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Committing to Stewardship through 2030

MADISON— Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released this statement reaffirming his commitment this Earth Day to a ten-year reauthorization of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program and advocating for a modernized program that addresses today’s conservation and recreation needs while anticipating tomorrow’s challenges in Wisconsin’s natural resource management:

“The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship program resulted from a groundbreaking, bipartisan effort to advance Wisconsin’s transition of conservation and outdoor recreation for decades. Wisconsin is proud to have a tourism industry that tops 20 billion dollars annually and keeps growing, but without opportunities for fishing and swimming and the maintained infrastructure for ample and diverse outdoor recreation for decades to come, our tourism industry may fail to grow and is even at risk of declining.

“We have the opportunity to build on that legacy by reflecting on the past to create a program that builds for the future. Today, on Earth Day, I am announcing my recommitment to a ten-year reauthorization of the program, and asking for my colleagues to consider programmatic changes that will balance the need of our state government to work cooperatively with our partners in the federal and local governments and nonprofit organizations. After months of reviewing today’s Stewardship program and focusing on advancing responsible conservation and recreation, I believe I have an outline for reauthorization to address today’s needs and anticipate tomorrow’s challenges.

“I envision a plan that would focus on things like improving property and infrastructure while prioritizing access and signage, critical habitat restoration and management, and recreational and natural infrastructure. Concentrating on simple things like preserving natural flood mitigation, increasing access for those with limited mobility, improving pollinator habitat, new options for non-motorized watercraft access, and more would greatly improve options for recreation and expand the functionality of these properties. Furthermore, this plan would also bolster and modernize popular local assistance programs like Recreational Boating Aids and protect vital programs like Nonprofit Conservation Organization Grants.

“The residents of Wisconsin and conservation stakeholders have spoken, and they’ve made it clear that we need to commit long-term to our Stewardship program. As we move further along in this budget cycle, I hope my colleagues on the Joint Finance Committee and throughout the Legislature understand our need to recommit to this program, and embrace the opportunity we have to create a modernized program that reflects on the past and builds for the future.”

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