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LAND TRUST COMMUNITY APPLAUDS PROPOSAL TO RENEW THE KNOWLES-NELSON STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

January 15, 2020 - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Madison, WI – Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts applauded Representatives Amy Loudenbeck and Joel Kitchens for proposing legislation to renew the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program through the end of the decade.

Named for two former governors and conservation champions—Republican Warren Knowles and Democrat Gaylord Nelson—the Stewardship Program has protected some of Wisconsin's most iconic public lands—including key sections of the Ice Age Trail, the Kettle Moraine State Forest, the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage, and the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway—as well as popular local trails and parks throughout the state.

“Wisconsin has a long-running, bipartisan tradition of protecting the places that make our state special, and this proposed legislation continues that legacy.” Mike Carlson, Executive Director of Gathering Waters, said. “This bill provides a creative solution for funding the Stewardship Program, and we’re asking the full Legislature and Governor Evers to support this long-term approach.”

For the past 30 years, the Stewardship Program has provided funding to local governments, nonprofit land trusts, and the Wisconsin DNR to preserve natural areas and wildlife habitat, to protect water quality and fisheries, and to expand opportunities for outdoor recreation in parks, trails, wildlife areas, and forests.

“The Stewardship Program contributes to a strong economy, healthy communities, and a high quality of life that makes Wisconsin a desirable place to live, work, and play,” Carlson said. “Two of Wisconsin's most important economic sectors—the \$18 billion outdoor recreation industry and \$24 billion forestry industry—are directly supported by the state's investment in Stewardship.”

As one of only a handful of state programs to require matching funds, Stewardship leverages the state's investment with millions of dollars of private, local, and federal funding. The annual cost of the program is less than 0.3 percent of the overall state budget. “The Stewardship Program costs each resident in Wisconsin less per year than a fishing license or a state park sticker,” Carlson added. “The ongoing benefits to our state far outweigh the cost.”

“This issue is also broadly popular with the public. Recent polling has showed 93 percent public support for renewing this program,” Carlson added. “Everyone who enjoys spending time outdoors in Wisconsin benefits from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. It's crucial for protecting our public lands, water, wildlife, and the Wisconsin way of life for future generations.”

Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts is a statewide land conservation organization founded in 1994 to strengthen Wisconsin's nonprofit land trusts. Through training and technical assistance, outreach, and public policy advocacy, Gathering Waters helps land trusts, landowners, and communities protect the places that make Wisconsin special.

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