

Your opinion

Legislators need to support Stewardship Fund

The debate about the extension of the state's Stewardship Fund revolves around environmental considerations, but equally important to Wisconsin are its economic impacts.

Extension of the fund is critical to the health of the state's economy. Think about the underpinnings of our economy.

Some of the key clusters that drive our prosperity are tourism, paper making, forest products, agri-business and boating. All of these drivers depend on preservation of our natural assets, mainly land and water.

Dwindling and over-taxed water resources are starting to constrain economic development all over the country. Kansas, by example, is being forced to cut back on farm irrigation because of the alarming drop



**JOHN
TORINUS JR.**

each year of the Ogallala underground reservoir. Ghost towns are predicted in parts of Kansas.

Unlike many other states, where land and water are not abundant, we still have much to preserve. That's where the Stewardship Fund has enormous impact.

The fund, now \$60 million a year, provides matching dollars for preservation projects.

For example, the Ozaukee Washington Land Trust has a mission of preserving the upstream watershed of the Milwaukee River. It has saved more than 3,000 acres of sponge tracts in that watershed. Take

the purchase of 65,000 acres of Goodman Forest in northeast Wisconsin. Such acquisitions are essential to a healthy tourism industry. Tourists don't go "up north" to see subdivisions. They go to see the beauty of our undivided forests and undeveloped lakes.

Recreation in densely populated southeastern Wisconsin depends heavily on public parks created with Stewardship dollars.

The Stewardship Fund has enjoyed bipartisan support for more than four decades. That kind of political unanimity occurs only when the program makes total sense. Legislators who have common sense about the economy will back its extension.

JOHN TORINUS JR. is chairman of Serigraph Inc., West Bend.