



Romaine Robert Quinn

STATE SENATOR • 25TH SENATE DISTRICT

From: Senator Romaine Robert Quinn
To: Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage
Re: Testimony on Senate Bill 142
Relating to: waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day
Date: February 14, 2024

Thank you chair Stafsholt and committee members for holding this public hearing and giving me the opportunity to testify on SB 142. I'd also like to thank Representative Green for his work on this legislation in the Assembly.

I support this item of legislation requiring the DNR to waive admission fees to state parks on Earth Day. Senate Bill 142 honors its founder, Gaylord Nelson's, legacy of environmental stewardship and encourages greater public engagement with nature. Eliminating admission fees on this day, we can ensure that everyone has access to our beautiful state parks and promote conservation efforts. I urge you to support this bill that recognizes the importance of Earth Day in our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration, I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Senator Romaine Quinn

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Romaine Quinn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and "Q".



DIANNE H. HESSELBEIN

STATE SENATOR • SENATE DISTRICT 27

Testimony of Sen. Dianne Hesselbein
Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation
SB 142: waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day
February 14, 2024

Chairman Stafsholt and members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing on Senate Bill 142. I am pleased to be an author of this important legislation, and I appreciate your attention to Earth Day and stewardship in Wisconsin. As stated in the analysis, this bill requires the DNR to waive any daily fee for admission to a state park on April 22nd of each year in commemoration of Earth Day.

As you know, this year will be the 54th anniversary of Earth Day. This day, known around the world as a time to recommit ourselves to stewardship and environmental education, was founded by Wisconsin's former Governor and U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson. In 1970, then-Senator Nelson initiated the idea of doing a national teach-in to urge Washington to recognize the public concern for the environmental issues of the time. This effort transformed into a movement and continues to inspire generations to take up the cause of environmental conservation.

Nelson wanted us to be able to appreciate our natural resources and conserve our environment for future generations to enjoy. We often forget the importance of nature in our everyday lives. This proposal is an effort to make sure that anyone who wants to spend their Earth Day at one of our state parks can do so. Wisconsin's commitment to conservation has been cherished by generations and can be shared by all of its people. The best way to commemorate that vision is to encourage all Wisconsinites to take sanctuary in their natural surroundings.

The idea for the proposal comes from one of the teachers in my district. She told me that she wanted to bring her class to a state park on Earth Day to commemorate the positive impacts of a healthy environment on our community. Unfortunately, it was too expensive. I've heard the same complaint from Girl Scout Leaders.

This proposal will help highlight Wisconsin's proud tradition of stewardship. Wisconsinites will have a better opportunity to appreciate and learn from their natural surroundings. The State of Washington recently offered free access to state parks on Earth Day. This committee has the opportunity to honor our 'Conservation Governor' while also continuing the legacy he left in our state.

Please join me in supporting SB 142.



CHANZ GREEN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 74TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

February 14th, 2024

Testimony on Senate Bill 142

Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage

Thank you, Chairman Stafsholt and Senate committee members, for having a hearing today on Senate Bill 142 relating to the waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day.

Enjoying the scenery Wisconsin State Parks have to offer is one of the many ways someone can learn about the value of Earth Day. Promoting the values of Earth Day gives individuals the tools to learn the many ways of protecting the environment.

I have two state parks in my district. One is named *Big Bay State Park*, which is located on the eastern side of Madeline Island. This park gives way to scenic sandstone bluffs along four miles of Lake Superior shoreline. The park also has a 1-mile boardwalk, a sandy swimming beach, hiking trails, a large family campground, and two group camps. The other state park is named *Cooper Falls State Park*. This park is home to ancient lava flows, deep gorges, and spectacular waterfalls and offers a near-two-mile hiking trail that is one of the best hikes in Wisconsin.

This bill would give everyone in Wisconsin, including those in my district, the opportunity to enjoy these two fabulous state parks and the other 48 parks on Earth Day without worrying about an admission fee. Everyone should be able to share in the appreciation of and have the desire to conserve our environment for future generations to enjoy.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work on this bill with my colleague from the Senate, Senator Quinn. Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your consideration of this bill.



ALEX JOERS

WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE
79TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony of Rep. Alex Joers
Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage
SB 142: waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day
February 14, 2024

Chairman Stafsholt and members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing on Senate Bill 142 and for passing this bill from last session, Senate Bill 287. As a co-author of this legislation, I am excited to advocate for Earth Day and stewardship in Wisconsin. This bill seeks to waive the fee for Wisconsin State Parks every year on Earth Day, April 22.

Environmental education and stewardship are important values many Wisconsinites believe in prioritizing. Earth Day is a universal event that promotes both environmental awareness and encourages individuals to take action to protect our planet. Many people celebrate Earth Day as the weather begins to get warmer by visiting one of our many state parks to appreciate the natural beauty of our environment and finally spend time outdoors after the long winter. However, admission fees to State Parks may hinder some people's ability to spend this holiday outdoors surrounded by Wisconsin's breathtaking scenery.

Furthermore, by offering free admission to state parks on Earth Day, Wisconsin can join other states, such as Washington, in the global effort to promote environmental awareness and conservation. This will help position the state as a leader in environmental stewardship, promote volunteerism, and increase out-of-state tourism.

This proposal of waiving admission fees for Wisconsin State Parks on Earth Day will serve as an incentive to encourage state park visits and in turn help continue to promote economic return benefiting communities across the state. Free Earth Day admission to state parks will also be a powerful symbol of the state's commitment to the environmental preservation of the natural beauty of Wisconsin.

Please join me in supporting SB 142.



Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage

2024 Senate Bill 142

Waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day February 14, 2024

Good afternoon, Chair Stafsholt and members of the Committee. My name is Chris Pedretti, and I am the Business Operations Section Supervisor for the Wisconsin State Park System for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify for informational purposes on Senate Bill 142 (SB 142), related to the waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day.

Earth Day is recognized as one of the largest civic events in the world and is designed to help raise awareness of protecting our natural environment. Allowing visitors to discover the natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities within our state by visiting a property within the State Park System can make a positive lifelong impact. Last year, the state park system saw over 20 million visitors across more than 100 properties. Allowing a free admission day could inspire many to continue visiting our State Park System properties and to purchase either an annual admission pass or daily pass in the future.

Under SB 142, the department would waive admission fees normally required to enter State Park System properties on April 22, of each year in recognition of Earth Day. Several other states allow free admission either for all state parks or in conjunction with special events at specific parks. These free days occur either on Earth Day or on a weekend date to celebrate Earth Day. This bill would have minimal effects on administrative procedures and management. Property staff would manage this day like the Free Fun Weekend in June where admission fees are waived at properties. We would allow entry and track capacity at all properties like normal but would not collect any admission fees or require a sticker or daily admission pass to be displayed on vehicles. All other property rules would remain in effect, as public safety is always a top priority.

The department supports efforts to increase public access to the many outdoor recreation activities available throughout Wisconsin. We also support the celebration of Earth Day and in recognition, the department generally hosts a variety of special events and volunteer activities. Of course, we are always mindful of balancing the self-funded model of our State Park System and making sure we effectively manage the revenue coming in from visitors each year to provide high quality outdoor recreation opportunities.

It is important to keep the self-funded model of our State Park System in mind to ensure our continued ability to provide the best outdoor recreation experience for our visitors. There are currently several fee waiver programs offered by the State Park System. In 2022, State Park System properties reported administering 8,542 fee waivers, totaling \$95,637. A sum sufficient transfer from the general fund, similar to the approach taken by the Governor when including admission waivers in his biennial budget request, would help offset the financial impacts of this bill. We appreciate the benefits this bill could offer by encouraging a broader population to experience our state parks.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, I would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Members of the committee,

My name is Ahavaha Pyrtel. My address is 7609 Westchester Drive Middleton WI 53562. I am the Program Director of South Central Wisconsin Chapter of Jack and Jill of America Inc. We are a not for profit organization dedicated to serving all children, and especially African-American children, throughout South Central Wisconsin and beyond through service projects, lobbying, educational programming and the organization of community and charity events.

I am writing to you in support of Support of Senate Bill 142. Last May, our group met with Rep. Joers, Rep. Hong and Lt. Gov Rodriguez to discuss issues affecting children and families in our State, including access to parks, which we view as necessary to promote social equity.

According to the National Recreation and Park Association, the benefits of social equity and universal access to public parks and recreation are many, including:

- Public enjoyment and engagement. Where parks and open space are plentiful and recreation services strong, residents enjoy the closest attachment and engagement within their communities; and studies indicate higher levels of local gross domestic product and economic well-being;
- Quality recreation time with family and friends. Parks and recreation services provide a space and a reason to partake in enjoying quality time, relaxation, and fun among family members and friends, thus strengthening the social and familial bonds that provide balance and satisfaction in life;
- Improvement of mental and physical health. Parks and recreation can reduce the impacts of chronic diseases, especially in such vulnerable populations as children, seniors, and the underserved; and
- Measurable decreases in rates of crime and other detrimental activities. Communities are safer as a result of a wholesome atmosphere created by well-managed parks and recreation services in communities through healthy activities and programming for all people.

We understand that admission fees to State Parks are an important source of revenue, however they are also an impediment to families with limited financial resources. This should not be the case. So that more families may enjoy the myriad benefits and the splendor of our State Parks, we urge you to pass Senate Bill 142.

In partnership,

Ahavaha Pyrtel, Program Director
On Behalf of the South Central Wisconsin Chapter of Jack and Jill of America