

# The Nature Conservancy: Applauds Governor Evers on fully funding the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program

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The following is a statement from Elizabeth Koehler, State Director, The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin

“Governor Tony Evers’ proposal in his biennial state budget to reauthorize the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program for another 10 years with a \$70 million dollar investment will ensure that future generations have the same opportunities to enjoy Wisconsin’s beauty and benefit from its natural resources as we do today,” says Elizabeth Koehler, who directs The Nature Conservancy’s work in Wisconsin.

For over 30 years, the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program has been a highly successful partnership with the people of Wisconsin to protect our lands and waters. The Stewardship Program has also proven to be a wise investment in our economy. In 2019 alone, tourism was a \$22.2 billion-dollar industry, with the outdoor recreation industry contributing \$7.8 billion to the state’s gross domestic product.

The program continues to enjoy strong bipartisan support in the Legislature, and we look forward to keeping that tradition alive as we work with the Governor and legislators on reauthorization.

While there is no question that the Stewardship Program has accomplished much, we need a strong, well-funded Program now more than ever. The past year drove the point home, with people taking solace in the great outdoors in record-setting numbers. Parks and natural areas have been at and often over capacity throughout

the pandemic, highlighting the increased need for opportunities for residents enjoy nature closer to home.

Wisconsinites are also increasingly concerned about the water quality of their lakes, rivers, and streams and of their drinking water. The Stewardship Program keeps our waters clean by protecting the forests, wetlands and grasslands that filter out pollutants in runoff before they reach our lakes, rivers, and groundwater.

The Program has helped cities like Milwaukee protect wetlands and forests along rivers upstream to store water and help reduce the risk of severe flooding downstream. We need to continue to invest in land and water conservation across the state that provides resilience in the face of increased flooding and other challenges.

“As the Legislature begins to consider Wisconsin’s budget for the next two years, we urge legislators from both parties to continue to invest in the Stewardship Program and protect Wisconsin’s lands, waters and way of life for generations to come,” concludes Koehler.