



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

One East Main, Suite 301 • Madison, WI 53703 • (608) 266-3847 • Fax: (608) 267-6873
Email: fiscal.bureau@legis.wisconsin.gov • Website: <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lfb>

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #457

Crex Meadows Wildlife Educator (DNR -- Fish, Wildlife, and Recreation)

[LFB 2013-15 Budget Summary: Page 326, #3]

CURRENT LAW

2011 Act 32 provided 1.0 PR position in the DNR Division of Lands gifts and grants appropriation for a wildlife educator at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area, near the Village of Grantsburg, in Burnett County. The approximately 30,000 acre property is one of the largest state-owned wildlife areas in Wisconsin. The property supports over 270 species of birds, at least 86 types of butterflies, and 720 species of plants and a wide variety of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and insects.

GOVERNOR

Delete \$21,400 PR annually and provide \$21,400 SEG annually from the fish and wildlife account of the conservation fund for the fringe benefit costs of a wildlife educator position at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitors Center.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. In their 2011-13 biennial budget request, DNR included a request for \$52,400 PR in 2011-12 and \$71,200 in 2012-13 (\$46,000 PR and \$25,200 fish and wildlife SEG) with 1.0 PR natural resources educator position at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitors Center. The Department request stated that an endowment fund established by the Friends of Crex, a private, non-profit corporation which provides volunteer and financial support for the wildlife education program at the Center, would fund all salary costs, while fringe benefit costs would be funded from fish and wildlife SEG. This item was not included in the Governor's 2011-13 budget bill. A motion was adopted by the Joint Committee on Finance, and included in 2011 Act 32, which provided the same amount of funding, except completely funded from program revenue, \$53,400

PR in 2011-12 and \$71,200 PR in 2012-13. The motion stated that the Friends of Crex would fund both the salary and fringe benefit costs of the educator. However, the agreement between the Department and the Friends of Crex, which was finalized in October, 2011, specified that the Friends of Crex endowment would support the educator's salary annually and support the fringe benefits only through June 30, 2013, with the Department providing the fringe benefits for the educator position beginning on July 1, 2013.

2. According to the agreement, DNR is required to "ensure that the Educator position is permanently stationed at Crex Meadows Wildlife Area for as long as funds to pay for the annual salary are provided by the Friends of Crex." The agreement further specifies that, "in the event the Friends are unable to maintain funding of the educator's salary, it shall be the Department's option to eliminate or re-assign the position commensurate with Department priorities and funding. It is understood that maintenance of the position at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area will be of high priority to the Department." Therefore, were the expenditure authority included in the bill not provided, DNR would likely fund the costs of the educator's fringe benefits from base resources. As the fish and wildlife account has maintained expenditures below authorized levels over the past several biennia, primarily through staff vacancies, and will continue to do so to maintain a positive balance in the account, it could be argued that additional expenditure authority should not be provided.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Adopt the Governor's recommendation to delete \$21,400 PR annually and provide \$21,400 SEG annually from the fish and wildlife account of the conservation fund for the fringe benefit costs of a wildlife educator position at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitors Center.

2. Adopt the Governor's recommendation to delete \$21,400 PR annually, but provide no corresponding SEG. (DNR could provide annual funding for the educator's fringe benefits from base resources.)

ALT 2	Change to Bill Funding
SEG	- \$42,800

Prepared by: Erin Probst