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Governor's proposal will bolster sustainable industries like clean energy and forestry, support forest regeneration, improve Stewardship Program.

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers today announced his 2023-25 biennial budget proposal will include efforts to strengthen Wisconsin's forestry industry, bolster the state's clean energy and conservation workforce, and improve transparency and accountability in the state's allocation of stewardship funds. The governor's announcement today covers a wide range of investments aimed at promoting sustainability and combatting climate change while providing the training and support to ensure Wisconsinites can meet the state's clean energy and conservation workforce needs.



"Wisconsin has a proud and rich history of conservation and stewardship—from our work to safeguard our unique forests and urban trees to the historically bipartisan Knowles-Nelson Stewardship fund, which has preserved outdoor spaces for folks to enjoy in all 72 counties over the last three decades," said Gov. Evers.

“We know protecting our environment and investing in sustainable industries is vital for conservation, protecting our quality of life, and maintaining our economy’s momentum. These investments and policies will help build a stronger, more resilient forestry industry, train Wisconsinites for in-demand jobs in conservation, sustainability, and clean energy, and improve our stewardship process. We don’t have to choose between building a healthier, more sustainable state and bolstering our workforce and our economy—we can and must do both.”



Over the last four years, Gov. Evers and the Evers Administration have prioritized strengthening Wisconsin’s forestry industry and promoting forestry across Wisconsin. The governor’s 2021-23 biennial budget increased the County Forest Acreage Share Payments from 30 cents to 63 cents—the first increased investment in more than 30 years. In April 2021 , Gov. Evers also signed Executive Order #112 , pledging to plant 75 million new trees in rural and urban areas and conserve 125,000 acres of forest in Wisconsin by 2030 in collaboration with public, private, and non-governmental partners. When fully realized Wisconsin’s tree pledge will result in nearly 29 million metric tons of carbon dioxide stored over the next 50 years. By April 2022 , Wisconsin had planted more than 9.3 million trees.



Gov. Evers has also worked to put Wisconsin on the path toward addressing and mitigating the effects of climate change and building a strong clean energy economy. Last year, Gov. Evers and Evers Administration released the state’s first-ever Clean Energy Plan, as directed by the governor in Executive Order #38. The Clean Energy Plan identifies dozens of pathways and

strategies aiming to lower energy bills and prices at the pump for Wisconsin families, promote energy independence by reducing reliance on out-of-state energy sources, create an estimated more than 40,000 jobs by 2030, and invest in job training and apprenticeship programs in innovative industries and technologies. The budget investments announced today align with the goals of the Clean Energy Plan to help the state achieve Gov. Evers' goal of 100 percent carbon-free electricity consumption by 2050.

A list of the governor's proposed investments and policies to strengthen the forestry industry, bolster the state's clean energy and conservation workforce, and improve transparency in the stewardship process is available below.

Invest in a Clean Energy Workforce & Economy
Gov. Evers is committed to implementing the state's Clean Energy Plan, which puts Wisconsin on a path to the governor's ambitious goal of 100 percent of all electricity consumed in the state being carbon-free by 2050 as outlined in Executive Order #38 and has the potential to create more than 40,000 new jobs by 2030. The governor is proposing new investments in clean energy workforce development, including:

- $5 million annually for a clean energy job training and reemployment program;
- $1 million annually under the Wisconsin Fast Forward framework for training in green jobs, including conservation and environmental career pathways; and
- $2 million in fiscal year 2024 to create the Southeast Wisconsin Green Jobs Corps to encourage young adults facing barriers to employment to enter energy efficiency, conservation, and environmental sector jobs.

Bolster Forest Regeneration and Management
Gov. Evers set an ambitious goal with Executive Order #112 of conserving 125,000 acres of forestland and planting 75 million trees by the end of 2030. The governor's budget will continue working toward this important goal and will include more than $4.4 million to encourage the planting and growth of trees and forests, including:

- $395,000 annually for forest regeneration on state-owned lands, including state forests;
- $667,500 annually to provide technical and financial assistance to public landowners for reforestation, forest regeneration and management, with a focus on county forests; and
- $286,200 in fiscal year 2024 and $341,600 in fiscal year 2025 to support the state nursery program to increase the production and distribution of seeds and seedlings for reforestation.

The governor is also proposing additional funding to support 30 county forests across Wisconsin, totaling over 2.4 million acres available to the public with:

- $250,000 annually for county forest administration grants and sustainable forestry grants to support county forests; and
- $128,300 annually to support wildlife habitat management on county forest lands.

Gov. Evers is also proposing providing $807,600 in fiscal year 2024 and $150,000 in fiscal year 2025 to replace fire protection equipment used in combatting forest fires, ensuring firefighters and first responders have the tools they need to safely and effectively battle these fires.

Expand the State's Forestry Industry and Workforce

Wisconsin's forestry industry is a critical part of the state's economy, but like many sectors, has struggled to attract and retain skilled forestry professionals.

The governor is proposing providing an additional $500,000 over the biennium in his Executive Budget for both the Wisconsin Institute for Sustainable Technology (WIST) at the University of Wisconsin (UW)-Stevens Point and the Advanced Manufacturing, Engineering Technology, and Apprenticeship (AMETA) Center at Mid-State Technical College (MSTC) to further support their critical work in building out Wisconsin's forestry and paper industry workforce.

This investment ensures ongoing support to these programs and builds upon Gov. Evers' previous investment of $4 million each to WIST and AMETA to support their work to ensure the long-term viability of the state's paper and forest products industry. In addition, the governor previously provided up to $8 million through the Workforce Innovation Grant Program for the Wisconsin Forestry Center at UW-Stevens Point for their Forest Industry Workforce Recruitment & Development Initiative, as well as up to $9 million through the same grant program to support construction of the AMETA Center at MSTC.

Gov. Evers is also proposing providing $84,200 in fiscal year 2024 and $110,800 in fiscal year 2025 to hire an outreach officer to work with groups that are historically underserved by traditional forestry and environmental higher education programs to help expand the pool of interested individuals in this vital industry and ensure the long-term viability of the industry.

Finally, Gov. Evers is proposing providing $775,000 in fiscal year 2024 for the development of a forestry industry strategic plan and roadmap which will help to retain existing businesses, identify new market opportunities, and drive innovation. This initiative was first recommended by the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Rural Prosperity.

Prevent Invasive Species

The governor is proposing more than $2.7 million for invasive species prevention. Invasive species degrade natural habitats and make it more difficult and expensive to manage forests, parks, grasslands, and other natural spaces.

Gov. Evers' more than $2.7 million investment includes:

- $589,500 annually to Terrestrial Invasive Species Protection;
- $310,000 annually for the Resilient Forests Initiative, which provides grant funding to the Wisconsin Forest Landowner and Weed Management Area programs to assist with forest management and invasive plant control on private forest land; and
- $475,000 annually for urban forestry grants to help communities with forest management, education and outreach, emerging invasive species threats and emergency storm response.

Promote Conservation and Stewardship

Wisconsin's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship program protects our state's natural resources through land purchases by conservation organizations and the Department of Natural Resources to maintain parks, build new trails, and protect shorelines. Unfortunately, the review process for these projects has been weaponized by members of the Legislature to indefinitely suspend critical projects from moving forward, leaving projects hanging in limbo.

Gov. Evers is proposing multiple commonsense initiatives to make the review process of Stewardship projects more democratic and transparent, including:

- Repealing the arbitrary requirement that all projects north of Highway 64 be subject to legislative review;
- Increasing the threshold for legislative review of stewardship grants and acquisitions from $250,000 to $500,000; and
- Requiring that if a member of the Legislature objects to a proposed stewardship project approval, that member's name and nature of the objection be announced publicly.