



## Legislative Fiscal Bureau

One East Main, Suite 301 • Madison, WI 53703 • (608) 266-3847 • Fax: (608) 267-6873

December 14, 2006

TO: Members  
Joint Committee on Finance

FROM: Bob Lang, Director

SUBJECT: Natural Resources: Section 16.505 Request for Mead-McMillan Educator Position --  
Agenda Item III

### REQUEST

On September 12, 2006, the Secretary of DOA submitted a request under s. 16.505 on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) seeking 1.0 PR permanent position for the appropriation under s. 20.370 (1)(mi). Under a cooperative agreement between the DNR, the Friends of Mead-McMillan Association, Inc (Friends), and the Mead-Witter Foundation (MWF), the salary for this position would be funded out of a private trust and deposited in the DNR appropriation 20.370(1)mi. The fringe benefits for the position would be provided from federal revenues or from existing expenditure authority from the fish and wildlife account of the segregated conservation fund. On September 29, 2006, the Co-chairs notified the DOA Secretary that a meeting would be scheduled to review the request.

### BACKGROUND

Located northwest of Stevens Point, in Marathon, Portage and Wood Counties, the George W. Mead Wildlife Area is the third largest wildlife area in the state comprising approximately 30,000 acres. The nearby 5,800-acre McMillan Marsh Wildlife Area is managed cooperatively with the Mead Wildlife Area. Environmental education programming at the Mead Wildlife Area has increased over the last several years. The number of students served increased from fewer than 200 students in 1999 to over 2,300 students in the first half of 2006.

Currently, the program serves 13 districts including 21 schools. Demand for the classes exceeds available programming, which has resulted in schools scheduling programs as much as three years in advance. Programming includes full-day activities in such areas as: wetlands, grasslands, forestry, hunting heritage, renewable energy and wildlife photography. Currently, Mead

Wildlife Area staff conduct educational programming in addition to their habitat maintenance and development activities. Staffing includes 5.0 full-time positions (one mechanic, three wildlife technicians, and one property supervisor). Educational programming was conducted without a dedicated facility through 2005.

In 1999, the Friends of Mead-McMillan Association, Inc. (Friends) and the Department of Natural Resources initiated a building project which would have provided a 3,400 square foot facility for educational programming on the property. The Friends group initially agreed to provide funding of \$75,000 for the facility while the state agreed to provide \$611,000. However, the Friends group was able to raise additional funds for the project (the state contributed the agreed upon \$611,000) allowing for the construction of an 8,200 sq. ft., \$1.7 million education and visitor center at the Mead Wildlife Area, which opened this year.

In June, 2006, the Friends group and the Mead-Witter Foundation (MWF) signed a cooperative agreement with the DNR which created a Mead Wildlife Area Trust. Under the agreement, the MWF would match funds raised by the Friends of up to \$500,000 providing an initial Trust principal of \$1,000,000. The primary goal of the agreement is to support the salary of a professional wildlife educator position at the Mead Wildlife Area; however, as revenues allow, trust income would also be used to support up to \$5,000 annually for an operating budget (such as manuals, support materials, and travel costs). Under the agreement, DNR would fund fringe benefits for the educator.

## **ANALYSIS**

The requested position would be classified as a Natural Resources Educator and would staff the new education and visitor center. Depending on the qualifications of the hired candidate, the educator would receive an annual salary ranging from \$32,800 to \$52,200, plus an associated \$14,600 to \$23,300 for fringe benefits. The educator would be responsible for coordinating, designing, and implementing all Mead Wildlife Area educational programming. Work activities would include creating lesson plans, grant writing, school district and teacher contact, and adult programming. Mead officials also plan to include some wildlife management activities in the position description to ensure compatibility between educational programming and field activities. However, Mead Wildlife Area staff would continue to conduct the delivery of educational programming until a volunteer and student teacher program could be initiated to conduct this part of the effort. In the past, DNR has partnered with UW-Stevens Point to develop educational curriculum, and the educator would be responsible for developing and coordinating such a partnership at the Mead Wildlife Area.

Mead Wildlife Area property officials indicate that the increase in educational programming has led to a decrease in the amount of time staff have been able to devote to habitat maintenance and wildlife development activities including: grassland brush control, dike maintenance, prescribed burning, wildlife surveys, hunter/hiker trail maintenance, invasive plant management, repair and maintenance of gates and roads, parking lot maintenance, and wetland development

projects. Staff indicate that approval of the educator position and the initiation of a volunteer and teacher program would allow the staff to return to property management activities.

The salary costs associated with the position would be funded from income derived from investing the Mead Wildlife Area Trust principal. Quarterly payments provided by the Trust would be credited to a PR continuing appropriation in DNR. As a continuing appropriation, DNR, with the approval of DOA, may expend all monies received by the appropriation. However, DNR has expended more than the allocated amount in this appropriation in the last three fiscal years. Since the appropriations schedule under Chapter 20 of the statutes is intended to represent the best estimate of expenditures for a continuing appropriation, if the Committee chooses to approve the request, associated authority could also be provided in 2006-07 in order to reflect anticipated expenditures.

As the requested position is responsible for overseeing all educational programming conducted at the Mead Wildlife Area, it is likely that the person hired would be someone with experience in the educational field who would be hired at the advanced level. While costs could vary substantially depending on qualifications of the individual hired, the annual cost could be expected to total approximately \$66,900 annually (\$47,800 for salary and supplies, and \$19,100 for fringe benefits). Due to the timing involved in filling the position, three months of funding is anticipated to be needed for 2006-07 (\$12,000 for salary and supplies). According to the cooperative agreement, until DNR can hire a permanent educator, the Friends would provide the salary for up to two temporary (LTE) positions. DNR has hired the two additional LTE's bringing the total number of LTE's working on educational activities at the Mead Wildlife Area to four. The agreement provides for an annual allotment of up to \$5,000 for this purpose. Mead staff indicate that they anticipate receiving the \$5,000 allotment for the 2006-07 fiscal year in January.

The salary and supplies for the Mead educator would be provided through the Friends/MWF trust by a grant received in a DNR program revenue appropriation. However, the agreement calls for DNR to fund the fringe benefits associated with the educator from its own budget. Typically, a permanent position is funded for both salary and fringe benefits from the same appropriation. While this arrangement is unusual, administration officials indicate funding the fringe benefits from a separate appropriation is an allowable budget practice (as long as the purpose of the expenditure is consistent with the appropriation authority). Although the request states that DNR would use federal funds for the fringe benefit payments if allowable, they now indicate a preference to utilize fish and wildlife SEG funds for this purpose. Agency officials argue that, if the position were funded with fish and wildlife SEG, no additional expenditure authority would be needed. However, the effect of paying the fringe benefit costs of the educator would be to either (a) use an excess allocation in the appropriation that would otherwise lapse back to the fish and wildlife account at the end of the fiscal year, or (b) reduce other fish and wildlife expenditures if the fringe benefits allocation needed to be supplemented to pay for the educator.

While the educator would have some duties, or oversee some educational programming, that would not have a wildlife related focus; DNR officials indicate that the educator's wildlife related

duties would be expected to far exceed 30% (the approximate level of fish and wildlife SEG used to leverage the Friends grant). Mead Wildlife Area officials argue that all educational programming sessions are wildlife oriented, with the exception of renewable energy. They argue that hunting, fishing, and trapping are components of all other sessions. However, the two educational programs most directly related to wildlife are the wildlife management and heritage programs. The wildlife management class teaches students about the need for wildlife management, how wildlife research is used to support wildlife habitat, and about the various uses of wildlife including viewing, hunting, fishing, trapping, and ecological stability. The heritage program provides students with information about the history of hunting, trapping and fishing, how Native Americans used wildlife resources, and provides them with hands on opportunities, such as handling animal pelts and learning to set traps. Mead officials indicate that in 2006, these two programs made up approximately 33% of educational programs conducted at the wildlife area. Further, DNR argues other programs offered at the Mead Wildlife Area also have a wildlife focus. Other program topics in 2006 included wetlands, grasslands, compass basics, forestry management, birding and a live owl demonstration.

If the request is denied, Mead-Witter Foundation staff indicate that the foundation likely would not provide the \$500,000 in matching funds to initiate the Trust. Friends of Mead-McMillan staff indicate that without the matching funds, they would be unable to raise adequate funds to initiate the Trust, and therefore, an educator likely would not be hired. As resources permit, existing Mead Wildlife staff would continue to conduct educational programming as well as scheduling and promotion of the educational programming.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Approve the Department's request for 1.0 PR position for the appropriation under s. 20.370(1)(mi) for an educator at the Mead Wildlife Center.
2. Approve 1.0 PR position and \$12,000 in 2006-07 for the estimated salary and supplies for an educator at the Mead Wildlife Center (fringe benefits would be provided from an existing fish and wildlife SEG appropriation).
3. Deny the request.

Prepared by: Erin Rushmer