



State of Wisconsin
2025 - 2026 LEGISLATURE

LRB-0036/1
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2025 ASSEMBLY BILL 315

June 9, 2025 - Introduced by Representatives KURTZ, NOVAK, FRANKLIN, KAUFERT, ARMSTRONG, BEHNKE, BORN, DITTRICH, DUCHOW, KITCHENS, KREIBICH, KRUG, MURSAU, O'CONNOR, PIWOWARCZYK, SORTWELL, TITTL, TRANEL, VANDERMEER, TUSLER and STEFFEN, cosponsored by Senators TESTIN, CABRAL-GUEVARA, JAMES and QUINN. Referred to Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation.

1 **AN ACT** *to renumber and amend* 23.096 (2) (a) and 30.277 (5); *to amend*
2 23.09 (19) (d), 23.09 (20) (b), 23.09 (20m) (b), 23.0915 (2p), 23.0917 (1) (e),
3 23.0917 (3) (a), 23.0917 (3) (bt) 3., 23.0917 (3) (bw) 2., 23.0917 (4) (a), 23.0917
4 (4) (e) (intro.), 23.0917 (4j) (b), 23.0917 (5g) (a), 23.0917 (5g) (b), 23.0917 (5g)
5 (L), 23.0917 (8) (e), 23.0917 (8) (f) 2., 23.0917 (12), 23.0953 (2) (a) (intro.) and
6 23.096 (2m) (intro.); **to create** 23.09 (19) (dm), 23.09 (20) (bm), 23.09 (20m) (c),
7 23.0917 (3) (br) 3., 23.0917 (3) (bu), 23.0917 (3) (dm) 9., 23.0917 (4) (d) 1m. g.,
8 23.0917 (4) (d) 2m. c., 23.0917 (8) (h), 23.0917 (8) (i), 23.09175, 23.096 (2) (a) 1.
9 and 30.277 (5) (b) of the statutes; **relating to:** the Warren Knowles-Gaylord
10 Nelson stewardship 2000 program and a major land acquisitions program.

Analysis by the Legislative Reference Bureau

This bill reauthorizes the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship 2000 Program until 2030, makes changes to the land acquisition and property

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development and local assistance subprograms, and creates a separate major land acquisitions program.

Reauthorization and changes to the stewardship program

Current law authorizes the state to incur public debt for certain conservation activities under the stewardship program, which is administered by the Department of Natural Resources. The state may incur this debt to acquire land for the state for conservation purposes and for property development activities and may award grants or state aid to certain local governmental units and nonprofit conservation organizations (NCOs) to acquire and develop land for these purposes. Current law establishes the amounts that DNR may obligate in each fiscal year through fiscal year 2025-26 for expenditure under each of five subprograms of the stewardship program.

The bill reauthorizes the stewardship program until fiscal year 2029-30.

Under the stewardship subprogram for land acquisition, the bill continues to require that \$1,000,000 be set aside to be obligated only for DNR land acquisition in each fiscal year. This equals the amount that current law requires to be set aside to be obligated only for DNR to acquire land for the Ice Age Trail. The bill reduces from \$7,000,000 to \$2,000,000 the amount to be set aside to be obligated for grants to NCOs to acquire and develop property for certain conservation purposes.

Under current law, in the stewardship program the term “obligate” means to encumber or otherwise commit or to expend without having previously encumbered or otherwise committed, and is used with respect to limits on obligating or requirements to obligate certain amounts in the stewardship program. The bill specifies that “obligate” only refers to encumbering, otherwise committing, or expending public debt that the state is authorized to contract. In other words, “obligate” does not refer to amounts that are not the result of bonding.

Under current law, DNR may obligate moneys for local assistance under the subprogram for property development and local assistance only for grant programs for urban green space, local parks, acquisition of property development rights, and urban rivers. Current law requires that such a grant may only be for up to 50 percent of the acquisition costs or development costs of a project. Under the bill, for such grants awarded to a governmental unit, no more than 30 percent of the remaining costs may be paid with funding provided from grants or in-kind contributions. Under current law, these grant programs define “governmental unit” to include a city, village, town, county, or the Kickapoo reserve management board and, for urban green space grants, to also include a lake sanitary district or public inland lake protection and rehabilitation district. The bill also provides that if a governmental unit applies for such a grant after closing on the acquisition of the land in question, the grant may only be for up to 40 percent of the acquisition costs.

The bill requires DNR to prioritize projects under any subprogram that involves property development over those that involve land acquisition.

The bill eliminates a current law restriction providing that, of the amount set aside for DNR land acquisition and county forest grants under the stewardship program in a given fiscal year, not more than one-third may be obligated for the purpose of DNR land acquisition. The bill also eliminates a current law restriction

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providing that, of all of the available stewardship program bonding authority in a fiscal year, not more than 20 percent may be obligated for the acquisition of parcels of lands that are less than 10 acres in size. The bill adds a restriction that DNR may not obligate stewardship moneys for a land acquisition project that exceeds \$1,000,000. For such projects, the bill creates a new, separate major land acquisitions program.

Under the bill, in addition to obligating stewardship moneys to provide grants to NCOs for the acquisition of land for certain conservation purposes, DNR may obligate moneys to provide grants to NCOs to develop, manage, preserve, restore, and maintain wildlife habitat on public lands to benefit game species and other wildlife. The bill requires DNR to prioritize wildlife habitat grants over land acquisition grants under the NCO grant program.

Under current law, if in a given fiscal year the amount DNR obligates to provide land acquisition grants to NCOs is less than the amount set aside for that purpose in that fiscal year, DNR may obligate the unobligated amount in the next fiscal year but only for the purpose of awarding a grant to a county for the acquisition of land for a county forest. Under this bill, such unobligated amounts may only be obligated for local assistance grants.

Under current law, if DNR does not obligate an amount authorized to be obligated for a subprogram in a fiscal year, DNR may not adjust the annual bonding authority for that subprogram by raising the annual bonding authority for the next fiscal year. Under current law, portions of the unobligated amounts for the land acquisition, property development and local assistance, and recreational boating aids subprograms from various fiscal years from 2011-12 to 2025-26 are obligated for specific purposes. One such provision under current law requires DNR to obligate all unobligated amounts from those subprograms from any fiscal year, including for drilling new wells, facility maintenance, upgrades, and renovations, and construction of new buildings. The bill limits this obligation to only those unobligated amounts for those subprograms from the fiscal years 2021-22 and 2022-23, and specifies that \$2,500,000 of that unobligated amount must be obligated for projects at the Les Voigt State Fish Hatchery and the Brule State Fish Hatchery, including drilling new wells, facility maintenance, upgrades and renovations, and construction of new buildings.

Major land acquisitions program

The bill creates a new major land acquisitions program, under which the bill authorizes DNR to use or obligate moneys to acquire land for the state for conservation purposes or to award grants to NCOs or local governments to acquire land for those purposes if two conditions are met: 1) the project or grant exceeds \$1,000,000; and 2) the project or grant is enumerated through legislation. To request enumeration of such projects, the bill requires DNR annually to, no later than January 15, submit to the joint committee on finance and to the appropriate legislative standing committees a list of all proposed major land acquisitions for the subsequent fiscal biennium, including estimated purchase prices, requested state funding sources, and nonstate sources of funding, such as federal grants or donations. The bill authorizes DNR to submit a list of proposed major land

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acquisitions not listed under the prior proposed list at any time during a fiscal biennium. Under the bill, the legislature may enumerate projects from either list through legislation.

For further information see the state and local fiscal estimate, which will be printed as an appendix to this bill.

The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. 23.09 (19) (d) of the statutes is amended to read:

23.09 (19) (d) Except as provided in par. (dm) and s. 23.096 (2m), grants under this subsection shall be for up to 50 percent of the acquisition costs of the land or the rights in land for the urban green space. The governmental unit is responsible for the remainder of the acquisition costs and no more than 30 percent of that remainder may be paid from funding provided by grants or in-kind contributions.

SECTION 2. 23.09 (19) (dm) of the statutes is created to read:

23.09 (19) (dm) If a governmental unit applies for a grant under this subsection after closing on the acquisition of the land or rights in land in question, the grant under this subsection shall be for no more than 40 percent of those acquisition costs, and no more than 30 percent of the remainder of those acquisition costs may be paid from funding provided by grants or in-kind contributions.

SECTION 3. 23.09 (20) (b) of the statutes is amended to read:

23.09 (20) (b) Except as provided in par. (bm) and s. 23.096 (2m), state aid under this subsection is limited to no more than 50 percent of the acquisition costs and the development costs of recreation lands and other outdoor recreation facilities. If a recipient of state aid under this subsection is a governmental unit, no more than 30 percent of the remainder of those costs may be paid from funding

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1 provided by grants or in-kind contributions. Costs associated with operation and
2 maintenance of parks and other outdoor recreational facilities established under
3 this subsection are not eligible for state aid. Administrative costs of acquiring lands
4 or land rights are not included in the acquisition costs eligible for state aid under
5 this subsection. Title to lands or rights in lands acquired by a municipality under
6 this subsection shall vest in the municipality, but such land shall not be converted
7 to uses inconsistent with this subsection without prior approval of the state and
8 proceeds from the sale or other disposal of such lands shall be used to promote the
9 objectives of this subsection.

10 **SECTION 4.** 23.09 (20) (bm) of the statutes is created to read:

11 23.09 (20) (bm) If a governmental unit applies for state aid under this
12 subsection after closing on the acquisition of the land or rights in land in question,
13 the state aid under this subsection is limited to no more than 40 percent of those
14 acquisition costs and no more than 30 percent of the remainder of those costs may
15 be paid from funding provided by grants or in-kind contributions.

16 **SECTION 5.** 23.09 (20m) (b) of the statutes is amended to read:

17 23.09 (20m) (b) The department shall establish a program to award grants
18 from the appropriation under s. 20.370 (5) (hu) or 20.866 (2) (ta) to governmental
19 units and nonprofit conservation organizations to acquire development rights in
20 land for nature-based outdoor recreation. Except as provided in par. (c) and s.
21 23.096 (2m), the grants shall be limited to no more than 50 percent of the
22 acquisition costs of the development rights, and no more than 30 percent of the
23 remainder of those acquisition costs may be paid from funding provided by grants
24 or in-kind contributions.

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SECTION 6. 23.09 (20m) (c) of the statutes is created to read:

23.09 **(20m)** (c) If a governmental unit applies for a grant under this subsection after closing on the acquisition of the development rights in question, the grant under this subsection is limited to no more than 40 percent of those acquisition costs, and no more than 30 percent of the remainder of those acquisition costs may be paid from funding provided by grants or in-kind contributions.

SECTION 7. 23.0915 (2p) of the statutes is amended to read:

23.0915 **(2p)** UPPER WHITING PARK. From the appropriation under s. 20.866 (2) (tz), the department shall provide to the village of Whiting \$38,000 in fiscal year 1999-2000 for the development of Upper Whiting Park. Notwithstanding s. 23.09 (20) (b), the ~~50-percent~~ matching requirement under s. 23.09 (20) (b) does not apply to the state aid provided under this subsection. For purposes of sub. (1), moneys provided under this subsection shall be treated as moneys for local park aids.

SECTION 8. 23.0917 (1) (e) of the statutes is amended to read:

23.0917 **(1)** (e) “Obligate” means to encumber or otherwise commit public debt that the state is authorized to contract or to expend public debt that the state is authorized to contract without having previously encumbered or otherwise committed that public debt.

SECTION 9. 23.0917 (3) (a) of the statutes is amended to read:

23.0917 **(3)** (a) Beginning with fiscal year 2000-01 and ending with fiscal year ~~2025-26~~ 2029-30, the department may obligate moneys under the subprogram for land acquisition to acquire land for the purposes specified in s. 23.09 (2) (d) and grants for these purposes under s. 23.096, except as provided under ss. 23.197 (2m), (3m) (b), (7m), and (8) and 23.198 (1) (a).

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1 **SECTION 10.** 23.0917 (3) (br) 3. of the statutes is created to read:

2 23.0917 (3) (br) 3. For each fiscal year beginning with 2026-27 and ending
3 with 2029-30, \$2,000,000.

4 **SECTION 11.** 23.0917 (3) (bt) 3. of the statutes is amended to read:

5 23.0917 (3) (bt) 3. For each fiscal year beginning with fiscal year 2022-23 and
6 ending with fiscal year 2025-26, \$1,000,000 plus the amount transferred to the
7 capital improvement fund under s. 20.370 (5) (hq), 2023 stats., in that fiscal year. In
8 this subdivision, “obligate” has the meaning given in s. 23.0917 (1) (e), 2023 stats.

9 **SECTION 12.** 23.0917 (3) (bu) of the statutes is created to read:

10 23.0917 (3) (bu) During the period beginning with fiscal year 2026-27 and
11 ending with fiscal year 2029-30, in obligating moneys under the subprogram for
12 land acquisition, the department shall set aside \$1,000,000 in each fiscal year to be
13 obligated only for the department to acquire land.

14 **SECTION 13.** 23.0917 (3) (bw) 2. of the statutes is amended to read:

15 23.0917 (3) (bw) 2. In obligating moneys under the subprogram for land
16 acquisition, for each fiscal year beginning with fiscal year 2022-23 and ending with
17 fiscal year 2025-26, the department shall set aside the amount transferred to the
18 capital improvement fund under s. 20.370 (5) (hr), 2023 stats., in that fiscal year to
19 be obligated only to provide grants to counties under s. 23.0953. In this subdivision,
20 “obligate” has the meaning given in s. 23.0917 (1) (e), 2023 stats.

21 **SECTION 14.** 23.0917 (3) (dm) 9. of the statutes is created to read:

22 23.0917 (3) (dm) 9. For each fiscal year beginning with fiscal year 2026-27
23 and ending with fiscal year 2029-30, \$3,000,000.

24 **SECTION 15.** 23.0917 (4) (a) of the statutes is amended to read:

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1 23.0917 (4) (a) Beginning with fiscal year 2000-01 and ending with fiscal year
2 ~~2025-26~~ 2029-30, the department may obligate moneys under the subprogram for
3 property development and local assistance. Moneys obligated under this
4 subprogram may be only used for nature-based outdoor recreation, except as
5 provided under par. (cm).

6 **SECTION 16.** 23.0917 (4) (d) 1m. g. of the statutes is created to read:

7 23.0917 (4) (d) 1m. g. For each fiscal year beginning with fiscal year 2026-27
8 and ending with fiscal year 2029-30, \$7,250,000.

9 **SECTION 17.** 23.0917 (4) (d) 2m. c. of the statutes is created to read:

10 23.0917 (4) (d) 2m. c. Beginning with fiscal year 2026-27 and ending with
11 fiscal year 2029-30, the department shall obligate \$7,250,000 in each fiscal year for
12 local assistance.

13 **SECTION 18.** 23.0917 (4) (e) (intro.) of the statutes is amended to read:

14 23.0917 (4) (e) (intro.) Beginning with fiscal year 2022-23 and ending with
15 fiscal year ~~2025-26~~ 2029-30, of the amounts obligated for property development, the
16 department shall set aside the following amounts for the following purposes:

17 **SECTION 19.** 23.0917 (4j) (b) of the statutes is amended to read:

18 23.0917 (4j) (b) For fiscal year 2007-08, the department may not obligate
19 more than \$1,500,000 for cost-sharing with local governmental units for
20 recreational boating projects under s. 30.92. For each fiscal year beginning with
21 fiscal year 2008-09 and ending with fiscal year 2021-22, the department may not
22 obligate more than \$2,500,000 for cost-sharing with local governmental units for
23 recreational boating projects under s. 30.92. For each fiscal year beginning with
24 fiscal year 2022-23 and ending with fiscal year ~~2025-26~~ 2029-30, the department

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1 cannot obligate more than \$3,000,000 for cost-sharing with local governmental
2 units for recreational boating projects under s. 30.92.

3 **SECTION 20.** 23.0917 (5g) (a) of the statutes is amended to read:

4 23.0917 (**5g**) (a) Except as provided in pars. (b) to (j), if for a given fiscal year,
5 the department obligates an amount from the moneys appropriated under s. 20.866
6 (2) (ta) for a subprogram under sub. (3) or (4) that is less than the annual bonding
7 authority under that subprogram for that given fiscal year, the department may not
8 obligate the unobligated amount in subsequent fiscal years. This subsection
9 applies beginning with fiscal year 2011-12 and ending with fiscal year ~~2025-26~~
10 2029-30.

11 **SECTION 21.** 23.0917 (5g) (b) of the statutes is amended to read:

12 23.0917 (**5g**) (b) If in a given fiscal year beginning with fiscal year 2013-14
13 and ending with fiscal year 2025-26 the amount that the department obligates from
14 the moneys appropriated under s. 20.866 (2) (ta) to provide grants to nonprofit
15 conservation organizations under s. 23.096 is less than the amount set aside for
16 that purpose under sub. (3) (br) in that fiscal year, the department may obligate the
17 unobligated amount in the next fiscal year but only for the purpose of awarding a
18 grant under s. 23.0953 to a county for the acquisition of land for a county forest
19 under s. 28.11. If in a given fiscal year beginning with fiscal year 2026-27 and
20 ending with fiscal year 2029-30 the amount that the department obligates from the
21 moneys appropriated under s. 20.866 (2) (ta) to provide grants to nonprofit
22 conservation organizations under s. 23.096 is less than the amount set aside for
23 that purpose under sub. (3) (br) in that fiscal year, the department may obligate the

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1 unobligated amount in the next fiscal year but only for local assistance programs
2 described under sub. (4) (b).

3 **SECTION 22.** 23.0917 (5g) (L) of the statutes is amended to read:

4 23.0917 **(5g)** (L) 1. In this paragraph, “unobligated amount” means the
5 amount by which the annual bonding authority for the subprograms under subs.
6 (3), (4), and (4j) in fiscal years 2021-22 and 2022-23 exceeded the amounts that the
7 department obligated from the moneys appropriated under s. 20.866 (2) (ta).

8 2. ~~The~~ Of the unobligated amount, the department shall obligate.—~~This~~
9 ~~includes \$2,500,000 for projects at the Les Voigt State Fish Hatchery and the Brule~~
10 State Fish Hatchery, including drilling new wells, facility maintenance, upgrades
11 and renovations, and construction of new buildings.

12 **SECTION 23.** 23.0917 (8) (e) of the statutes is amended to read:

13 23.0917 **(8)** (e) Beginning with fiscal year 2007-08 and ending with fiscal year
14 2025-26, the department may not obligate from the appropriation under s. 20.866
15 (2) (ta) more than 20 percent of the available bonding authority in a fiscal year for
16 the acquisition of parcels of lands that are less than 10 acres in size.

17 **SECTION 24.** 23.0917 (8) (f) 2. of the statutes is amended to read:

18 23.0917 **(8)** (f) 2. Beginning with fiscal year 2013-14 and ending with fiscal
19 year 2025-26, of the amount set aside for a given fiscal year under sub. (3) (bt), not
20 more than one-third of that amount may be obligated for the purpose of the
21 acquisition of land by the department.

22 **SECTION 25.** 23.0917 (8) (h) of the statutes is created to read:

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1 23.0917 (8) (h) Beginning with fiscal year 2026-27, the department may not
2 obligate moneys from the appropriation under s. 20.866 (2) (ta) for a department
3 land acquisition project that exceeds \$1,000,000.

4 **SECTION 26.** 23.0917 (8) (i) of the statutes is created to read:

5 23.0917 (8) (i) In obligating amounts from the moneys appropriated under s.
6 20.866 (2) (ta) for any subprogram, the department shall prioritize projects that
7 involve property development over projects that involve land acquisition.

8 **SECTION 27.** 23.0917 (12) of the statutes is amended to read:

9 23.0917 (12) EXPENDITURES AFTER ~~2026~~ 2030. No moneys may be obligated
10 from the appropriation under s. 20.866 (2) (ta) after June 30, ~~2026~~ 2030.

11 **SECTION 28.** 23.09175 of the statutes is created to read:

12 **23.09175 Major land acquisitions program. (1) DEFINITIONS.** In this
13 section:

14 (a) “Land” means land in fee simple, conservation easements and other
15 easements in land, and development rights in land.

16 (b) “Obligate” has the meaning given in s. 23.0917 (1) (e).

17 **(2) MAJOR LAND ACQUISITIONS.** Beginning in fiscal year 2026-27, the
18 department may use moneys from the appropriation under s. 20.370 (7) (fd) and
19 may obligate moneys from the appropriation under s. 20.866 (2) (tj) to acquire land
20 for the purposes specified in s. 23.09 (2) (d) and to award grants for land acquisition
21 for the purposes specified in s. 23.09 (2) (d) under s. 23.09 (19), (20), or (20m),
22 23.096, or 30.277 if all of the following requirements are met:

23 (a) The land acquisition project or grant exceeds \$1,000,000.

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(b) The land acquisition project or grant is enumerated through legislation as provided under sub. (3).

(3) ENUMERATION OF PROJECTS. (a) Annually, no later than January 15, the department shall submit to the joint committee on finance and to the appropriate standing committees of the legislature under s. 13.172 (3) a list of all proposed major land acquisitions under this section for the subsequent fiscal biennium, including estimated purchase prices, requested state funding sources, and nonstate sources of funding, such as federal grants or donations.

(b) At any time during a fiscal biennium, the department may submit to the joint committee on finance and to the appropriate standing committees of the legislature under s. 13.172 (3) a list of proposed major land acquisitions that were not listed under par. (a), including estimated purchase prices, requested state funding sources, and nonstate sources of funding, such as federal grants or donations.

(c) The legislature may enumerate projects from a list under par. (a) or (b) through legislation.

SECTION 29. 23.0953 (2) (a) (intro.) of the statutes is amended to read:

23.0953 **(2)** (a) (intro.) Beginning with fiscal year 2010-11 and ending with fiscal year ~~2025-26~~ 2029-30, the department shall establish a grant program under which the department may award a grant to a county for any of the following:

SECTION 30. 23.096 (2) (a) of the statutes is renumbered 23.096 (2) (a) (intro.) and amended to read:

23.096 **(2)** (a) (intro.) The department may award grants from the appropriation under s. 20.370 (5) (ht) or 20.866 (2) (ta) or (tz) to nonprofit

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1 conservation organizations to do all of the following, in the following order of
2 priority:

3 2. To acquire property for all of the purposes described in ss. 23.09 (2) (d) 1. to
4 7., 9., 11., 12. and 15., (19), (20) and (20m), 23.092, 23.094, 23.17, 23.175, 23.27,
5 23.29, 23.293, 30.24, and 30.277.

6 **SECTION 31.** 23.096 (2) (a) 1. of the statutes is created to read:

7 23.096 (2) (a) 1. To develop, manage, preserve, restore, and maintain wildlife
8 habitat on public lands to benefit game species and other wildlife.

9 **SECTION 32.** 23.096 (2m) (intro.) of the statutes is amended to read:

10 23.096 (2m) (intro.) Notwithstanding sub. (2) (b), in each fiscal year
11 beginning with fiscal year 2010-11 and ending with fiscal year ~~2025-26~~ 2029-30, the
12 department may award grants under this section that equal up to 75 percent of the
13 acquisition costs of the property if the natural resources board determines that all
14 of the following apply:

15 **SECTION 33.** 30.277 (5) of the statutes is renumbered 30.277 (5) (a) and
16 amended to read:

17 30.277 (5) (a) Except as provided in par. (b) and s. 23.096 (2m), to be eligible
18 for a grant under this section, at least 50 percent of the acquisition costs for land or
19 of the project costs shall be funded by private, local, or federal funding, by in-kind
20 contributions, or by state funding. If a grant recipient under this section is a
21 governmental unit, no more than 30 percent of the matching amount may be funded
22 from grants or in-kind contributions. For purposes of this subsection, state funding
23 may not include grants under this section, moneys appropriated to the department

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1 under s. 20.370, or money appropriated under s. 20.866 (2) (ta), (tp) to (tw), (ty), or
2 (tz).

3 **SECTION 34.** 30.277 (5) (b) of the statutes is created to read:

4 30.277 (5) (b) If a governmental unit applies for a grant under this section
5 after closing on the acquisition of the land in question, the state aid under this
6 subsection is limited to no more than 40 percent of those acquisition costs, and no
7 more than 30 percent of the remainder of those acquisition costs may be paid from
8 funding provided by grants or in-kind contributions.

9 **SECTION 35. Nonstatutory provisions.**

10 (1) If LRB-3507/1 is not enacted in the 2025-26 legislative session, then this
11 act is void.

12 **SECTION 36. Effective date.**

13 (1) This act takes effect on the day after publication, or on the 2nd day after
14 publication of the 2025 biennial budget act, whichever is later.

15 **(END)**