WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE
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Testimony In Support of Assembly Bill 573
Assembly Committee on Natural Resources
March 7, 2012

Good morning Chairman Mursau and members of the committee. I appreciate having the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 573, relating to stewardship funding for invasive species control. I want to recognize Representative Mursau, who is a lead author with me on this bill – thank you for your support.

As members of this committee, you are all well aware that the Legislature has allocated financial resources to the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program over the years. Established in 1989, the dual aims of the Stewardship Program are (1) preserving Wisconsin's land and water resources for future generations and (2) providing the recreational opportunities and land base that are necessary for high-quality outdoor experiences. To fund the program, the state sells bonds to investors, which the state then repays over an approximately twenty-year time period. Over the years, the Stewardship Program has provided for the protection of over 500,000 acres of Wisconsin's natural resources.

The Stewardship Program works in a variety of different ways throughout our state. One key component is the cost-sharing grant opportunity provided to nonprofit organizations that are interested in acquiring land and conservation easements. These organizations may apply for a 50% matching grant, which, if granted, is then used for pre-identified resource protection and outdoor recreation purposes. Another component is the special grant program for "Friends" groups and nonprofit conservation organizations. For this part of the Stewardship Program, $250,000 is set aside to grant to NCOs to help improve facilities, build new recreation projects and restore habitat on state properties. The program recognizes the important role these groups play in meeting the development and restoration needs of state properties.

I think we would all agree that the success of the Stewardship Program demonstrates how well the varied components of the program work together. Allocating resources for the purchase of land is a good allocation of resources. The Stewardship Program does it

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well. However, I believe that Wisconsin has an equally important interest in expanding recreational opportunities, which goes beyond purchasing land to maintaining these lands. This is particularly so in the face of invasive species challenges that Wisconsin faces. Assembly Bill 573 would make the statutory changes needed to allow Stewardship Program resources to be used to meet that challenge, filling in the gap that currently exists under state law.

Assembly Bill 573 addresses this additional interest in maintaining our land while recognizing unique opportunity that certain organizations in our state have to fight the spread of invasive species. AB 573 expands Wisconsin's bonding authority as it relates to grant programs that currently exist under the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. Specifically, AB 573 creates grants for NCOs, lake districts and certain lake associations to use to control invasive species for "nature-based outdoor recreation" related purposes like buying weed cutters and specialized AIS depreciable assets. Grant money could also be dedicated to preserving environmental support facilities, which include "access roads, parking areas, utility and sanitation systems, sanitary and shelter building, signs, interpretive items, and other features that enhance nature-based outdoor recreation or improved disabled activity."

We have heard a lot of testimony in this committee about the threat of invasive species here in Wisconsin. Notre Dame University researchers have found that just aquatic invasive species cost people, businesses, utilities and communities at least $200 million per year in Wisconsin and the cost of invasive species to the national economy has been estimated as high as $137 billion per year and increasing. These losses are spread across economic sectors from tourism, agriculture, forestry and fisheries, as well as to the cost of clearing invasive-clogged waterways and fighting invasive-fueled fires.

As more information on the detrimental environmental and economic impact that invasive species present becomes available, the threat that these organisms represent becomes much more apparent. We must take proactive measures now to combat this growing problem before it is too late. I believe that Assembly Bill 573 is one such step that we can take now. This bill has bipartisan support and it would create another important tool that could be used to fight the spread of invasive species in our state. I hope I can have your support as well.

Thank you for hearing my testimony in support of AB 573. I would be happy to answer any questions that the Committee might have.