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WARREN KNOWLES-GAYLORD NELSON STEWARDSHIP 2000 PROGRAM

The biennial state budget act (1999 Wisconsin Act 9), passed by the legislature and signed by Governor Tommy Thompson on October 27, 1999, reauthorizes the state's land stewardship program for another 10-year period, ending June 30, 2010. In the second decade, it will be named the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship 2000 Program, and its bonding authorization will almost double from approximately \$231 million to \$460 million.

BACKGROUND

The stewardship program was first authorized in 1989 Act 31 to cover the 10-year period of 1990-91 through 1999-2000. Its purpose was to acquire and develop recreational land and protect environmentally sensitive areas. 1993 Act 343 named the program the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Program in recognition of the conservation efforts of the two governors. By July 1, 1998, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) had acquired or made a commitment for 130,451 acres under the program.

STEWARDSHIP 2000

Under Act 9, the Stewardship 2000 projects are organized into four specific subprograms: land acquisition; property development and local assistance; bluff protection; and Baraboo Hills land acquisition. (Projects created under the original stewardship program, which will be phased out, are divided into 12 subprograms.)

Land acquisition. DNR and nonprofit conservation organizations (NCOs) are eligible for funding for land purchases devoted to conservation and recreational purposes, including state parks, forests, wildlife areas, and recreation areas. Stewardship 2000 places a \$28.5 million maximum on expenditures for land acquisition in fiscal 2000-01 and increases the maximum to \$34.5 million for each of the succeeding fiscal years through 2009-10. DNR may use this funding to acquire land or for grants to NCOs for acquisitions. Act 9 requires that \$3 million per year be spent on state trails or the Ice Age Trail. In spending the remainder of the annual funding, DNR must give priority to: 1) preservation or enhancement of water resources, including lands in the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway; 2) wild rivers; 3) protection of stream banks and Great Lakes' shorelines; 4) habitat areas; 5) natural areas; and 6) the Middle Kettle Moraine.

Act 9 also allows DNR to spend all of the amount available under the land acquisition program for a land transaction that will require DNR to sell a portion of the acquired land. Under the program, the Joint Committee on Finance and the governor must approve any transactions in excess of \$250,000.

Property development and local assistance. Stewardship 2000 authorizes a maximum annual expenditure of \$11.5 million through 2009-10 for property development and local assistance. A minimum of \$3.5 million must be spent on property development, which covers

repair and renovation activities for existing facilities at state parks and DNR-owned recreational sites, including campsites, beaches, nature trails, and information centers. The funds may also be used for grants to match private contributions for development projects at state sites.

Local assistance is provided in the form of grants to municipalities and NCOs to match 50% of the cost of acquiring and developing recreational lands in community park systems, urban rivers, and urban green space. Act 9 also provides grants to governmental units and NCOs for acquiring property development rights.

Any money provided for property development or local assistance must be used for nature-based outdoor recreation, as defined by DNR.

Bluff protection. Stewardship 2000 provides that a maximum of \$1 million may be made available to DNR and NCOs for the bluff protection subprogram, which will sunset on June 30, 2004. Bonding authority not obligated at the time of the sunset will be transferred to the land acquisition subprogram.

Baraboo Hills Land Acquisition. Stewardship 2000 authorizes a \$5 million allocation to match the value of land acquisitions made in the Baraboo Hills for conservation purposes by the federal government, a local government, or NCOs. The commitments must have been made before January 1, 2006, and the federal expenditures must be from nontransportation monies. DNR must value the matching land acquisition at the appraised value of the parcel plus any related expenses to the purchasing agency. Act 9 provides that no funds may be used under the Baraboo Hills subprogram until the Department of Transportation certifies that construction has begun on U.S. Highway 12 that will result in at least four traffic lanes between Middleton and Sauk City.

Acquisition costs. DNR must establish criteria for determining acquisition costs for land purchases under Stewardship 2000. Act 9 requires that acquisition costs must equal the owner's acquisition price for lands owned for less than one year. A 5% annual adjustment increase is calculated to determine acquisition costs for lands owned more than one year but less than three years.

Prohibitions. Act 9 places certain prohibitions on the use of stewardship funds. Funds must not be used for the development of golf courses and cannot be used by one municipality to purchase land within another municipality without the latter's approval. The act also requires county board approval for stewardship purchases that occur in counties where at least 66% of the land is in public ownership.

CONTACTS

For more information about the Stewardship 2000 Program created by 1999 Wisconsin Act 9, contact Robert Roden of DNR's Bureau of Facilities and Lands at (608) 266-2197.