not limited to:

- Clean up and restoration of salvage from natural disasters
- Treatment of invasive species
- Technology advancements (improves quality of work and creates efficiencies)
- Improving roads & increasing forest access
- Timber stand improvement

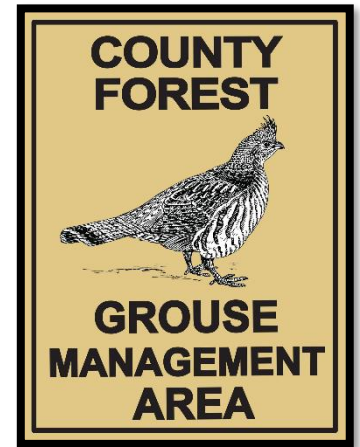
**Full funding at request level for the County Forest Administration Grant and the Sustainable Forestry Grant, combined, would equal \$2,363,900 annually.**



- \* **Wildlife Habitat Grant** – Hunting and fishing are a large part of Wisconsin’s fabric and historical pastimes. The Wildlife Habitat Grant helps the County Forests increase and improve wildlife habitat across the landscape. State statute ([WI §23.09\(17m\)](#)) allows \$0.10/ acre for this grant, however, the grant has been at \$0.05/acre since 2010 and furthermore, has also been prorated for the last several years, as the funds are being redistributed elsewhere. **REQUEST: Increase funding by \$130,000 annually; full funding at \$0.10/acre equals \$241,085.**

Work accomplished through this grant includes, but not limited to:

- Purchasing of tree seed & seedlings for forest regeneration, mainly Jack Pine & Red Oak
- Installing rip rap & wildlife habitat seed mixes for erosion control and maintenance
- Purchasing of lupine seed for Karner Blue Butterfly habitat (an endangered species)
- Installing and improving access control gates, parking lots and signage
- Planting and mowing of wildlife openings & hunter walking trails
- Implementing habitat & silvicultural prescribed burns & site preparation
- Production of brochures & maps for forest users
- Treatment of invasive species
- Stocking of fish in local lakes
- Installing dam structures for water control and fur-bearer habitat
- Alder shearing for woodcock habitat
- Purchase of wild rice for water flowage restoration
- Development of Grouse Management Areas
- Development of Woodcock Management Areas
- Funding for Woods & Waters programs (local school outdoor education)



## 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, and agreed upon, by the Division of Forestry, WCFA and the counties, showed a need of over 52,000 hours. A lot of additional work could be accomplished on the county forests for the betterment of Wisconsin if the allocation of hours met the need. It should be noted that we do not want to diminish the work of the DNR on their own lands, for their own priorities and are not suggesting reprioritizing work or reallocating staff time. **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.**

Work accomplished with the assistance of time standards includes, but not limited to:

- Forest inventory & reconnaissance
- Planning, establishment and administration of timber sales
- Reforestation planning & establishment
- Forest regeneration preparation monitoring
- Prescribed burning
- Planning, establishment & maintenance of road & forest infrastructure
- Treatment of invasive species
- Timber stand improvement



## 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. The staff positions that were removed because of funding cuts resulted in less available resources and subject matter experts for forest managers to consult, as well placing undue burden on county forest staff to fill the gaps. For example, because a fire staff position was eliminated in Burnett County due to the budget cuts, the DNR had to ask the local county forest staff to increase their availability for fire response. A second example consists of the elimination of the Natural Heritage Conservation liaison between that program and the forestry (both DNR and County Forest) staff, resulting in slower response to support Natural Heritage inventory and questions relating to forest management.

Last, we fully support continuous funding for the Wisconsin Forest Inventory and Reporting System (WisFIRS) maintenance and upgrades, as the county forests rely heavily on that system for their work. We are aware of several large projects and upgrades slated for WisFIRS that have been shelved because of the lack of staff time and funding available to do the work. Putting off needed upgrades to the system will eventually have negative impacts on its users.

## OTHER BUDGET PRIORITIES:

- **County Forest road infrastructure, transportation and aids** ([WI §86.315](#))

Currently, the County Forests receive \$351 per mile of forest road annually from the Department of Transportation. While every dollar helps, the real cost of maintaining these roads is more than three times what is currently given.

- **Wisconsin's Council on Forestry Initiatives**

The Council on Forestry has a suite of budget priorities of their own, including support of private forest owners, support for K-12 forestry education, increasing efforts to maintain forest health and increasing forestry outreach and education. Lastly, their initiative for developing new wood markets is critical to keep our forests thriving.

- **County Forest Acreage Share Payments** ([WI §28.11\(8\)\(a\)](#)).

Currently, the State provides \$0.63/ acre to the townships where county forests lie, which is far below the amount paid for State lands. Increasing this direct payment from the DNR to the townships would greatly improve neighbor relations by making public lands less of an economic burden on local towns.

- **Reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program**

Authorized in FY 2011, the County Forest Subprogram has been one of the most cost effective and efficient uses of Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funds. It is one of the few uses of the Stewardship funds which actually produces revenue and a positive rate of return on its investment, most of which goes back into local coffers to be reinvested. We support the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship County Forest Subprogram being reauthorized and funded at current levels (\$3 million annually), and amended to allow nature-based recreational development grants under the County Forest Subprogram.

## LEARN MORE:

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