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LAND TRUST COMMUNITY APPLAUDS REQUEST FOR 10-YEAR REAUTHORIZATION OF THE KNOWLES-NELSON STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

September 19, 2018 - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Madison, WI – Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts applauded yesterday's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) budget request to reauthorize the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program for another decade.

Named for two former governors and conservation champions—Republican Warren Knowles and Democrat Gaylord Nelson—the Stewardship Program has protected some of Wisconsin's most popular and iconic public lands, including key sections of the Ice Age Trail, the Kettle Moraine State Forest, the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage, and the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway.

“Wisconsin has a long-running, bipartisan tradition of protecting the places that make our state special, but we are approaching a significant crossroads—if the Stewardship Program isn't reauthorized in the next state budget, funding for the program will end in June 2020.” Mike Carlson, Executive Director of Gathering Waters, said. “The DNR has recognized the importance of continuing the program, which is exciting news for those who love the outdoors.”

For the past 28 years, the Stewardship Program has provided funding to the state DNR, local governments and nonprofit conservation partners, such as land trusts, to preserve natural areas and wildlife habitat, to protect water quality and fisheries, and to expand opportunities for outdoor recreation in our parks, wildlife areas, and forests.

“The Stewardship Program contributes to a strong economy, healthy communities, and a high quality of life that makes Wisconsin a desirable place to live, work, and play,” Carlson said. “Two of Wisconsin's most important economic sectors—the \$18 billion outdoor recreation industry and \$24 billion forestry industry—are directly supported by the state's investment in Stewardship.”

As one of only a handful of state programs to require matching funds, Stewardship leverages the state's investment with millions of dollars of private, local and federal funding. The annual cost of the program is less than 0.3 percent of the overall state budget. “The Stewardship Program costs each resident in Wisconsin less per year than a fishing license or a state park sticker,” Carlson added. “The ongoing benefits to our state far outweigh the cost.”

“This issue is also broadly popular with the public. A poll from earlier this summer showed 93 percent public support for reauthorization,” Carlson added. “Everyone who enjoys spending time outdoors in Wisconsin benefits from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. It guarantees that our children and grandchildren will always have special places to hike, hunt, fish, paddle, and watch birds and wildlife.”

Gathering Waters: Wisconsin's Alliance for Land Trusts is a statewide land conservation organization founded in 1994 to strengthen Wisconsin's non-profit land trusts. Through training and technical assistance, outreach, and public policy advocacy, Gathering Waters helps land trusts, landowners, and communities protect the places that make Wisconsin special.

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