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October 18, 2016

RE: October 2016, NRB item 2.B.2: DNR recommendations for the third phase of land sales to occur under the direction of the 2013-15 state biennial budget bill

Chair Hilgenberg, Secretary Stepp, and members of the Natural Resources Board;

As with the phase one and two of the recommended land sales required by 2013 Act 20, when the department released the phase three land parcels for possible sale, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress reached out to our delegates in all 72 counties across the state to provide input to the Congress' leadership. We asked our delegates to identify concerns they were hearing from the public regarding the sale of proposed parcels and specific parcels the department should consider retaining due to the value the citizens saw in keeping them as state-owned land, open to the public for outdoor recreation. As expected, the phase three garnered far more responses than did the first two phases.

Congress leadership reviewed each of the parcels that had concerns raised about them. The Congress does not have any concerns with the department offering for sale those parcels that do not have any access allowing the public to utilize them. However, most of the concerns we heard were about parcels that did have a reasonable level of public access. During the past two months I have had numerous conversations with Doug Haag and Terry Bay relating to the concerns we heard from not only our delegates, but also from the public. Of the parcels that had reasonable public access, all of those that Congress had concerns about and brought to the attention of the department have been recommended for retention.

There is no question that the department had some land holdings with little to no public access and which were of minimal use to the public. However, I believe there has been a misperception by some in both the public and the legislature that the amount of such lands was much greater than reality, which is what in part led to the Act 20 requirement to offer for sale 10,000 acres. That being said, I also believe this was a good exercise that showed how much the public is benefitting on some relatively small parcels of public land particularly in areas where public land is scarce and I hope moving forward, the department can convey that importance to both the public and our legislature.

In closing, these are some final thoughts the WCC would like you to consider as you make this very difficult decision.

- It is a difficult assignment the DNR had to evaluate all of its land holdings and identify 10,000 acres to offer for sale, which was the requirement of the legislation. Specifically, once the "low hanging fruit"
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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.

had been identified in the first two phases, the third phase became a much more difficult task with intense scrutiny and difficult decisions needing to be made.

- There is simply no way the department can comply with Act 20 and not have some negative impact on outdoor recreational users; however, we feel the department staff has worked closely with the WCC and the public to minimize that negative impact on users as much as possible.
- The DNR is recommending retention of those parcels that had public access and also had concerns brought to the attention of the WCC.
- The most concerns/comments came from the southern part of the state where there is relatively little public land access in relation to the large numbers of outdoor recreational users.

In summary, the Conservation Congress believes the department did an excellent job balancing the need to fulfill the requirements of Act 20 with the objective of minimizing negative impacts on outdoor recreational users by utilizing specific criteria to thoroughly vet each parcel on the phase three list. It is because of this, that the WCC offers its support of the phase three land sales as recommended.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Bonde". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Larry Bonde, Chair  
Wisconsin Conservation Congress