



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON FORESTRY

Tony Evers, Governor

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June 5, 2026

Secretary Karen Hyun
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
101 S. Webster Street
PO Box 7921
Madison, WI 53707-7921

RE: Wisconsin Council on Forestry FY2025-29 Budget Priorities

Dear Secretary Hyun:

The Wisconsin Council on Forestry appreciates the opportunity to discuss budgetary items important to Wisconsin's forestry community with you and your staff on June 12th and wanted to share this overview ahead of time.

Appointed by the Governor, the Wisconsin Council on Forestry is a diverse group of forest community leaders who support Wisconsin's stewardship of our State's 17-million-acre forest resource. The Council was created by State Statute in 2002 to advise the governor, legislature, Department of Natural Resources, and other state agencies on a host of forestry issues, including "staffing and funding needs for forestry programs conducted by the state".

In preparation for the upcoming budget process the Council convened a group of members and forest stakeholders to determine core funding needs necessary to support Wisconsin's strong history of sustainably managing our forests while supporting a vital state-wide forest products industry. What follows are funding priorities (not in order of priority) identified as important to sustaining, supporting and diversifying our forests, forest industry and forest dependent communities.

Specific DNR Funded Program Priorities

- Increase funding for the LEAF-Wisconsin's K12 Forestry Education Program and the Wisconsin Forestry Center (WFC).
- Increase funding for the Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program (WFLGP).
- Increase funding for the Division's information technology (IT) needs, specifically to invest in the Wisconsin Forest Inventory and Reporting System (WisFIRS).
- Establish and fund dedicated staff and resources for the Wisconsin Council on Forestry operations.
- Develop and fund forest regeneration efforts to include:
 - Increase cost share percentage for forest regeneration needs
 - Create a new cost sharing mechanism with funding for large private forest landowners and County Forests who typically do not qualify for WFLGP.
 - Establish a new dedicated DNR reforestation position to advance forest regeneration needs and practices
 - Support efforts to establish a low interest loan or other financial support incentive program for investments in forest industry equipment to help build the contractor pool needed to meet current and future reforestation needs.

Additional Council Forestry Related Funding Priorities

- The Council on Forestry feels strongly that the Department must support and actively advocate for the Division of Forestry operations and programs. Transfers from the Forestry SEG account to support programs that are not directly related to forestry, while at the same time not funding forestry-specific needs are deeply concerning to the forestry community. Cuts to the Division of Forestry's supplies and services funding, as seen in the last budget, threatens the entire community's efforts to sustainably manage our forest resources.
- Ensure the Division of Forestry's budget authority is sufficient to meet priority program functions, taking into consideration reductions the Division received in the FY25-27 budget for supplies and services and increased costs of doing business.
- Continue to fund the Forestry SEG account with General Purpose Revenues (GPR) using the same formula as the former mill tax. The Forestry SEG account was previously funded by a mill tax until 2017, at which time the legislature committed to maintaining this funding through GPR in order to support critical public safety and forestry-related programs and projects.
- Increase efforts and funding to support healthy forests specifically to mitigate risks associated with pests, pathogens and invasive species.
- Provide ongoing funding for wildland fire control operations and support for rural fire departments that reflects cost increases and program/partner needs.
- Support the Wisconsin County Forests Association goal to increase annual payments for county forest roads.

- Support for increasing County Forestland acreage share/payment and State lands payments in lieu of taxes (PILT) payments.

We look forward to the opportunity to discuss these in more detail and provide additional information as we move forward.

Respectfully submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Hittle". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "T".

Tom Hittle
Wisconsin Council on Forestry Chair

*Please note that due to the nature of their public positions, Council members Representatives Jeffrey Mursau and Lori Palmeri, Senators Romaine Quinn and Jamie Wall, State Forester Heather Berklund, and the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest representative abstain as signatories.