Council on Forestry - Funding Committee FY27-29 Budget Recommendations

1. *** Restore the Forestry SEG account spending authority to Pre - FY23–25 levels that were reduced in the FY25-27 budget, from the Division of Forestry's funding for supplies and services.**
    a. Restore to pre-FY23-25 level requires increasing current budget by $675,000 annually (or by $1.35M in FY27-29)

2. *** Continue to fund forestry programs using General Purpose Revenues (GPR) at the same level as the former mill tax.**
    a. The FY25-27 budget included no change to current law on the GPR transfer to forestry SEG. The mill rate equivalent will remain at 0.1697 mills of total equalized values. This is the primary source of funding/revenue for forestry SEG.

3. *** Increase funding for the UWSP College of Natural Resources LEAF-Wisconsin's K12 Forestry Education Program and the Wisconsin Forestry Center (WFC).**
    a. $616K
    b. "LEAF's funding allocation has not kept pace with inflation, resulting in a 33% reduction over the past 15 years. We request additional funding [$242k/yr] to sustain personnel to support teachers and to restore a position that will focus on high school education and training." Becca Franzen, Director of WCEE (WI Center for Environmental Education)
    c. "The WFC depends on grants and program revenue; <10% is provided by UWSP. With the large WEDC grant ending, a new source of sustainable funding is crucial to continuing the WFC's work. Moreover, as the Utility Vegetation Management program that WFC facilitates transitions to a for-credit program, a major source of WFC's revenue will be significantly reduced." Franzen

4. *** Increase funding for the Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program (WFLGP).**
    a. $500K
    b. The '25-'27 budget provided $45,100 each year in additional funds, in part for private forest landowners. "This amount is 'equal to the difference between base funding and the average amount applied for.'"
    c. Since 2009-2011 budget the budget has been static at $1.1M.
    d. Demand exceeds funding; waiting list of applicants; applicants deterred from applying due to limited funding, high level of competition and timeline to receive funds.
    e. Funding fewer projects due to inflation (43% based on CPI calculator).

5. *** Increase funding for the Division's information technology (IT) needs, specifically to invest in the Wisconsin Forest Inventory and Reporting System (WisFIRS).**
    a. $400,000
    b. Critical business need.

c. Significant use with external partners – County, Federal and Certified Plan Writers.
d. Needs modernization and support of applications.

6. *** Establish and fund dedicated staff and resources for the Wisconsin Council on Forestry operations.**
    a. $94K for 1 FTE
    b. $71 for 1 LTE

7. *** Increase efforts and funding to support healthy forests specifically to mitigate risks associated with pests, pathogens and invasive species.**

8. *** Support the intent and purpose of a public funding program (such as Knowles-Nelson) that slows forest parcelization and maintains access to forests for the sustainable harvest of forest products.**

9. **Support the Wisconsin County Forests Association goal to increase annual payments for roads, specifically county forest roads.**
    a. County forests currently receive $346/mile from the DOT.
    b. The recent one-time Agricultural Roads Improvement Program may have helped with some Town roads, but didn't only benefit roads that are open year-round, and doesn't benefit forestry-based roads.
    c. The '25-'27 budget provided an additional $500k each year for county sustainable forestry and county forest administrator grants, and an additional $130k each year for the county forest wildlife habitat grant program.
    d. The '25-'27 budget provided $328,300 annually from SEG to "fund the existing county forest road aid rate of $351 per mile."

10. **Develop a cost share program for oak and pine regeneration efforts.**
    a) Increase cost share percentage for forest restoration needs as indicated by science (currently needed for red pine and oak reforestation) in the Wisconsin Forest Landowner Grant Program (WFLGP) and create a new cost sharing mechanism with funding for large private forest landowners and County Forests who typically do not qualify for WFLGP. Incorporate this new funding mechanism into an existing program where it is possible to avoid additional program oversight expenses.
    b) Establish a new dedicated DNR reforestation position to advance forest regeneration needs and practices, and coordinate and support landowner connections with contractors who provide site prep, tree planting and related services.
    c) 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.

11. **Increase acreage share/payment in lieu of taxes (PILT) payments.**
    a. A good use of funds from the Forestry SEG account
    b. Assists rural townships significantly affected by tax-exempt public land

12. **Continue wildland fire control operations and support for rural fire departments at FY25-27 levels, however, change from a one-time allocation to an annual budget item.**

13. * **Advocate for improvements in transportation infrastructure, including rail, bridge replacements/upgrades and roads.**

- *Note: * indicates language that is unchanged from the '25-'27 recommendations.*
- *Note: Wording in **bold** is recommended for the initial letter to the DNR secretary. Other details are included for information and may be included in more detailed recommendations as the budget process moves forward.*

Submitted:
5/18/2026
J. Skiff