



Budget Briefs

from the Legislative Reference Bureau



Budget Brief 08-1

January 2008

WARREN KNOWLES-GAYLORD NELSON STEWARDSHIP 2000 PROGRAM

The biennial budget act, 2007 Wisconsin Act 20, passed by the legislature and signed by Governor Jim Doyle on October 26, 2007, made numerous revisions to the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship 2000 Program.

BACKGROUND

The Stewardship Program, which uses state funds to purchase conservation lands or to assist local governments or nonprofit conservation groups in purchasing land for conservation purposes, was first authorized in 1989, and was named the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Program in 1993. In 1999, the legislature renamed the program the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship 2000 Program and increased the bonding allotment to \$46 million per year over the 10-year period from 1999-2000 to 2009-10. Annual bonding authority was increased to \$60 million per year beginning in 2002-03.

ACT 20 REAUTHORIZATION

Act 20 reauthorizes the stewardship program for an additional 10 years, through the 2019-20 fiscal year. The act also increases bonding authorization of the program to \$86 million annually, or \$860 million for the entire 10-year period.

ACCESS TO STEWARDSHIP LANDS

Act 20 creates new public access requirements for all lands acquired with stewardship program grant funds or by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) using stewardship funds. These requirements, which also apply to easements to managed forest lands acquired with stewardship funds, require that access be granted to the general public for the purposes

of hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, cross-country skiing, and any other activity authorized by DNR rule, unless the lands or easements are part of a fish and game refuge. Persons receiving grants may prohibit access to lands for one or more of these activities if the DNR board determines that the prohibition is necessary to protect public safety, protect a unique animal or plant community, or accommodate user patterns as determined by DNR rule.

Act 20 requires the DNR to prepare an annual report detailing all lands acquired during the year under the stewardship program to which public access is restricted, and which activities are permitted on each parcel. The report must be submitted to the Joint Committee on Finance (JCF) and to the appropriate standing committees of the legislature by November 15 of each year, beginning in 2008.

INFORMATION AND PUBLIC NOTICE REQUIREMENTS

The DNR and other owners of stewardship land are required by Act 20 to make certain efforts to publicize the availability of their land for recreational purposes. By October 27, 2011, the DNR must establish and maintain an interactive mapping tool showing the location of land available for public access. The mapping tool must be available to the public free of charge at the DNR's Web site. Act 20 also requires the DNR to publish a printed directory of stewardship lands available for public access, listed by county and town, and made available to the public for cost by October 27, 2011. As an alternative, the DNR may provide

the public with a privately published directory paid for by the DNR.

Act 20 also creates certain signage requirements to help identify stewardship lands available for public access. The DNR or other owner of stewardship land must post signs at major access points of the land. They must identify the parcel as stewardship land and indicate the activities permitted on it, as well as contact information for the owner of the parcel. Access notification requirements do not apply to trail easements, easements not related to public areas, or lands associated with the Ice Age Trail.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FINANCE REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

Act 20 implements a procedure for passive review by the JCF of stewardship transactions. Under the new law, the DNR must notify the JCF of certain transactions using stewardship funds. The JCF may schedule a meeting to review any transaction if at least five members, including one of the cochairpersons, notify the DNR in writing that they wish to schedule one. If the JCF does not notify the DNR of a meeting within 14 days of the DNR's initial notification, the DNR may proceed with the activity in question. If the JCF notifies the DNR that it wants to schedule a meeting on an action, it must do so within 16 days, or 31 days if the legislature has completed its last general-business floorperiod. Once a meeting is scheduled, the DNR may proceed with the action only with JCF approval. The review procedure only applies to projects exceeding \$750,000,

unless a less costly project is linked to another project that would bring the combined total of the two to more than \$750,000. The DNR is prohibited from dividing projects to circumvent the review process under the \$750,000 rule.

GRANT PROGRAMS

Act 20 requires the DNR to create a grant program to assist counties in acquiring land for county forests or projects promoting nature-based outdoor recreation or conservation. The program is to run from fiscal year 2010-11 to 2019-20, and will provide counties with matching funds equaling 50% of acquisition costs. Once land is acquired, counties may not convert it to uses inconsistent with recreation or conservation activity without approval of the DNR board.

Act 20 also modifies an existing grant program for nonprofit organizations to increase the maximum percent of land acquisition costs covered by grants from 50% to 75%. The increased percentage applies if the DNR board determines that 1) the property to be acquired is uniquely valuable in preserving the resources of the state, 2) that delaying acquisition until 50% of the cost is procured is not reasonably possible, or 3) if sufficient bonding authority remains after awarding grants to organizations that have met the 50% requirement.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The DNR provides extensive information about the stewardship program on its Web site at <http://dnr.wi.gov/stewardship>.