



March 25, 2003

Joint Finance Committee
Madison, WI 53702

Dear Member of the Joint Finance Committee,

As a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to protecting Wisconsin's health and natural resources, **the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters and the Wisconsin Conservation Voters Institute urge you to support funding for the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund.**

Wisconsin's outdoor heritage is critical to our tourism industry and the health of Wisconsin's economy as a whole. The Stewardship Fund is the most effective mechanism we have to protect this outdoor heritage. The Stewardship Fund offers the opportunity to leverage more conservation through partnerships with private organizations, than the state can do alone. To date, Wisconsin's 50 land trusts have protected over 100,000 acres of wetlands, grasslands, natural areas, shorelines, forests and farms in communities across the state. Much of this land would not have been protected without matching grants from the Stewardship Fund. Of the more than \$25 million in grants received by land trusts in the last ten years, each was matched dollar-for-dollar and leveraged an additional \$75 million in private and public dollars for conservation.

We understand the difficult budget the State Legislature is currently facing. However, short-term budget difficulties can not override the long-term benefits, both environmental and economic, that the Stewardship Fund provides. As a bonded program, it constitutes less than one half of one percent of the annual budget. Reducing the Stewardship Fund would be a drastic action that would result in little benefit to the overall state budget. In addition, a reduction would cause a delay in the protection of critical areas whose prices will only increase. Maintaining the Stewardship Fund at its current level will assure that these areas are not lost forever to development or degradation.

We are pleased that the Joint Committee on Finance has scheduled several budget hearings across the state. Our Board members and I look forward to testifying at one or more. Please so not hesitate to contact me at (608) 850-4585.

Sincerely,

Kathy Pielsticker
Executive Director

Clean Air - Clean Water - Clear Choices

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