

# Sen. Keyeski: Responds to Republicans pulling Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program bills from Senate calendar last minute, putting program at risk of expiring

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MADISON – Yesterday, two Republican-authored bills relating to reauthorizing the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, [Senate Bill 316](#) (SB 316) and [Senate Bill 685](#) (SB 685), were scheduled to be voted on by the full Senate. Instead, Senate Republicans pulled these bills from the session calendar and have left this important program in limbo at the end of our legislative session.

State Senator Sarah Keyeski (D-Lodi) released the following statement in response to Republicans' failure to act on Knowles-Nelson during yesterday's session day:

“Senate Republicans cannot agree within their own caucus on how to handle Knowles-Nelson and have refused to find a real and reasonable compromise with us, their Democratic colleagues. Instead, the newest offer Republicans presented would significantly weaken this vital, valuable, and popular conservation program.

“Their bills, which were set to come before us for a vote yesterday before they were abruptly removed from our day's agenda, were nowhere near Democrats' ideal plan for how to continue Knowles-Nelson. In fact, Republicans' plan would be a step backwards. Without our support, Republicans could not pass their own Knowles-Nelson bills, yet they still remained unwilling to continue working with us on a real compromise, despite our motivation.

“In response, Senate Democrats had a commonsense amendment we planned to present yesterday to simply renew the program for one additional year, through June 30, 2027. This effort would help save the program, leaving it ‘as is’ until next session when we could renew our efforts to give our Stewardship Program the resources it needs to continue successfully into the future. Unfortunately, the majority party did not even allow us to do that much for our state.

“I have heard from hundreds of constituents this session who have reached out in support of continuing this program that protects our cherished natural spaces and wildlife. Now, Knowles-Nelson is in jeopardy, and Republicans have only offered one more day to be in session. If this program ends, its death lies at the feet of my Republican colleagues. Let’s not let that happen.”

*The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is a bipartisan conservation program that was created in the 1989-90 legislative session. The program provides local governments, non-profit conservation organizations, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources with funding for projects such as restoring habitats, acquiring land for public use, and building and maintaining recreational infrastructure including trails, campgrounds, and boat launches. There have been over 800 Knowles-Nelson projects in the 14th Senate District alone. Currently, \$33 million is provided annually for the program through the end of this fiscal year. The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is set to expire in June of 2026 if no action is taken.*

*Republicans removed Governor Evers’ proposal to re-authorize the Stewardship Program for 10 years at \$100 million per year from the 2025-27 budget. Then, Republicans introduced their plans for the Stewardship Program, which through multiple would have underfunded and significantly weakened the program. [SB 316/AB 315](#) is their policy proposal to reauthorize the program, and [SB 685/AB 612](#) is their accompanying fiscal proposal to fund the program.*

*In response, Legislative Democrats introduced their own legislation to save the Stewardship Program. [Senate Bill 436/Assembly Bill 435](#), authored by Sen. Jodi Habush-Sinykin and Rep. Vincent Miresse, which would re-authorize the Stewardship Program for 6 years, provide \$72 million per year, and create a new independent oversight board for the program. The level of funding was a compromise between the Governor’s budget proposal and the Republicans’ legislative proposal. Democrats’ proposal has sat in committee, unacted upon, since September 2025.*