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# Gov. Evers: Announces budget initiatives to bolster conservation, strengthen forestry industry

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MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today will visit Milwaukee's Arborist Apprenticeship Program to highlight his 2023-25 biennial budget initiatives to strengthen Wisconsin's forest regeneration and management, take preventative action against invasive species, and expand the forestry industry workforce across the state.

"Conservation is part of our DNA as Wisconsinites, and preserving our forestland and other outdoor spaces is not only important for Wisconsinites' health and well-being but also critical to our state's economic success." said Gov. Evers. "From investing in forestry regeneration and mitigating invasive species to bolstering our vast forestry workforce, these investments are about protecting our environment and growing our economy for generations to come."

According to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the forest products industry in Wisconsin accounts for more than 60,000 jobs and has a total industry output of $24.4 billion, and for every 10 jobs in the forest products industry, 12 additional jobs are supported in other state sectors.

Over the last four years, Gov. Evers and the Evers Administration have prioritized strengthening Wisconsin's forestry industry and promoting forestry across Wisconsin. The governor's 2021-23 biennial budget increased the County Forest Acreage Share Payments from 30 cents to 63 cents—the first increased investment in more than 30 years. In April 2021, Gov. Evers also signed Executive Order #112, pledging to plant 75 million new trees in rural and urban areas and conserve 125,000 acres of forest in Wisconsin by 2030 in collaboration with public, private, and non-governmental partners. When fully realized Wisconsin's tree pledge will

result in nearly 29 million metric tons of carbon dioxide stored over the next 50 years.

Additionally, the governor has previously invested $4 million each to the Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Technology (WIST) at the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Stevens Point and the Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering Technology, and Apprenticeship (AMETA) Center at Mid-State Technical College (MSTC) to support their work to ensure the long-term viability of the state's paper and forest products industry. In addition, the governor previously provided up to $8 million through the Workforce Innovation Grant Program for the Wisconsin Forestry Center at UW-Stevens Point to invest in their Forest Industry Workforce Recruitment and Development Initiative, as well as up to $9 million through the same grant program to support construction of the AMETA Center at MSTC.

More information regarding the governor's proposal to support the state's forestry industry, from forest regrowth and resiliency to local county forest administrative support to expanding forestry workforce development programs, is available below.

**Conserving and Protecting Wisconsin's Forestry Resources**
The governor's budget will continue working toward the goals of Executive Order #112 by providing more than $4.4 million to encourage the planting and growth of trees and forests, including:

- $395,000 annually for forest regeneration on state-owned lands, including state forests;
- $667,500 annually to provide technical and financial assistance to public landowners for reforestation, forest regeneration and management, with a focus on county forests; and
- $627,800 to support the state nursery program to increase the production and distribution of seeds and seedlings for reforestation.

The governor is also proposing additional funding to support 30 county forests across Wisconsin, totaling over 2.4 million acres available to the public with:

- $250,000 annually for county forest administration grants and sustainable forestry grants to support county forests; and
- $128,300 annually to support wildlife habitat management on county forest lands.

The governor's budget proposal also provides $957,600 to replace fire protection equipment used in combatting forest fires, ensuring firefighters and first responders have the tools they need to safely and effectively battle these fires.

**Prevent Invasive Species**
The governor is proposing more than $2.7 million for invasive species prevention. Invasive species degrade natural habitats and make it more difficult and expensive to manage forests, parks, grasslands, and other natural spaces. This investment includes:

- $589,500 annually for Terrestrial Invasive Species Protection;
- $310,000 annually for the Resilient Forests Initiative, which provides grant funding to the Wisconsin Forest Landowner and Weed Management Area programs to assist with forest management and invasive plant control on private forest land; and
- $475,000 annually for urban forestry grants to help communities with forest management, education and outreach, emerging invasive species threats and emergency storm response.

**Growing Wisconsin's Forestry Industry and Workforce**
Wisconsin's forestry industry is a critical part of the state's economy, but like many sectors, has struggled to attract and retain skilled forestry professionals.

The governor is proposing providing an additional $500,000 over the biennium in his Executive Budget for both the WIST at UW-Stevens Point and the AMETA Center at MSTC to further support their critical work in building out Wisconsin's forestry and paper industry workforce.

Gov. Evers is also proposing providing $195,000 to hire an outreach officer to work with groups that are historically underserved by traditional forestry and environmental higher education programs to help expand the pool of interested individuals in this vital industry and ensure the long-term viability of the industry.

Finally, Gov. Evers is proposing providing $775,000 in fiscal year 2024 for the development of a forestry industry strategic plan and roadmap, which will help to retain existing businesses, identify new market opportunities, and drive innovation. This initiative was first recommended by the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity.

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