

The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin: Statement on Gov. Evers' lawsuit to restore separation of powers

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MADISON, WIS – Elizabeth Koehler, State Director for The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin, released the following statement today regarding the announcement of a lawsuit by Gov. Evers and Attorney General Josh Kaul against the Legislature for violating the Wisconsin constitution:

“For many years, The Nature Conservancy and our partners have relied on the state’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program (KNSP), an important tool for protecting and caring for Wisconsin’s land and water for all the social, economic, climate, and biodiversity benefits that nature provides.

“Signed into law by Republican Gov. Tommy Thompson in 1989, the KNSP continues to have strong, bipartisan support from people all across the state ([poll source](#)). Wisconsinites understand the importance of the program and its value to our lives and well-being, especially as tourism and outdoor recreation continue to be critical pillars of our state’s economy and culture.

“KNSP has been broken for several years by a lack of transparency and unnecessary legislative roadblocks during the funding allocation process. We saw the impact of that brokenness with projects like the Pelican River Forest, which has been indefinitely held up by a single, anonymous objection by a member of the Joint Finance Committee. Healthy government function shouldn’t hinge on the votes of anonymous individuals, and transparency should remain at the heart of legislation in Wisconsin. We believe it’s time to break up the unnecessary logjam that is

hindering our democratic processes.

“Gov. Evers’ lawsuit asks for a restoration of the separation of powers that are central to the healthy functioning of our democracy—functioning that Wisconsinites deserve and benefit from. Restoring transparency to the process by which KNSP grants are approved or denied, and allowing the Department of Natural Resources and other state agencies to do their jobs, are common-sense actions that benefit people across the state.

“TNC thanks the governor for addressing this serious issue and working to support Wisconsin’s natural heritage. We look forward to the restoration of a rigorous, competitive, and transparent process for conservation funding and many other important functions of government.”