



July 31st, 2015

Helping Local Government

The Governor's proposed state budget was first introduced nearly five months ago. Looking back, one of the first issues that my office received a lot of phone calls about was the Governor's proposal to change the property tax assessment process. The proposal would have moved property tax assessment duties from the municipal level to the county level. It didn't take very long for individuals serving on Town Boards to contact my office to oppose this change. As a former Town supervisor, I understood the concern and it wasn't too long after that the provision was removed from the budget.

This wasn't the only positive change that the Joint Committee on Finance made to help local governments. We maintained the funding for county shared revenue and local transportation aids. This includes the four percent increase county governments received last year. The budget increased the amount of unused levy authority that can be carried forward. We restored funding to the Wisconsin Fund to help homeowners and small businesses work with counties to replace or repair private onsite wastewater treatment systems. Two million dollars will now be paid to towns and counties from Manage Forest Land payments over the next two years. We rejected the Governor's proposal to change ADRCs and doubled the amount of funding counties receive to help fight fraud in the Medicaid and FoodShare programs.

We also worked hard to help bring down the cost of local government projects and provide more flexibility. Now, counties will be able to replace culverts without having to reapply for permits and pay additional fees. More flexibility has been established for road projects with the repeal of the state's "Complete Streets" statute. Communities will no longer be forced to build bike and pedestrian paths if they believe them to be too costly or unnecessary. However, due consideration will still be required. Finally, the budget repealed the state's prevailing wage requirements for county and municipal governments. Prevailing wage is a law that requires government bodies to pay individuals working on public works projects a mandated wage. In some cases, prevailing wages can be up to 40 percent higher than market wages. High wages and steady wage growth are very important to a healthy economy, but the market economy should dictate wages - they should not be mandated by the government. Among those that will benefit from the changes, school districts will now be able to save on construction costs and put those savings towards other priorities. However, projects that use federal dollars are still required to follow the federal Davis-Bacon prevailing wage requirements.

There were some great things for local governments in this biennium's budget and I hope to continue to build on these successes in the next budget.

I also want to thank Vilas County Board Chairman, Ron DeBruyne, and the Vilas County Board for allowing me to address their July meeting. The presentation included a recap of the recently completed state budget. It was good to hear the board members' questions and comments. I look forward to visiting with the Vilas County Social Services office in September!

DNR Organization

This week, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) announced a reorganization of the entire department. This isn't the first time the DNR has undergone a major transformation. Back in 1995, then Governor Thompson and DNR Secretary George Meyer orchestrated a major reorganization and removed the ability for the Natural Resources Board to appoint the Secretary. At the same time, Michigan would split its DNR, only to combine them and split them several more times over the last two decades.

Several years later, the legislature was poised to split the DNR into two separate agencies, one committed to wildlife and sporting heritage while the other, new agency would be called the Department of Environmental Quality and in charge of permits and environmental issues. Gov. McCallum vetoed this provision. The legislature then attempted to split the DNR years later, only to once again fail.

The current reorganization the department is proposing is far less drastic than the actions taken in the past. They are proposing to move from six divisions to five and align similar priorities. Now water and air will be in the same division to facilitate greater communication and coordination on permitting issues. Fish and wildlife will now be within the same division to strengthen sporting issues. Forestry will remain its own division and regional directors will now be called Secretary's Directors in an effort to bring consistency to individual regions.

It's important to remember that no environmental standards or laws are being changed. I'm optimistic that this will lead to greater efficiency and stronger accountability to taxpayers. I don't believe in change for the sake of change but if we can continue Wisconsin's strong environmental standards while leading to greater effective management then I think it's a good deal for taxpayers and sportsmen alike.

DNR Lands For Sale

The Department of Natural Resources is offering five state-owned parcels of land for public sale beginning July 16, 2015.

In June 2014, the Natural Resources Board approved 22 department-owned properties totaling approximately 1,400 acres for public sale. Of these 22 parcels, 15 were land-locked with no legal access from a road and marketed to adjoining landowners. The remaining seven parcels are accessible by a town road, and the first five of these properties are posted for bid through the [Wisconsin Surplus Online Auction](#). The bidding process for these five parcels will close Aug. 12, 2015 at 10 a.m.

The parcels available for purchase are located in Vilas, Sawyer and Lincoln counties, and range from five to 80 acres. Four of the five properties are forested, while one parcel has been used for agriculture purposes in the past. These parcels are part of the department's ongoing sale of surplus state-owned lands.

Land titles may transfer to the successful bidders subject to certain restrictions, including county snowmobile easements, DNR access easements, or "no development" requirements on certain portions of the property. Each parcel will be sold "as is," and it is the bidder's responsibility to determine the condition of the property and its suitability for any private use. Specific property information, along with maps and photographs can be found on the Wisconsin Surplus Online Auction website.

This land sale program is being carried out by the Department in compliance with Wisconsin Act 20 which requires that the Natural Resources Board offer for sale at least 10,000 acres located outside of project boundaries by June 30, 2017. The sale of select department-owned lands will help resolve key boundary and access issues, realign land ownership with conservation partners and private citizens for more efficient management, and allow the department to work closely with partner and stakeholder organizations to meet common property and conservation goals.

The department's land sale policy was shaped by public comments received at five informational meetings held throughout the state in October 2013 and by comments received through the public policy page of the DNR website. The Natural Resources Board approved the final policy in December 2013.

Shooting Ranges Receive DNR Grants

Seven public and three private shooting ranges will receive a combined total of \$803,822.25 in grant funding this year through the Shooting Range Grant Program. The recipients were notified on July 3, 2015.

Seven public shooting ranges located in Barron, Chippewa, Columbia, Dunn, Florence, Portage and Vilas counties will receive grants totaling \$646,450.25. One of the seven is a new range that will be developed in Columbia County. Three private shooting ranges were given grants for a total of \$157,372. These existing private ranges are located in Marathon, St. Croix and Sauk counties.

The shooting range grant program began in 2013. Shooting range grants are available to counties, cities, villages, townships, other governmental agencies or units, clubs or organizations, businesses or corporations and education institutions. Currently, grants are awarded every two years and recipients must pay a portion of the total project costs.

Eligible project types include archery ranges, backstops and berms, target holders, restroom facilities, shooting benches, baffles, trenches, signs, gun racks, platforms, protective fencing and other items the DNR deems essential for a project. Most projects include improving the range to make it compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act, increasing safety aspects and developing shooting lanes for a variety of firearms. Indoor ranges may be eligible as well, including classroom, storage and restroom facilities.

Listed below are the grant recipients:

Public Shooting Range Grant Recipients

- **Barron County Maple Plains shooting range renovations**
Grant award \$150,000
Grantee share \$50,000
- **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources**
Chippewa County-Cornell shooting range improvements and expansion
Grant award \$45,000
Grantee share \$22,270
- **Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources**
Columbia County-Mud Lake shooting range development
Grant award \$375,000
Grantee share \$125,000
- **Dunn County**
Dunn County Land Conservation Division - Colfax shooting range renovations
Grant award \$6,000
Grantee share \$6,000
- **Florence County**
Florence County shooting range-Florence County forest rifle range improvements
Grant award \$31,177
Grantee share \$10,393

- Portage County
Dewey shooting range
Dewey shooting range renovations
Grant award \$26,662
Grantee share \$8,888
- Vilas County
Boulder Junction shooting range renovations (phase 2)
Grant award \$12,611.25
Grantee share \$4,203.75

Private Shooting Range Grant Recipients

- Marathon County
Wausau Skeet and Trap Club-Wausau Skeet and Trap Club middle field skeet and trap house reconstruction
Grant share \$ 8,050
Grantee share \$ 8,050
- St. Croix County
Hudson Rod, Gun and Archery Club site range improvements (phase 2)
Grant share \$114,000
Grantee share \$114,000
- Sauk County
Sauk Prairie Trap and Skeet Club renovations
Grant award \$35,322
Grantee share \$35,322

Calendar of Events

Upcoming Events

Start Date	Event Name	Location
July 29 - Aug. 2	<u>Langlade County Youth Fair</u>	Antigo
July 30 - Aug. 1	<u>Pig in the Pines Ribfest</u>	St. Germain
July 30 - Aug. 2	<u>Oneida County Fair</u>	Rhinelanders
August 1	<u>Forest Fest</u>	Eagle River
August 1	<u>Normal Park Craft Festival</u>	Merrill
August 1	<u>Phelps Fireman's Picnic & Pig Roast</u>	Phelps
August 1	<u>Lakes Country Arts and Crafts Show</u>	Lakewood

August 1 - 2	<u>Firemen's Picnic and Summerfest</u>	Arbor Vitae
August 1 - 2	<u>Wabeno Art & Music Festival</u>	Wabeno
August 2	<u>Fireman's Picnic & Parade</u>	Presque Isle
August 2	<u>Sayner/Star Lake Street Fair</u>	Sayner
August 5 - 8	<u>Antique Outboard and Motor Show</u>	Tomahawk
August 6	<u>After Look Delight Craft Show</u>	Minocqua
August 8	<u>Antigo Tater Trot</u>	Antigo
August 8	<u>Boulder Junction History Day</u>	Boulder Junction
August 8	<u>Minocqua Triathlon</u>	Woodruff
August 8	<u>Open Studio/Garden Walk</u>	Phelps
August 8	<u>Ride with Leinie Bike Ride</u>	Land O'Lakes
August 8	<u>Thrilla on the Grilla</u>	Tomahawk
August 8	<u>Annual Little Hearts for Life Corn Roast</u>	Oconto Falls
August 9	<u>Musky Jamboree</u>	Boulder Junction
August 9 - 15	<u>Northern Woods & Waters Bicycle Tour</u>	Three Lakes
August 11	<u>Krazy Day</u>	Minocqua
August 13	<u>Crazy Daze</u>	Merrill
August 13 - 16	<u>Vilas County Fair</u>	Eagle River
August 15	<u>Gleason Mud Bogs</u>	Gleason
August 15 - 16	<u>Oconto County Fair</u>	Gillett
August 22	<u>Hodag Triatholon</u>	Rhineland

As always, if you have any comments or thoughts regarding the subjects of this e-update, please feel free to contact me.

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