



ALEX JOERS



WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE
81ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony of Rep. Alex Joers
Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation
AB 267: waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day
August 26, 2025

Chairman Mursau and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for holding this public hearing on Assembly Bill 267. As a co-author of this legislation, I am encouraged to be here with you all to discuss Earth Day and promoting outdoor recreation in Wisconsin. This bill seeks to waive the fee for Wisconsin State Parks every year on Earth Day, April 22.

Environmental education and management are important values many Wisconsinites believe in prioritizing. Earth Day is a universal event that promotes environmental awareness and encourages individuals to celebrate the natural resources our state has to offer. Many people celebrate Earth Day by visiting one of our many state parks to appreciate the beauty of our environment. However, admission fees may hinder some people's ability to spend this holiday surrounded by Wisconsin's breathtaking scenery.

Furthermore, by offering free admission to state parks on Earth Day, Wisconsin can join other states in the nationwide effort to promote environmental awareness and conservation. This can help position the state as a leader in environmental stewardship and increase 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 conservation of the natural beauty of Wisconsin.

Please join me in supporting Assembly Bill 267.



DIANNE H. HESSELBEIN

STATE SENATOR • SENATE DISTRICT 27

Testimony of Senator Dianne Hesselbein
Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation
AB 267: waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day
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Chairman Mursau and Members,

Thank you for holding a hearing today on legislation to recognize an important Wisconsin legacy, improve access to our state parks and help instill an appreciation for our state and its natural beauty and public lands, especially for our young people.

I am sorry I cannot join you in person today but want to offer my strongest possible support for Assembly Bill 267, waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day. I am proud to join Rep. Alex Joers, a tireless advocate for this bill, in this effort and happy to see the bi-partisan support AB 267 has received.

Wisconsin is blessed with outstanding natural resources highlighted by unique state park lands throughout our state. On Earth Day, founded in 1970 by former Wisconsin Governor and U.S. Senator Gaylord Nelson, this bill would allow everyone to appreciate our parks for free.

This idea originated with an educator who wanted to take her class to a state park for Earth Day but found the cost to be prohibitive. Under this legislation, the daily fee for admission to a state park on April 22nd of each year would be waived in commemoration of Earth Day and its foundation in our state.

This bill gives us the opportunity to make Earth Day, a wonderful Wisconsin-originated national tradition, an even more special day in the Badger State.

Again, thank you for hearing Assembly Bill 267 today and as always, I welcome the opportunity to further discuss this bill and our strong support for it with any committee member at your convenience.



Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation

Assembly Bill 267

AN ACT *to create* 27.01 (9) (b) of the statutes; **relating to:** waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day.

Aug 26, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Mursau and members of the Committee. My name is Steve Schmelzer, and I am the Bureau Director overseeing the Wisconsin State Park System for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 267 (AB 267), 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 AB 267, 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. 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 all 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.

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. Revenue loss would be primarily through loss of daily admission sales at properties and a minor additional expense for some management and promotion in the amount of \$2,000. The daily admission reported for April 22, 2025 on Earth Day was approximately \$2,401. In comparison, if Earth Day would fall on a weekend the revenue loss could be significantly higher. Daily sales on Saturday April 26, 2025 were approximately \$23,620. The department asks that the committee consider a provision that would use GPR to reimburse the department for any lost admission revenue and additional expenses from issuing these fee waivers

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.