

Testimony on 2019 Senate Bill 125

Senator Robert Cowles

Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy – April 17, 2019

Thank you, committee members, for allowing me to testify on 2019 Senate Bill 125. This bill provides \$5.2 million in authorized, but unobligated Stewardship bonding from prior fiscal years to complete necessary water infrastructure upgrades in our State Parks System. This legislation also provides an additional \$300,000 in spending authority from the segregated Parks account to further serve the needs of our public lands.

Our State Parks System is a treasure for residents and the Park's 17 million annual visitors. Showcasing everything from woodlands and dunes to waterfalls and cliffs, our pristine natural resources in the State Park System are not only a treasure we should be proud of, but are economic drivers in communities throughout the state. While the natural landscape of these properties is still picturesque, some of our basic water facilities and infrastructure is not.

Senate Bill 125 provides \$5.2 million in authorized but unobligated Stewardship funds from prior fiscal years to complete critical health and safety and high priority water-related facility and infrastructure projects in State Forests and Parks. This legislation builds on the progress from 2017 Wisconsin Act 71 which passed with broad, bipartisan support to provide \$4.5 million in authorized but unobligated Stewardship bonding for water infrastructure upgrades in other high-traffic properties by completing some of these crucial backlogged projects. Despite the significant progress made last session in addressing these needed upgrades, a substantial backlog of water-related facility and infrastructure projects still remains.

The water facility and infrastructure projects that would be completed in Senate Bill 125 are prioritized for Parks with the highest visitor demand. While the projects are not specified in the bill, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) indicates that they would use the funding from this legislation to expend an estimated:

- \$250,000 to replace 50 water fountains in Parks throughout the state
- \$1,000,000 for 13 four-unit vault toilet replacements in campgrounds and high-traffic day-use areas at Black River State Forest and Devil's Lake, Harrington Beach, Hartman Creek, High Cliff, Kohler-Andrae, Pattison, and Yellowstone Lake State Parks
- \$150,000 to replace 5,100 feet of water lines at Yellowstone Lake State Park
- \$3,300,000 to replace several toilet and shower facilities at Lake Wissota, Mirror Lake, and Peninsula State Parks
- \$500,000 to replace facility plumbing fixtures in Parks throughout the state

This legislation also provides the DNR with \$300,000 in increased expenditure authority from the segregated State Parks System account for use in operations with a priority given to Parks with the highest demand. This authority will allow the DNR to go even further in addressing the maintenance backlog in our State Parks System and help them improve and maintain our public lands.

Most visitors will never notice that the drinking fountains, shower facilities, or vault toilets are up-to-date. But if that water infrastructure is run down or out-of-service, it will impact the visitor's experience in our State Parks and may impact their plans to come back or visit other State Parks in the future. An isolated illness or an outbreak of water-related disease at our State Parks would not only be devastating to those impacted and their loved ones, but could cause ripple effects and harm our entire outdoors-based tourism industry in Wisconsin.

The water facility and infrastructure upgrades in Senate Bill 125 will help to improve visitor experience, promote parks-based tourism, and protect the health and safety of millions of State Park visitors for decades to come.



ROB SUMMERFIELD

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 67th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

April 17, 2019

Senator Cowles, Chair
Senator Olsen, Vice-Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources & Energy

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Relating to: amounts obligated under the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship 2000 Program for water infrastructure projects in state parks and making an appropriation

Dear Chairman Cowles, Vice-Chairman Olsen, and Committee Members:

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify at today's public hearing on Senate Bill 125. I appreciate your time and consideration of this legislation.

From our statewide *Fall Color Report*, to our extensive northwoods ATV trails, to our Great Lakes, Wisconsin has always been known for its natural beauty and outdoor recreation. We outperform our Midwestern neighbors in these areas, in large part, due to our State Park System. In 2017, over 17 million people visited state parks across Wisconsin; with over 6 million visiting the parks listed in this bill alone. That same year, tourism dollars across the state rose to \$12.7 billion. A 2013 study by the DNR and UW-Madison Department of Urban and Regional Planning found state parks to contribute \$350 million to Wisconsin's economy. Lake Wissota, located in Chippewa Falls in my district, is a driver of local tourism; especially during the hot summer months. However, nothing would be more disappointing than taking a trip to Lake Wissota with my family, and finding the toilets and other plumbing unusable.

SB 125 builds on past successful bipartisan parks revitalization legislation by requiring the DNR to spend up to \$5.2 million in authorized but unobligated Stewardship funds to complete critical health and safety-related water infrastructure projects at State Parks; providing \$300,000 in increased expenditure authority from the segregated State Parks System account for operations; and prioritizing State Parks with the highest visitor demand to receive those funds.

Clean water is a big concern for Wisconsin. Making sure our State Parks' water infrastructure is up-to-date is critical for the overall health and experience of millions of visitors to our great state each year. Thank you again for listening.



JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony for the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy Senate Bill 125 Tuesday, March 19, 2019

Thank you Chairman Cowles and fellow committee members for holding a public hearing and giving me the opportunity to speak on Senate Bill 125. This piece of bipartisan legislation authorizes the Department of Natural Resources to commit up to \$5.2 million in authorized but unobligated Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program funding from prior fiscal years to complete critical health- and safety-related infrastructure projects in our high-demand state parks.

In Door County, we have five wonderful state parks that contribute greatly toward the county's \$360 million tourism industry. Simply put, our region would not have as many visitors as it does without our state parks. The same could be said about Wisconsin as a whole, which attracts more than 17 million people annually to our state parks.

That is why it is so important that we take the steps to ensure the health and safety of all who frequent our state parks by making much-needed water facility and infrastructure upgrades. A person's well-being is obviously paramount, but we must also be cognizant of the fact that park attendance could suffer significantly if a water-related bacterial outbreak were to occur. Plus, visitors will also likely be turned off by old and malfunctioning facilities, increasing the chances they may never come back again.

SB 125 helps us reach the goal of a robust and vibrant state park system by focusing on backlogged projects that are vital to the health and safety of our visitors.

This effort began the previous session with 2017 Wisconsin Act 71, which passed with broad, bipartisan support and provided \$4.5 million for similar water infrastructure upgrades. Out of that funding, I am proud to say that Peninsula State Park, which is one of the most visited state parks, received \$1.25 million for vault toilet replacements and \$450,000 for the construction of a new dump station. The local park also shared part of \$1 million that was earmarked for upgrading drinking fountains across the state.

I am tremendously excited that SB 125 would once again benefit Peninsula State Park by setting aside \$1.4 million to replace the large toilet and shower facility at the Tennison Bay Campground, which is more than 50 years old.

I would like to thank Senator Cowles and his staff for all the work they put into this bill. It's imperative that we continue to maintain our state parks in a fiscally-responsible manner so they can be enjoyed for generations to come, and I believe SB 125 is key to making that vision become a reality.

Thank you committee members for hearing my testimony and I will now answer any questions if you have them.

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Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy
2019 Senate Bill 125
Water Infrastructure Projects in State Parks
April 17, 2019

Good morning Chairman Cowles and Committee members. My name is Ben Bergey, and I am the Department of Natural Resources' Parks and Recreation Bureau Director. I am joined today by Todd Ambs, who is the Assistant Deputy Secretary for the DNR. Thank you for the opportunity to testify for informational purposes on Senate Bill 125 and thank you to the bill authors for working with us while crafting this legislation.

The Wisconsin State Park System sees more than 17.5 million visitors across more than 100 properties statewide. These visitors engage in a variety of recreational opportunities from camping and hiking to boating and picnicking. Property facilities and infrastructure provide the foundation of elements required to serve the needs and ensure the safety of our visitors.

The Department has identified approximately \$5.2 million in water (drinking and waste water) infrastructure projects that would be eligible for funding under the provisions of Senate Bill 125. Under the bill, the agency would be authorized to utilize unobligated Stewardship bonding authority to address these previously identified property infrastructure needs.

The identified projects include replacing three toilet shower buildings in campgrounds at Mirror Lake, Lake Wissota and Peninsula State Parks for approximately \$3.3M; \$500,000 in plumbing fixture replacement at properties statewide; \$1.0M in vault toilet replacement statewide; and an additional \$400,000 in drinking fountain and waterline replacement, as well as \$300,000 in additional park spending authority to address critical maintenance and operational needs at large properties that serve significant numbers of visitors throughout the state.

In the 2017-2019 biennium, Act 71 was passed to address similar issues of water and waste water infrastructure at state parks across the state. Projects included infrastructure projects at Devil's Lake and Peninsula State parks as well as \$1.0M to replace drinking fountains. All of these projects are at different stages of completion including the installation of more than 500 new drinking fountains before Memorial Day of this year.

We appreciate the proactive and open approach Sen. Cowles and his office have taken with us. With that said, we also recognize the challenges associated with the future of the Stewardship program and the implications Senate Bill 125 has on the program's sustainability. Stewardship is an important program that helps to ensure the future of conservation and outdoor recreation in this state. The Governor, the Administration and the DNR are committed to making sure the Stewardship program continues and is funded at an appropriate level into the future. This bill draws upon the same funding source that the

Governor has proposed utilizing for Stewardship in his budget. If this bill were to become law, the DNR would need to work with the Governor and the Legislature to rectify the gap in funding that would occur.

On behalf of the Park and Recreation Management Bureau and the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.