



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON FORESTRY

Scott Walker, Governor

Reply to: P.O. Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921
Office: 608/261-7599
Fax: 608/266-6983
Email: henry@gltpa.org

March 30, 2017

Henry Schienebeck
Chairman
Butternut

Jane Severt
Vice-Chair
Rhineland

Troy Brown
Antigo

Matt Dallman
Tomahawk

Fred Souba
Wisconsin Rapids

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Sen. Tom Tiffany
Madison

Richard Wedepohl
Madison

Ken Zabel
Janesville

Ken Price
Stevens Point

Rep. Nick Milroy
Superior

Sen. Janet Bewley
Ashland

Jason Sjostrom
Hayward

To: The Honorable Senator Alberta Darling
The Honorable Representative John Nygren
Co-Chairs, Wisconsin Joint Committee on Finance
C/O Committee Clerk
Joe Malkasian
State Capitol
Room 305 East
Madison, WI 53702

Subject: Biennial 2017-2019 State Budget - *Wisconsin Environmental Education Board (WEEB) and associated grants*

The Wisconsin Council on Forestry (Council) would like to express support for forestry education in Wisconsin. The FY 2015-2017 state budget eliminated the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board (WEEB) by the end of the biennium and funding for school forest and forestry education grants by the end of 2016. This elimination is expected to have long-term negative impacts on forestry in Wisconsin.

Sound forest management is key to maintaining Wisconsin's healthy forests and a strong forest products industry. Education regarding sustainable forestry provides youth and citizens of all ages an improved understanding of the important societal benefits realized through proper forest management. WEEB and associated grants are one of the main tools available to share the sustainable forestry message and to provide students the opportunity to engage in environmental and outdoor education, which improves students' performance, motor fitness, health, and emotional regulation (Gill, 2014).

Education of Wisconsin students is essential to the future success of our state's forests. Results of the 2015-2016 School Forest Survey indicated that 80% of the respondents agreed that the lessons presented at the school forest increased students' knowledge of natural resource management issues; 86% agreed that students indicated the school forest is a place where they enjoy learning; 89% agreed the school forest increased student learning; and 77% agreed that teachers recognized the school forest as a valuable learning environment. In addition, the survey indicated that 53 schools have used the school forest to help students understand the role of the forests in local, community sustainability through consideration of social, economic, and environmental aspects.

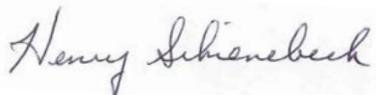
From 1998 to 2013, 609 proposals were submitted for WEEB school forest and forestry education grants totaling \$8,373,656. Of these, 367 projects were funded totaling \$4,520,396. These funds were matched by grantees with a value of \$4,491,620 (nearly 1:1 match although only 25% match is required) and served 1,327,796 participants. If WEEB and the associated grants are eliminated, a major deficiency in forestry education is expected.

The Council also recognizes a strong connection between forestry education and a growing, healthy workforce. In December of 2013 the Governor's Economic Summit highlighted a need for workforce development in the forest products industry. Research documents a gap in understanding of students regarding natural resource management careers (Balcarczyk et al. 2015, Hager 2007). WEEB and the associated grants, which fund projects and initiatives that help students learn about forestry and the skills needed to enter this workforce, help bridge this gap in understanding. For example, a workforce development project funded by WEEB called Natural Resource Careers Workshop connected 30 students to professional resource managers, provided fieldwork opportunities, and highlighted pathways to natural resource careers such as forestry. Other career-focused projects include:

- "Jobs in the Forest,"
- "Forester Training in Northwest Wisconsin," and
- "Farm and Field Youth Training Program in Sustainable Agriculture."

We respectfully encourage you to reauthorize the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board and reallocate funding for WEEB and associated school forest and forestry education grants to previous levels (\$130,500 for environmental education grants from the environmental fund and \$200,000 from the forestry account).

Sincerely,



Henry Schienebeck
Council Chair

*Please note that due to the nature of their positions, Representatives Jeffrey Mursau and Nick Milroy, Senators Tom Tiffany and Janet Bewley, State Forester Fred Souba, Chequamegon Nicolet National Forest Supervisor Paul Strong, Jason Sjostrom, and Professor Mark Rickenbach respectfully withdraw their names as signatories of this letter.

Literature Cited

Balcarczyk, K.L, D. Smaldone, S.W. Selin, C.D. Pierskalla, and K. Maumbe. 2015. Barriers and supports to entering a natural resource career: Perspectives of culturally diverse recent hires. *J. For.* 113(2):231-239.

Gill, T. (2014). The benefits of children's engagement with nature: A systematic literature review. *Greening Early Childhood Education.* 24(2):10-34.

Hager, S., T. Straka, and H. Irwin. 2007. What do teenagers think of environmental issues and natural resources management careers? *J. For.* 105(2):95-98.