



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

Capitol Update By Senator Howard Marklein June 5, 2015

JFC Restores Stewardship Program and \$50 million to University System

The Joint Finance Committee (JFC) met late into the day on Friday, May 29th to work on issues related to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the University System. We made several significant changes to the Governor's proposed budget in response to input from constituents and stakeholders. Overall, I believe the following adjustments improve our state's financial stability while supporting funding priorities at responsible levels.

We invested \$33 million into the DNR's Stewardship Program, \$12 million into local assistance grants and protected public-private partnerships with a few changes to make the programs more financially solvent.

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program was designed to preserve valuable natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and fisheries, and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation. The conservation and recreation goals of the Stewardship Program are achieved through the acquisition of land and easements, development of recreational facilities, and restoration of wildlife habitat.

In the 2013-2015 budget, the legislature required the DNR to sell 10,000 acres of land that does not meet the goals of the department. For example, the DNR owns a parcel in an industrial park that is surrounded by industry and cannot be used by the department to meet their programming needs.

Rather than freeze land acquisitions and bonding, my colleagues and I proposed to allow the DNR to purchase new land only after they sell a parcel of currently-owned stewardship lands that do not meet programming goals. Half of the proceeds from the sale will be reinvested in stewardship purchases and the other half will be directed to debt service.

We also maintained science and research in the DNR. The department employs more than 700 scientists who work on everything from wildlife and fisheries to water quality and permit issuance. While we adopted the Governor's recommendation to eliminate 18.4 positions in science services, 6.4 of these positions are vacancies and 40 positions remain active. Throughout our discussion with the DNR, the Department discussed their intention to integrate many of the positions into the existing bureaus such as the Bureau Wildlife Management and the Bureau of Fisheries Management.

The JFC asked the DNR to prioritize applied science research to guide management decisions that impact our state's natural resources and stakeholders. We also prioritized funds from the Pittman Robertson fund to be applied more directly to hunting, trapping and fishing issues such as habitat management, deer advisory councils and deer management assistance. Pittman Robertson funds are gathered directly from

hunting and fishing licenses and we believe that these funds should be reinvested directly into programs that support hunting and fishing in our state.

Switching gears, the JFC made significant decisions related to the University of Wisconsin System. The JFC restored \$50 million in funding from Governor Walker's original proposal to cut \$300 million.

In order to better manage financial resources, we gave the Board of Regents freedom to manage their own procurement policies, but froze tuition for two years so that students are not asked to make up the difference. In addition, the Board of Regents is also granted authority to make their own policies related to tenure and shared governance, rather than the legislature making these decisions for the agency.

With new flexibilities, the JFC added requirements that the UW System would have to conduct an independent financial audit and establish accountability measures in financial and administrative management, research and economic development, and educational performance. The Chancellors at our campuses need to have increased flexibility to manage their operations. We will now allow the Board of Regents to renegotiate leases. UW-Platteville Chancellor Dennis Shields tells me that his campus can save \$250,000 per year by renegotiating existing leases.

We also responded to concerns that the UW is not able to attract and keep high-performing faculty because of financial competition nationwide, by creating a merit pay program that will allow individual campuses to respond to these needs directly. We want campuses to be able to reward achievement and performance while having the ability to keep excellent staff if they are entertaining offers from other institutions.

Overall, the JFC is working hard to make responsible decisions within the confines of our state's finances. While the decisions are difficult, I am proud of our work and look forward to wrapping up the budget process very soon. I look forward to continuing to communicate with you about these important issues and welcome your input and ideas.

For more information and to connect with me, visit my website <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/17/marklein> and subscribe to my weekly E-Update by sending an email to Sen.Marklein@legis.wisconsin.gov. Do not hesitate to call 800-978-8008 if you have input, ideas or need assistance with any state-related matters.

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