



# WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON FORESTRY

Tony Evers, Governor

councilonforestry.wi.gov

Reply to: P.O. Box 7921

Madison, WI 53707-7921

Office: (715) 453-3274 x314

Email: [tom.hittle@steigerwaldt.com](mailto:tom.hittle@steigerwaldt.com)

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The Honorable Tony Evers

Governor of Wisconsin

PO Box 7863

Madison, WI 53707

Tom Hittle  
Chairman

▪

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▪

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▪

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▪

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▪

Jennifer K. Youngblood, RN, JD

## RE: Forestry Considerations for Wisconsin's 2023-2025 State Budget

Governor Evers,

On behalf of the Wisconsin Council on Forestry we would like to thank you for your administration's efforts to protect and maintain Wisconsin's vital forest products industry and forests. Funding for forestry programs in the State Budget are investments that supports rural communities as well as the overall state economy. By keeping forests as forests, we can better address climate change, and foster the additional benefits that forests provide for clean water and air, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation.

We recognize the numerous decisions you need to make in developing the upcoming biennial budget. We urge you to maintain the essential investments in forestry programs that supports the forestry community ability to address threats to forest health and maintain and enhance a forest industry that directly and indirectly benefits every Wisconsin resident and visitor.

In 2017, when the Forestry Mill Tax ended, legislators promised to maintain forestry funding from GPR. It is imperative to continue this funding. The current GPR allocation to the Forestry Account within the Conservation Fund supports public safety and forestry-related programs including the **following critical functions**:

- Urban forestry grant program
- County forest sustainability and habitat grants
- Forest management activities on public lands
- Wildland fire control operations and support for rural fire departments
- Supporting family forest owners Managed Forest Law
- Forest nurseries, forest health and forest conservation activities
- Forest recreation, campgrounds, trails, and forest facilities
- Support for community tree programs
- Debt service for Knowles-Nelson Stewardship

In addition to maintaining funding for the critical functions listed above, the following are specific Council budget recommendations.

## Council on Forestry 2023 – 2025 Budget Recommendations

- **Fund a new one-time appropriation in the Forestry SEG Account of \$775,000 to facilitate the development of a Forest Industry-Wide Strategic Plan and Roadmap.** This Plan will build on existing projects that support innovation and workforce development and will position Wisconsin to anticipate and drive the demand of our 21<sup>st</sup> century wood fiber production with sustainable, innovative products to put the state at the top of global wood markets.
- **Increase spending authority by \$500,000 annually to improve management of private forests through the Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program (WFLGP).** This critical grant program supports reforestation, storm clean up, and other activities to improve forest health, sustainability, and productivity. Demand for this program exceeds current funding levels and increasing availability is an important strategy to meet Wisconsin's goals to maintain forest health in light of increasing stressors from a changing climate and challenges with current wood markets for low grade fiber. This increase can be made by adjusting annual spending authority within Wis. Stat. 20.370(5)(av) from \$1,147,900 to \$1,647,900.
- **Increase spending authority by \$300,000 annually to support forest Education and Innovative Curriculum Development to keep pace with an ever-evolving forest industry.** Of the numerous challenges facing Wisconsin's forest industry, workforce recruitment and training remain among the most pressing. This funding will build upon the well-established programs developed by LEAF and ensure sustainability for the Wisconsin Forestry Center. This increase can be made by adjusting annual spending authority within Wis. Stat. 20.370(2)(cu) from \$350,000 to \$650,000 and modify Wis. Stat. 26.39(2) as needed to allow for this authority to also be used for innovative curriculum development.

We cannot stress enough how appreciative we are for your efforts this past year in supporting the development of the Mid-State Technical College Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering, Technology, and Apprenticeship Center, the Workforce Innovation Grant to UWSP's Wisconsin Forestry Center and supporting UWSP's Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Technology. These initiatives together with the requests above will help to ensure we maintain a diverse work force, for a diverse forest products industry to sustain healthy and diverse forests in Wisconsin.

The members you have appointed to the Wisconsin Council on Forestry reflect a broad spectrum of sectors and interests throughout our state. We hope that in your budget deliberations you will carefully consider the important role forests play in contributing to the quality of life for Wisconsin residents, and a way of life for the over 60,000 full-time workers and their families who make their living from our forests.

We welcome the opportunity to follow up with you and your staff with regard to these recommendations and the important investments they represent.

With best regards,

Tom Hittle



Chair of the Wisconsin Council on Forestry

Abstaining from signing considering roles in the budget process or their professional public positions are:  
Sen. Felzkowski, Rep. Mursau, Rep. Shankland, Heather Berklund, Jennifer K. Youngblood, RN, JD