As a coalition representing hunting, fishing, forestry, conservation, local governments, recreation, and business interests, we write to express our support for the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Program.

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program was created in 1989 to preserve valuable
natural areas and wildlife habitat, protect water quality and fisheries, expand opportunities for outdoor recreation, and support our timber and tourism industries.

And it has been a resounding success. Because of this program, local governments and nonprofit groups have received state matching funds to purchase land or easements for conservation, and we have the funding needed for the upkeep and maintenance of our waterways, parks, forests, and trail systems.

But if the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is not renewed as part of the state budget being debated right now, then we’ll lose the effectiveness of Wisconsin’s best source of funding for land and water conservation.

Planning and executing Stewardship projects can take many years, meaning landowners, funders, nonprofits and local governments need certainty about the long-term future of the program for projects to be viable. That’s why the Legislature continued the program for ten additional years each time during the two prior reauthorizations.

Unfortunately, the Governor’s proposed budget only calls for a two-year extension of the Stewardship Program. That short time frame is entirely inadequate, and severely limits the ability of nonprofit groups and local governments to provide these outdoor spaces for the public to enjoy.

We support a long-term reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, and urge the Legislature to adopt a ten-year reauthorization of the program, while maintaining current funding levels.

A June 2018 statewide survey from The Nature Conservancy found that an overwhelming majority (93%) of Wisconsin voters want to see the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program reauthorized. This includes 89% of Republicans, 90% of Independents, and 100% of Democrats.

We urge the Legislature to continue to support this tremendously popular program by passing a long-term reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.