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LAND TRUST COMMUNITY DISAPPOINTED BY PROPOSAL TO CUT STEWARDSHIP FUNDING TO PURCHASE LAND ALREADY OWNED BY THE PUBLIC

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Madison, WI – **Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts is disappointed** by the bill (LRB-1803/1) introduced by Representative August and Senator Nass that proposes to cut 78% from the Knowles-Nelson grants to counties for land acquisition and 43% from the Knowles-Nelson grants to non-profit conservation organizations for land acquisition. Ironically, this proposal takes this money from the highly popular and successful stewardship program to **purchase land that the state already owns!**

Mike Carlson, Executive Director of Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts, said "This bill is not in the best interests of the people of Wisconsin, it is fiscally imprudent, it literally is using money that is allocated for land acquisition grants to counties and non-profit conservation organizations to buy land that is **already state owned**. It will do nothing to add to the stock of lands available to forestry industry, as the lands proposed for purchase are already being actively managed for forestry where appropriate. **What this bill does is to reduce the funds available for grants that are used to increase public access and land conservation.**"

Wisconsin's \$12 billion outdoor recreation industry, including our \$4 billion hunting and fishing industry, is directly supported by the Stewardship Program's protection of our land resources. So is our state's \$20 billion forestry industry – through working forest conservation easements and land purchases. A strong, well-funded Stewardship Program continues to be important because:

- Wisconsin ranks last among our neighbors Minnesota and Michigan in state-owned public land and our tourism industry also trails these neighboring states.
- With Wisconsin's population projected to grow 15% in the next twenty years, so will the demand for public recreation opportunities in all corners of the state.
- Lack of public access is cited repeatedly as a significant threat to our state's sporting heritage.
- Lack of available timber is a major concern in some areas of the state, as is fragmentation of forestland. The Stewardship Program helps to ensure that large blocks of timber remain in sustainable production, keeping raw material available for pulp and saw mills.

"The Stewardship Program contributes to the high quality of life that makes Wisconsin a desirable place to live, work and play. That's why close to 90% of Wisconsin residents support investing in Stewardship to protect our land, water, and wildlife habitat and recognize that the program should not be pitted against other programs."

Gathering Waters is a statewide land conservation organization founded in 1994 to strengthen Wisconsin's private non-profit land trusts. Through technical assistance, outreach and public policy advocacy, Gathering Waters helps land trusts, landowners, and communities protect the places that make Wisconsin special. www.gatheringwaters.org.

We urge all members of the public to **contact their legislators and urge them not to sign on as co-sponsors and to vote against the bill** if it comes up for vote either in committee or on the floor. We also urge that the bill not be included in the upcoming state budget.