



There are so many things wrong with this budget that I don't have time to speak about them all, but Democrats have put forward numerous amendments today to address them.

Throughout today's session, I spoke on the damage that cuts to K-12 education and our UW system will do.

I spoke on the need for sustainable transportation funding and keeping the I-39/90 project on track.

I'm also deeply concerned about the lingering uncertainty for people who rely on Family Care, IRIS, and ADRCs.

But I want to focus now on the other budget issue that I've heard most about: our natural resources and our cherished outdoors.

In this budget, Republicans have attacked our public spaces and the DNR scientists who help manage them; they have attacked our environment and our outdoor tradition.

Governor Walker began this by threatening a moratorium on the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, jeopardizing protections for our public lands and natural resources.

For over 25 years, the Stewardship Program has been an essential tool for Wisconsin to advance our time-honored tradition of protecting our natural resources and maintaining healthy lands and waters that provide jobs, boost local economies, and guarantee places to hunt, hike, boat, fish and explore close to home.

These activities bring millions of dollars to Wisconsin every year, contributing to a multi-billion dollar tourism industry.

Thankfully, this budget no longer ends the Stewardship Program. However, the program will still suffer a \$15 million annual hit.

Bottom line: this wildly successful and important program will be able to conserve less land because of this budget.

This short-sighted decision risks the loss of important lands that might only be available once in a generation, and means that funds might not be available for the people in my district, to complete the extension of the Ice Age Trail through Evansville, or to assist with the Pearl

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Island project, a restoration of beautiful acreage in Brodhead that will attract locals and tourists alike.

Outdoor enthusiasts, sportsmen, and environmentalists wrote, emailed, called, and showed up to listening sessions to speak out against this attack on our proud tradition of protecting our natural heritage for public use and benefit.

We need to restore full bonding authority for the Stewardship Program.

But, like K-12 and higher education - this budget doesn't stop there. It also entirely eliminates state funding for our state parks.

Republicans left our state parks with millions of dollars in cuts, leading to less staffing, less maintenance, and lower quality.

To make up that difference, Republicans have raised fees for park stickers, overnight camping, and state trail passes.

Both Wisconsin residents and out of state tourists will now be able to pay more for less when they visit our state parks.

Our state parks are essential to tourism. They're an important way for middle class, hardworking Wisconsin families to take an affordable summer vacation, get their kids outside, and cultivate an appreciation for nature.

It has been suggested that in order to help make up for these cuts, the DNR would consider corporate naming rights.

Devil's Lake State Park, brought to you by Koch Industries?

Is that really where we are heading?

Earlier tonight, Republicans rejected an amendment that would have restored state funding for our state parks and ensured that naming rights for our state parks are not up for sale.

These issues are critical to our state, critical for many constituents, and they're personal for me. I've been enjoying Wisconsin's state parks and public lands my entire life.

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State parks like Devil's Lake, Peninsula, Governor Dodge, Newport, and Roche a Cri have personal meaning for me and I know the same is true for so many of our residents and tourists.

Even in a tight budget, the needed funding for our state parks should not be that hard to find.

I fear the decision to move forward with these cuts has more to do with ideology than with the budget.

Even so, it's not too late.

Let's not raise fees for middle class families.

Let's ensure that the Stewardship Program can be as successful in the next 5 years.

Let's restore funding for our state parks, for our universities, for our schools, for our future.

Let's reject this budget.

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