



OPINION
RESEARCH
& STRATEGY

MEMORANDUM

TO: Interested Parties

FROM: Lori Weigel & Karoline McGrail / New Bridge Strategy
Dave Metz / FM3 Research

DATE: March 28, 2023

RE: Survey of Wisconsin Voters Shows Overwhelming Support for Transparency in Knowles Nelson Stewardship Grants; Support for Funding Natural Climate Solutions

A recent statewide survey of Wisconsin voters¹ conducted by the bipartisan research team of FM3 Research (D) and New Bridge Strategy (R) demonstrates overwhelming support for the Legislature changing two provisions in how Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program grants are reviewed to ensure greater transparency in the approval process. Nearly nine-in-ten support requiring that the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee hold public hearing and require lawmakers who block grants to announce their objections publicly, rather than the current system of anonymous objections. Similarly, more than two-thirds would remove the Joint Finance Committee review of small conservation projects in rural northern Wisconsin entirely. Taken together, fully 82 percent would tell their State Legislator to vote Yes in favor of these two changes. This is true across party lines and regions of the state.

Specifically, the survey found that:

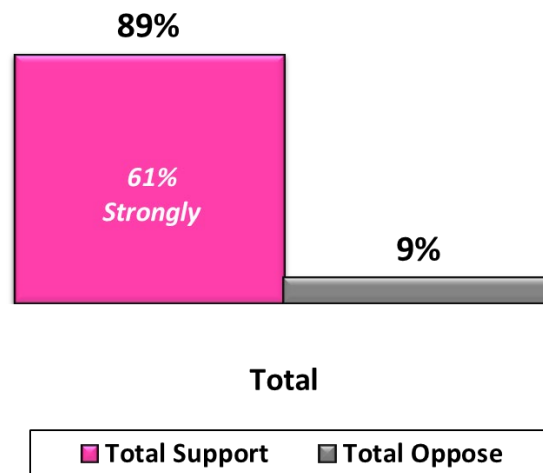
- **Support for greater transparency in the Legislature's review process of Knowles Nelson Stewardship program grants is overwhelming and evident throughout the state and across party lines.** Respondents were provided with a brief explanation of the current review process for grants as follows:

"Local projects to conserve forests, wetlands, and other natural areas can seek funding from the Stewardship program, with those grants reviewed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Larger grants are also reviewed by the Legislature's Joint Finance Committee. Currently, a single legislator on the committee can block a grant anonymously and without stating a reason. One proposal would change this to require that the Committee hold public hearings and require lawmakers who block grants to announce their objections publicly."

¹ **Methodology:** From March 16-21, 2023, the bipartisan research team of FM3 and New Bridge Strategy completed 500 interviews among registered voters throughout the state of Wisconsin. Interviews were conducted online as well as on landlines and cell phones. The margin of error for the full sample is +/-4.38 percent; margins of sampling error for subgroups within the sample will be larger. Some percentages may sum to more than 100 percent due to rounding.

Nearly nine-in-ten (89 percent) Wisconsin voters support this change to hold public hearings and require lawmakers to announce their objections to grants publicly before blocking them. In fact, 61 percent “strongly” support this. Only 9 percent oppose this idea.

Support for Public Hearings and Announcing Objections



- **In a similar change, more than two-thirds of Wisconsin voters support removing the Legislature’s review of smaller grants simply because they are located in northern Wisconsin.** Again, we provided survey respondents with some neutral background on this potential change as follows:

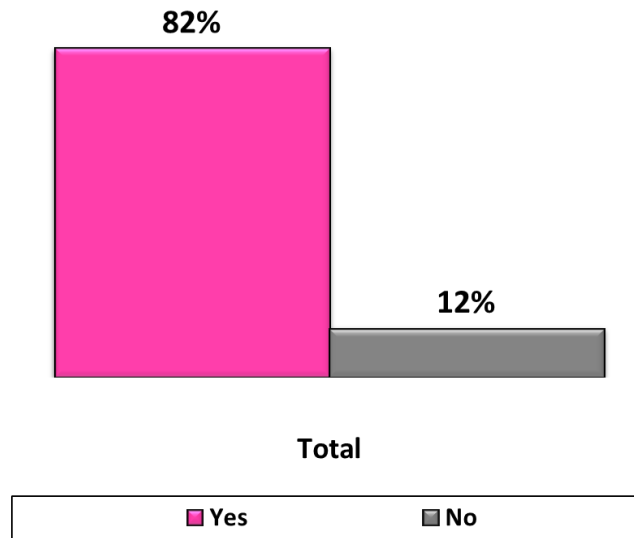
“Similarly, every conservation project in rural northern Wisconsin – no matter how large or small - is also reviewed by the Legislature’s Joint Finance Committee and is therefore subject to a single legislator being able to block a grant anonymously and without stating a reason. One proposal would remove this additional step in the review process for smaller projects in this region.”

More than two-thirds (69 percent) of the state’s voters support this change, with 40 percent saying the “strongly” support this change. One-in-four (26 percent) indicate opposition to this change.

It is worth noting that support for this change is highest in the northern most media markets of the state, where fully 79 percent support removing this additional step in the review process for smaller projects in this region.

- **Taken together, more than four-in-five Wisconsin voters say they would tell their State Legislator to vote Yes in favor of both of these two changes.** Fully 82 percent would tell their Legislator to vote in favor of “these two changes to require lawmakers who block grants to announce their objections publicly and to ensure that projects in rural north Wisconsin are not subject to this additional legislative review.” Only 12 percent say they would tell their Legislator to vote No against this.

Tell Legislator to Vote Yes or No on Implementing Both Changes to the Stewardship Program



The desire to implement these changes is evident across all major segments of the electorate, including:

- 78% of men and 85% of women;
- 79% of voters of color, and 83% of whites;
- 87% of moderates, 70% of conservatives, and 88% of liberals;
- 73% of hunters, 78% of anglers/fishermen, and 85% of non-sportsmen;
- 86% of those in the northern portions of the state, 68% of voters in the Green Bay/Appleton media markets, 84% of voters in the Milwaukee media market, and 85% of those in the Madison area; and
- 87% of Democrats, 75% of independents, and 80% of Republicans.

- **In addition, the survey found that the vast majority of voters support investing some of the budget surplus into conservation projects that are also natural climate solutions.** Four-in-five voters (80 percent) support investing one billion dollars of the current seven billion dollar state surplus over the next ten years into these types of conservation projects. Respondents were given some examples of what these kinds of projects could be, including “actions that reduce emissions and increase carbon storage in forests, farms, grasslands and wetlands, such as conserving and replanting forests; conserving and restoring wetlands that protect against floods and storms; and reducing the loss of natural areas, planting trees, and providing parks in communities.”

A majority (54 percent) “strongly” support this investment in natural climate solutions. Just 19 percent oppose it (10 percent “strongly”).

Support is evident throughout the state, with two-thirds or more in every major region expressing support for this investment. Majorities across party lines also offer support for this investment (94 percent of Democrats, 78 percent of independents and 65 percent of Republicans).

In summary, Wisconsin voters overwhelmingly support implementing changes to the grant review process for the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program. Voters could not be more clear – they want the Legislature to make changes to increase transparency and eliminate additional review for small projects in Northern Wisconsin.

In addition, they overwhelmingly support investing one billion dollars of surplus funds into natural climate solutions.