



Analysis of Conservation Impacts in Gov. Evers' Proposed State Budget

2021-2023

The state budget and legislative agenda should reflect the strong conservation values of Wisconsin citizens. A pro-conservation budget and policy agenda should:

- Maintain or increase Department of Natural Resources (DNR) staffing levels needed to carry out the agency's mission of protecting and managing Wisconsin's natural resources and implementing natural resources laws.
- Protect public health and natural resources as opposed to making it easier for polluters to cut corners and expose our air, water, and land to more toxins.
- Keep information transparent and the public informed every step of the way about their exposure to pollution and changes being made to natural resources programs.
- Not raid funds that are collected for specific purposes to fund unrelated programs in the budget.
- Promote practices and programs that prevent environmental pollution, reducing the need for clean up later.
- Ensure the right of every eligible person to vote, including ensuring that registering and exercising that right can be done easily and safely, and voters can have confidence their vote will be counted.
- Develop fair maps that require decision-makers to represent all their constituents and puts the wellbeing of voters first, rather than partisan politics.

Clean Energy & Climate Change

Addressing Wisconsin's role in climate change

Human-driven climate change is scientific fact and Wisconsin is already suffering because of it. Reduced corn harvests, unprecedented flooding, later snowmelts that are disrupting wildlife migration, toxic algae blooms in our lakes, degradation of water quality in the Great Lakes, even increased mosquito hatches – climate change is already having serious detrimental effects in Wisconsin.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' goal to ensure that Wisconsin's electricity is 100 percent carbon neutral by 2050.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposal to establish an Office of Environmental Justice with a Chief Resiliency Officer and two additional staff at the Department of Administration. The impacts of climate change pollution fall unfairly on communities of color. Wisconsin should assess the health impacts of our current energy use for all our communities and ensure future policies and investments do not leave any community behind.

Promoting Clean Energy

While climate change poses the greatest threat to human life on the planet, the alternative – clean energy – offers huge opportunities for jobs and economic growth. Recent extreme weather events around the country, including severe flooding due to historic rain events in Wisconsin, have made the need for action on climate a growing priority for the public.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' efforts to support local governments who are leading the charge in moving Wisconsin towards 100 percent clean energy but need more investment and resources from the state to be successful. Specifically:

- Allocating \$200,000 to establish a technical assistance grant program to assist municipalities and tribal nations to develop plans to be carbon-free by 2050.
- Requiring municipalities to develop comprehensive plans to address climate change, and to include climate change in local hazard mitigation plans and in their community health improvement assessments and plans.
- Establishing the existing Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy in statute within the Department of Administration, which will continue to promote the development and use of clean and renewable energy across the state, advance innovative sustainability solutions that improve the state's economy and environment, diversify the resources used to meet the state's energy needs, and generate family supporting jobs by promoting the expansion of Wisconsin's clean energy economy.
- Allocating \$4 million for renewable and clean energy research grants administered by the Office of Sustainability and Clean Energy.
- Providing \$1.8 million GPR in each year for grants to counties for additional county conservation staff to support climate change resiliency efforts.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' increase to the Focus on Energy program from 1.2 to 2.4 percent of operating revenues, which results in an annual program budget increase of approximately \$100 million.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposed \$20 million energy efficiency program to update school buildings to address climate change and rising energy costs for school districts.

Clean Water

Too many Wisconsinites can't turn on their taps and drink the water. With aging infrastructure and growing pollution problems, the number of Wisconsin families who don't have access to clean, safe drinking water in their own homes is reaching crisis levels. Whether it's lead poisoning impacting children's brain development, manure forcing families

to dig expensive new wells, or threats from emerging pollution like PFAS, Wisconsin is seeing increasing human impacts of unsafe water.

Protecting drinking water from PFAS

The U.S. Center for Disease Control has advised doctors that PFAS have been linked to increased rates of testicular and kidney cancer. Exposure can also lead to liver lesions, kidney degeneration, and damage to liver function. In addition, a number of large epidemiological studies have related higher maternal exposure to these chemicals to lower birth weight. PFAS are also linked to reducing the efficacy of vaccines. PFAS chemicals are one of the most serious threats to our health and are being found in increasing numbers of drinking water sources around the state. The DNR needs to prioritize understanding how these pollutants contaminate our waters and how best to address that pollution.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' efforts to expedite setting PFAS standards for drinking water, groundwater, surface waters, air, and soil.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposed \$2.11 million for statewide testing and monitoring of PFAS and \$20 million for municipal governments to test and remediate for PFAS.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposal to add eleven additional fulltime staff dedicated to understanding the threats from PFAS.

Protecting drinking water in private wells

Roughly 1.7 million people in Wisconsin depend on private wells to get their drinking water. It's estimated that 47 percent of these wells are contaminated by one or more pollutants at levels above public health standards. This is the reality for many families across the state. Entire communities are at risk for short-term and long-term consequences, ranging from diarrhea to learning disabilities to death. Dangerous pathogens, bacteria, and chemicals are found in manure and industrial wastewater, which can get into our groundwater and ultimately our drinking water.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposed \$2 million for households to replace their contaminated wells. The proposal also changes the qualifications so that more households are eligible for assistance.

Polluted runoff: implementing non-point pollution programs

County soil and water conservation departments provide essential testing and monitoring services across Wisconsin. These departments assist farmers with designing and constructing manure storage facilities, help establish conservation cropping practices, and aid in nutrient management planning. The county departments also help landowners find cost-share funds for conservation work. These services result in management practices that reduce non-point pollution runoff.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposal to increase the annual base funding for county conservationists to \$10.9 million.



► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposal of \$6.5 million in bonding authority for the Targeted Runoff Management program, which includes assistance to local municipalities for infrastructure projects to reduce nonpoint source pollution.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposal for \$7 million in bonding authority for the Soil and Water Resource Management (SWRM) program, which assists famers in implementing infrastructure projects such as manure storage facilities and streambank restoration to reduce water pollution.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposed \$12 million in bonding authority for urban non-point source, the storm water grant program, and the municipal flood control program, which ensures rainwater coming off parking lots and developments does not end up polluting surface waters or lead to flash floods.

Lowering lead levels

Lead poisoning, especially in young children, can lead to profound and permanent health problems, including damage to brain development. Young children in childcare centers – and even in their own homes – can be exposed to lead-contaminated water without their parents' knowledge.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposed \$40 million in bonding to replace lead services lines through the Safe Drinking Water Loan Program.

Funding oversight of CAFOs

Families are suffering in Wisconsin. As Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), proliferate across the state – and grow ever larger – they create millions of gallons of concentrated liquid manure per day. That manure is spread over pastures and fields where it seeps into the groundwater and our drinking water. The DNR needs adequate staffing and adequate funding to allow it to implement oversight properly. In recent years, the number of CAFOs in Wisconsin have increased over 500 percent without additional support.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' increase of permit fees for CAFOs to \$545 each year and \$3270 to review and reissue their wastewater permits. This increase in fees would help to fund five new positions at the DNR to oversee CAFO permits and regulation.

Cleaning up contaminated sediments

The Great Lakes is the largest system of fresh water lakes in the world, and represents 95 percent of all the freshwater in the United States. Unfortunately, due to heavy industrial activities in the last century, there are many areas along the Great Lakes, including in Wisconsin, that have excessive levels of toxins accumulated in the water and soil near old industrial sites.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposal of \$25 million in bonding to clean up contaminated sediment in five areas of concern in the Great Lakes Basin.



Public Lands

Reauthorizing the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is used to purchase and protect Wisconsin lands treasured by residents and visitors alike. The stewardship program also protects many of the natural resources on which Wisconsin's \$22 billion tourism industry, \$23 billion forestry industry, and \$4 billion hunting and fishing industry depend.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program for ten years at \$70 million in bonding levels.

A Healthy Democracy

Currently, Wisconsin has one of the nation's most stringent – and complex – voter ID law coupled with the most partisan gerrymandered maps in the nation. These two elements have worked to keep good legislation supported by the majority of Wisconsin residents from being enacted and has maintained legislators' unequal grip on our democratic process.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' People's Map Commission and implement a system to ensure a fair process for establishing legislative and congressional maps.

Making voting easy and safe

Lawmakers passed the voter ID law in 2011, but, since then, haven't taken meaningful steps to educate voters on how to comply with the often confusing requirements of the law. Wisconsin's strict photo ID requirement keeps voters of color, college students, and low-income people from having their voices heard in disproportionate numbers. COVID-19 exposed how hard it can be to navigate this requirement while voting absentee. We support efforts to eliminate this unnecessary requirement to vote, but support voters' efforts to get IDs as quickly as possible while the requirement is still in place.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposal to make voter registration as easy as possible through automatic voter registration at the Department of Motor Vehicles.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' proposal to increase access to DMV service centers in Dane and Brown Counties for voter IDs in the months leading up to elections and invest in a public education campaign that combats misinformation and simplifies access information.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' efforts to require UW-System and Wisconsin Technical College System to issue ID cards that meet voter identification requirements.

► **SUPPORT** Gov. Evers' policy directive would allow municipalities to offer early voting earlier than the two weeks that are allowed right now.

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