

These op-eds are a testament to the value of the Stewardship Program in five key legislative districts. Feel free to use them as templates, edit and personalize them, then send them to your local media sources.

Layfayette County

Why should the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program remain intact in the state budget?? I'll tell you. It has been providing funding to the state, local governments, land trusts, and other non-profits to purchase and protect land for 25 years. These projects benefit all of us in Wisconsin by supporting jobs, benefitting local economies, protecting our water resources, and air quality, promoting tourism and a high quality of life, and guaranteeing places to hunt, hike, fish, and explore close to home. *I'll give you an example of that, right here in Layfayette County:*

When community members heard that Alex and Mary Erickson were selling their 220 acre property between the Pecatonica River and the Village of Argyle, they were worried. They had always had access to this place and felt it was part of them. Luckily, the Ericksons decided to sell their land to the local land trust—Driftless Area Land Conservancy (Driftless), ensuring that it would remain an undeveloped community asset.

Since then, Driftless and locals have worked together to truly make the most of all the property has to offer. They've invested time and money into making it more of a local asset than ever before and students in particular are reaping the benefits. With Argyle schools being adjacent to the property, Driftless has helped to incorporate an outdoor laboratory and classroom. And the kids are loving it, while the entire community can rest assured that this treasure will always be theirs.

None of this would have been possible without the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, which allowed Driftless to purchase the land for half the market value and ensure its protection and value to the community. Indeed, I'd say legislators should keep the Stewardship Program alive and healthy!

Door County

Why should the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program remain intact in the state budget?? I'll tell you. It has been providing funding to the state, local governments, land trusts, and other non-profits to purchase and protect land for 25 years. These projects benefit all of us in Wisconsin by supporting jobs, benefitting local economies, protecting our water resources, and

air quality, promoting tourism and a high quality of life, and guaranteeing places to hunt, hike, fish, and explore close to home. *I'll give you an example of that, right here in Door County:*

In Ellison Bay, the Grand View property is an iconic view that identifies the community. Residents and visitors alike have enjoyed the scenic overlook for many years, often pulling over to the side of the road to snap photos or take in the majestic view. Only when construction of a 44-unit condominium development began on the property did people realize that this signature view could disappear. And in addition to community concern, an economic threat also loomed... Door County draws over two million visitors every year, most of whom come to enjoy the scenery and outdoor activities. Tourism accounts for almost \$300 million in annual revenue in Door County. Though privately owned, the Grand View property is a de facto tourist attraction that draws thousands of visitors each year.

Citizens approached Door County Land Trust to help find a solution. The land trust responded, forging a path to preservation of this special place by securing funding for it through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.

Because of funding from the Stewardship Program, this 16-acre property and its famous view are permanently protected as the Grand View Scenic Overlook and Park—places for visitors to picnic, take photos, reflect, and explore. Door County, known for its beautiful landscape, can rest assured that this destination spot will always remain. I think it's clear that legislators should keep the Stewardship Program alive and healthy!

Chippewa County

Why should the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program remain intact in the state budget?? I'll tell you. It has been providing funding to the state, local governments, land trusts, and other non-profits to purchase and protect land for 25 years. These projects benefit all of us in Wisconsin by supporting jobs, benefitting local economies, protecting our water resources, and air quality, promoting tourism and a high quality of life, and guaranteeing places to hunt, hike, fish, and explore close to home. *I'll give you an example of that, right here in Chippewa County:*

Camp Nawakwa is a summer camp that has been run by the Girl Scouts for many years. It offers kids a place to experience the outdoors, to connect with nature through activities like fishing, swimming, or hiking, and learn invaluable skills; all while building lifelong friendships. It has shaped the lives of many. So much so, that when a portion of Camp Nawakwa needed to be sold to support other programs and properties, Girl Scout leadership approached a local land trust, the Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA), for help.

The IATA did not disappoint. They understood the vision and led the way to make it possible. They collaborated with Chippewa County to secure funding through the state's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, which provided half the Purchase-price of the land and made this deal

possible, and with the Girl Scouts, who placed an easement on the land to ensure its permanent protection.

Because of the Stewardship Program, the camp will remain and have access to an extensive trail improved and maintained by the IATA. And that's not all.... The land is now managed as a public working forest, supplying the county with jobs and a new source of revenue that also offers 110 magnificent acres of public recreational opportunities like fishing, hiking, skiing, and much more. Clearly, legislators should keep the Stewardship Program alive and healthy!

Marquette County

Why should the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program remain intact in the state budget?? I'll tell you. It has been providing funding to the state, local governments, land trusts, and other non-profits to purchase and protect land for 25 years. These projects benefit all of us in Wisconsin by supporting jobs, benefitting local economies, protecting our water resources, and air quality, promoting tourism and a high quality of life, and guaranteeing places to hunt, hike, fish, and explore close to home. *I'll give you an example of that, right here in Marquette County:*

John Muir grew up on his family's farm near Portage. It was there, amongst woods, prairies, wetlands and glacial lakes that he developed his lifelong passion for the natural world, which became a national legacy and inspiration. About a century later, Bessie McGwin Eggleston and her husband owned a farm in Marquette County that included 38 acres of what had once been part of Muir's family farm. Their connection and love of the land grew in such a way that before she died, Bessie wished to have her entire 198 acre property permanently protected, to benefit future generations.

Although she didn't live to see it, her wish was granted when her family sold the land to Natural Heritage Land Trust (NHLT). While a number of organizations and donors chipped in, the fulfillment of this dream wouldn't have been possible without funding from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.

And now because of it, a portion of this land will become part of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, while another will be added to the Fox River National Wildlife Refuge, creating a bridge between it and the Muir Memorial County Park, providing locals and visitors the opportunity to experience 1400 acres of the land that shaped Muir. And all of it will be open to the public for hiking, hunting, cross-country skiing, fishing, trapping, and bird-watching. Clearly, legislators should keep the Stewardship Program alive and healthy!

Ozaukee County

Why should the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program remain intact in the state budget?? I'll tell you. It has been providing funding to the state, local governments, land trusts, and other non-profits to purchase and protect land for 25 years. These projects benefit all of us in Wisconsin by supporting jobs, benefitting local economies, protecting our water resources, and air quality, promoting tourism and a high quality of life, and guaranteeing places to hunt, hike, fish, and explore close to home. *I'll give you an example of that, right here in Ozaukee County:*

For many years, Dr. Noel Cutright envisioned the creation of a bird observatory along Lake Michigan. As a renowned birder and ornithologist, he knew that the western shore was a significant stopover point for birds on their migratory journeys, being part of a major flyway stretching from South America to Alaska. So when a golf course in the town of Belgium went on the market, he saw an opportunity and encouraged the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust (OWLT) to buy it and transform it into a migratory bird preserve.

After a great deal of research and expert advice, OWLT was convinced of the ecological significance of the land and the viability of Dr. Cutright's vision. OWLT secured funding for half of the purchase price through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, then collaborated with local birding groups, many local contractors, and people at every level of government, to accomplish ten years of land restoration in only eighteen months of intensive work.

Now, because of the funding from the Stewardship Program, this special place, the Forest Beach Migratory Preserve, provides 150 acres of safe cover for birds to rest and feed, offers a trail system that winds through the property, and is home to the Western Great Lakes Bird and Bat Observatory. It also uses 10-20 million fewer gallons of water per year than its predecessor and strengthens the economy by supporting Wisconsin's hearty birding industry. Legislators should definitely protect the Stewardship Program in the state budget!