

Press Release

Cuts to Conservation Programs in Proposed State Budget a False Economy

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The Madison Audubon Society is dismayed and concerned with the actions taken by the Joint Finance Committee against the environment. While we fully understand that there must be deep cuts made to address the budget crisis, eliminating or cutting back on conservation programs is a false economy.

This is especially true in the case of the Stewardship Fund, as those dollars have leveraged millions of private, local, and federal dollars. Stewardship dollars are also a smart investment, as land can be purchased at a more reasonable price now than will be possible in future years.

Cutting the proposed hunting and fishing license fee increases, which were supported by more than 50 conservation groups in the state, including the Madison Audubon Society, is also a false economy. Wildlife-watching, according to the "1996 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation" brings in \$1,159,600,000 in expenditure/sales to Wisconsin per year, generating \$58 million in state sales tax revenue, and \$24.9 million in state income tax revenue. If the license fee increases supported by the conservation community don't go through as originally proposed, many important and popular programs will have to be cut. As just one example, the budget for nature programs at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, one of Wisconsin's most popular wildlife-watching sites, would have to be cut 50%. Yet Crex visitors generate \$2.4 million for the local economy.

At a time when public support for natural resources management and outdoor recreation is at an all-time high, with surveys showing that Wisconsin citizens place its value at over 9 on a scale of 1 to 10, the legislature should take a lesson and support these programs to a like degree.