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Friday, May 29, 2015

The Honorable Alberta Darling
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance
Room 317 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI

The Honorable John Nygren
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance
Room 309 East, State Capitol
Madison, WI

RE: 2015 Senate Bill 21 and 2015 Assembly Bill 21, relating to: state finances and appropriations, constituting the executive budget act of the 2015 legislature in regards to Natural Resources and State Parks

Dear Co-Chair Daring, Co-Chair Nygren and members of the Joint Committee on Finance:

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC) held its 81st annual convention at Stoney Creek Inn & Conference Center in Rothschild, WI on Friday, May 15th & Saturday, May 16th, 2015.

On Saturday, May 16th, the WCC addressed the following citizen resolutions that were assigned to the Floor of the Congress by our Rules and Resolutions Committee that met on Monday, April 27th, 2015.

Resolution #010115, Retain the Natural Resource Board Policy and Regulatory Making Authority: This resolution was unanimously supported by the WCC. We acknowledge this proposal has been removed from the budget, and extend our deepest gratitude for your decision is doing so.

Resolution #130315, Renew and Increase Funding for the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program in the Next Budget: This resolution was supported by a paddle vote with 35 counties in favor and 29 counties against. There's a concern that the possible elimination or reduction in funding of the Stewardship program would have negative effect on access to quality public land in Wisconsin.

Resolution #130815, Retain the Research Positions in the Bureau of Science Research: This resolution was supported by the WCC. We're concerned that the elimination of the research positions will severely reduce the scientific information needed to manage our state's fish, wildlife, lands and waters. Eliminating these positions does not reduce the GPR deficit. These positions are funded with sportsmen and women's dollars, i.e. state hunting and fishing license funds, Federal Pittman-Robertson funds, Federal Sports Fishing Restoration funds and federally funded State Wildlife Grants.

Resolution #131315, Continue Funding of State Parks by the State of Wisconsin, was supported by the WCC. We need to keep our State Parks affordable for all users by continuing to use general revenue funds, and not raising fees.

Resolution #131815, Support the DNR's Use of Stewardship Funds to Purchase Land, was supported by the WCC. We believe the Stewardship program is necessary to preserve wildlife habitat and increase open space for recreational use.

Resolution #160315, Retain DNR Research Scientists, was supported by the WCC. Research scientists are a vital part of the decision making on fish and wildlife populations, harvest seasons, harvest quotas, habitat needs and land management practices.

Resolution #490415, Changes in Natural Resources Management and Policy in Governor's 2015-17 Proposed Budget, addresses the Natural Resources Board, Stewardship and the Science Research positions, and was supported by the WCC.

Wisconsin is highly regarded as the leader in conservation. We are blessed with the most abundant natural resources in the country. We are proud of pioneer conservationists Aldo Leopold, Increase Lapham, John Muir and so many others who've called Wisconsin home. They understood the importance of science research, land stewardship and our state parks, and were the ones who laid the foundation before us.

On behalf of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, I respectfully ask that you retain the science research positions, continue our stewardship program and continue funding our state parks with general revenue funds and not raise fees. Our natural resources cannot afford to lose these vital pieces of our conservation heritage.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Rob Bohmann', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rob Bohmann, Chair
Wisconsin Conservation Congress

As established by Wisconsin State Statutes, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress is officially recognized as the only natural resources advisory body in the state where citizens elect delegates to represent their interests on natural resources issues on a local and statewide level to the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources. Their mission is to represent the citizens of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's greatest asset, our abundant natural resources, for present and future generations to enjoy.