



## Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #157

### **County Conservation Staff (Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection -- Environment)**

[LFB 2021-23 Budget Summary: Page 63, #2]

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#### **CURRENT LAW**

Since 1987, the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) has disbursed state funds to county land conservation committees to support activities that prevent soil erosion and runoff of nutrients and pollutants into waters of the state. County conservation staff activities eligible for funding include: (a) implementation of land and water resource management plans, which are required of every county by statute to identify local objectives for soil and water conservation; (b) conservation practice engineering, design, and installation; (c) cost-share grant administration; (d) farmland preservation program administration; and (e) livestock regulation. Counties submit funding requests each spring, and grant awards are finalized in fall for the subsequent calendar year. Grants to counties for conservation staff are provided on a reimbursement basis.

Grants are awarded in a tiered process, providing each county a base allocation of \$75,000. As available, remaining funding is allocated to provide for 100% funding of a county's first position, 70% of a second position, and 50% for each position thereafter, with counties providing the difference. Conservation staffing grants are funded by DATCP with GPR and nonpoint account SEG. During the 2019-21 biennium, grants are budgeted at \$3,027,200 GPR and \$6,411,900 nonpoint SEG, including \$475,000 nonpoint SEG each year provided on a one-time basis.

#### **DISCUSSION POINTS**

1. County conservation staff are the first point of contact for landowners who would implement conservation practices to limit soil erosion and nonpoint source water pollution. DATCP and counties have argued preserving funding for county conservation staffing grants retains continuity

in personnel that provide landowners with expertise and technical assistance necessary to meet soil and water conservation standards. In the event a landowner is not in compliance with state soil and water conservation standards, the landowner may be more willing to contact county staff with whom the landowner has a long-term working relationship. Further, county conservation staff represent the primary avenue for allocating state nonpoint source pollution abatement, and soil and water conservation grants to landowners and assisting in implementing the practices and designs necessary to achieve effective use of grant funding.

2. Table 1 shows recent DATCP county conservation staffing grant funding by fund source. The following nonpoint SEG amounts have been provided on a one-time basis: (a) \$998,600 in 2013-14; (b) \$815,900 in 2014-15; (c) \$675,000 annually during the 2015-17 biennium; and (d) \$475,000 annually during the 2019-21 biennium.

**TABLE 1**  
**DATCP County Conservation Staffing Grant Funding**

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>GPR</u>	<u>SEG</u>	<u>Total</u>
2013-14	\$2,844,500	\$6,035,500	\$8,880,000
2014-15	3,027,200	5,852,800	8,880,000
2015-16	3,027,200	5,711,900	8,739,100
2016-17	3,027,200	5,711,900	8,739,100
2017-18	3,027,200	5,936,900	8,964,100
2018-19	3,027,200	5,936,900	8,964,100
2019-20	3,027,200	6,411,900	9,439,100
2020-21	3,027,200	6,411,900	9,439,100
2021-22 (Base)	3,027,200	5,936,900	8,964,100
2022-23 (Base)	3,027,200	5,936,900	8,964,100

3. In 2020, the most recent year for which counties have reported staffing levels, DATCP allocated \$9,439,100 to support 116.6 positions, of a total of 370.3 positions reported by counties. Other funding for positions typically comes from county governments (207.7 positions) or other private or governmental grants (46.0 positions). The attachment shows county-reported staffing levels for each county. Based on the most recent reporting, 51 (71%) counties employed at least three conservation staff. While local budgeting decisions are not able to be anticipated, it is expected the majority of counties would receive state funding for a third position if it were made available.

4. After a \$75,000 base allocation per county, funding is provided on a proportional basis to each county based on their request, until all funding is depleted. During the 2020-21 allocation, DATCP fully funded the base allocation and first positions in every county, and approximately 67% of requested funding for second positions (47% of total position costs). Table 2 summarizes county requests by funding tier for the 2019-20 and 2020-21 allocation cycles. For the 2020-21 fiscal year allocation, supporting staff costs during calendar year 2021, counties requested funding totaling \$17,901,800 and were awarded \$9,439,100. Preliminary county requests for 2021-22 funding totaled \$18,291,400. Second positions were last fully funded in 2010.

**TABLE 2****County Conservation Staffing Grant Requests**

	<u>2021</u>		<u>2022 (Preliminary)</u>	
	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Cumulative Total</u>	<u>Cost</u>	<u>Cumulative Total</u>
Base	\$5,400,000	\$5,400,000	\$5,400,000	\$5,400,000
First Position	1,456,600	6,856,600	1,212,400	6,812,400
Second Position	3,873,100	10,729,700	4,216,300	11,028,700
Third Position	2,309,000	13,038,700	2,426,600	13,455,300
Fourth Position and beyond	4,863,100	17,901,800	4,836,100	18,291,400

5. Future county staffing grants are expected to support less staff as costs increase over time. From 2016-17 to 2021-22, requested amounts have grown by approximately 2.3% each year. Consistent with increasing costs over time, an inflationary increase of 2.3% to base funding would require an additional \$206,200 in 2021-22 and \$417,100 in 2022-23. However, if additional funding were made available, staff costs could increase more quickly in the near term as conservation departments face competition in recruitment from neighboring departments receiving similar funding increases.

6. Additional allocations for county conservation staff are dependent on availability of funding in the nonpoint account. Based on Committee action to date, the nonpoint account is anticipated to have a June 30, 2023, available balance of \$8.8 million, equal to an increase of \$3.4 million during the 2021-23 biennium. Thus, across all budget items related to nonpoint programs, the Committee could consider providing an additional approximately \$1.7 million nonpoint SEG each year in ongoing expenditures while still maintaining balance with available revenues. Further, the Committee could consider allocating a portion of the fund balance as one-time funding, although any ongoing funding allocations that exceed available annual revenues could limit future availability of funding for nonpoint programs.

7. From March through September of 2019, the bipartisan Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality, consisting of 11 members from the Assembly and four members from the Senate, held 14 hearings throughout Wisconsin to study determinants of water pollution, engage with stakeholders and water quality professionals, review best practices and possible solutions to water quality problems, and make recommendations to improve water quality in Wisconsin. As part of its final report, the Task Force proposed 2019 Assembly Bill 790/Senate Bill 723. AB 790/SB 723 proposed to increase county conservation staff funding to \$12.4 million beginning in 2020-21, funded with GPR. AB 790 passed the Assembly on February 18, 2020, by a vote of 97-0, but failed to pass the Senate pursuant to SJR 1.

8. Assembly Bill 68/Senate Bill 111 would provide an additional \$3,600,000 nonpoint SEG in 2021-22 and \$3,708,000 nonpoint SEG in 2022-23 for county conservation staffing grants, for a total of \$12,564,100 in 2021-22 and \$12,672,100 in 2022-23. Assuming a base allocation for all other nonpoint programs, the proposed funding level for county conservation staffing grants under

AB 68/SB 111 or as recommended by the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality could not be supported by nonpoint SEG on an ongoing basis unless revenues to the account were increased. Currently, approximately one third of county conservation staffing grant funding is provided from GPR. If the Committee wished to ensure future availability of funding for nonpoint programs, it could provide such increases partially with GPR, or on a one-time basis.

**TABLE 3**

**State Funding of Position Requests Under Alternatives**

	<u>Funding Level</u>		<u>Change to Base</u>		<u>Funding Supports Up To:</u>
	<u>2021-22</u>	<u>2022-23</u>	<u>2021-22</u>	<u>2022-23</u>	
Alternative 1 (AB 68/SB 111)	\$12,564,100	\$12,672,100	\$3,600,000	\$3,708,000	63% and 56% of third position requests in respective years.
Alternative 2 (Speaker's Task Force)	12,400,000	12,400,000	3,435,900	3,435,900	57% and 45% of third position requests in respective years.
Alternative 3 (Second Positions)	11,030,000	11,280,000	2,065,900	2,315,900	All second position requests in both years.
Alternative 4 (Inflation)	9,170,300	9,381,200	206,200	417,100	56% of second position requests in both years.
Alternative 6 (Base)	8,964,100	8,964,100	0	0	51% and 46% of second position requests in respective years.

9. Table 3 shows potential funding levels listed in the alternatives below, and the anticipated share of requested positions each funding amount would support. Given the role county conservation staff take in assisting farmers in implementing best management practices to protect soil health and water quality, the Committee could consider providing additional funding for county conservation staff. Funding could be provided as proposed in AB 68/SB 111 [Alternative 1], as recommended by the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality [Alternative 2], at an amount sufficient to fund anticipated the second position cost-share amount [Alternative 3], or at an inflationary increase of 2.3% each year [Alternative 4]. The Committee could also consider taking no action [Alternative 6].

10. Given available nonpoint account funding, increased funding could be provided with nonpoint SEG [Alternatives ending in a]. To ensure future availability of funding for nonpoint programs, the Committee could provide one third of increases as GPR [Alternatives ending in b], or provide funding on a one-time basis during the 2021-23 biennium [Alternative 5].

**ALTERNATIVES**

1. Provide an additional \$3,600,000 in 2021-22 and \$3,708,000 in 2022-23 for county

conservation staffing grants, for a total of \$12,564,100 in 2021-22 and \$12,672,100 in 2022-23, as proposed in AB 68/SB 111. Specify funding be provided from:

- a. Nonpoint SEG.

ALT 1a	Change to Base
SEG	\$7,308,000

- b. Two-thirds nonpoint SEG and one-third GPR.

ALT 1b	Change to Base
SEG	\$4,872,000
GPR	<u>2,436,000</u>
Total	\$7,308,000

2. Provide an additional \$3,435,900 each year for county conservation staffing grants for a total of \$12.4 million each year, as recommended by the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality. Specify that funding be provided from:

- a. Nonpoint SEG.

ALT 2a	Change to Base
SEG	\$6,871,800

- b. Two-thirds nonpoint SEG and one-third GPR.

ALT 2b	Change to Base
SEG	\$4,581,200
GPR	<u>2,290,600</u>
Total	\$6,871,800

3. Provide an additional \$2,065,900 in 2021-22 and \$2,315,900 in 2022-23 for county conservation staffing grants, for a total of \$11,030,000 in 2021-22 and \$11,280,000 in 2022-23, equivalent to the anticipated cost-share for second positions each year. Specify that funding be provided from:

- a. Nonpoint SEG.

ALT 3a	Change to Base
SEG	\$4,381,800

- b. Two-thirds nonpoint SEG and one-third GPR.

<b>ALT 3b</b>	<b>Change to Base</b>
SEG	\$2,921,200
GPR	<u>1,460,600</u>
Total	\$4,381,800

4. Provide an additional \$206,200 nonpoint SEG in 2021-22 and \$417,100 nonpoint SEG in 2022-23 for county conservation staffing grants, for a total of \$9,170,300 in 2021-22 and \$9,381,200 in 2022-23, equivalent to a 2.3% inflationary increase each year.

<b>ALT 4</b>	<b>Change to Base</b>
SEG	\$623,300

5. Specify that funding would be provided on a one-time basis during the 2021-23 biennium. (This alternative could be selected in addition to any other alternative.)
6. Take no action. Grants would be budgeted at \$8,964,100 each year.

Prepared by: Rory Tikalsky  
Attachment

## ATTACHMENT

### County Conservation Staff and Awards by County

<u>County</u>	<u>2021 Requests</u>	<u>2021 Awards</u>	<u>2020 Staff</u>	<u>County</u>	<u>2021 Requests</u>	<u>2021 Awards</u>	<u>2020 Staff</u>
Adams	\$161,991	\$118,335	4.00	Marathon	\$215,443	\$145,072	8.30
Ashland	147,620	109,884	4.00	Marinette	189,495	128,344	4.71
Barron	196,982	133,829	3.40	Marquette	166,996	131,429	3.00
Bayfield	172,236	119,187	5.00	Menominee	99,335	94,200	2.00
Brown	216,686	152,638	9.82	Milwaukee	97,756	75,000	1.62
Buffalo	149,969	107,652	4.00	Monroe	168,893	127,296	5.00
Burnett	138,581	99,223	7.50	Oconto	200,274	144,022	4.50
Calumet	223,124	152,070	6.00	Oneida	121,976	101,181	3.64
Chippewa	258,087	182,536	9.00	Outagamie	256,794	182,729	12.00
Clark	179,477	126,177	4.00	Ozaukee	215,615	147,624	3.50
Columbia	184,909	123,580	8.00	Pepin	141,850	107,109	3.00
Crawford	152,275	109,090	3.00	Pierce	205,794	139,885	5.00
Dane	280,960	196,094	11.00	Polk	181,712	133,522	6.00
Dodge	214,206	151,992	6.00	Portage	211,497	148,692	5.00
Door	210,576	144,315	8.88	Price	111,488	92,670	1.90
Douglas	138,674	112,221	3.00	Racine	206,634	151,585	3.00
Dunn	233,975	159,463	7.50	Richland	134,810	100,475	4.00
Eau Claire	207,635	144,654	4.36	Rock	233,581	164,360	6.50
Florence	79,422	75,000	2.94	Rusk	121,080	96,334	2.00
Fond du Lac	221,479	160,840	10.00	St. Croix	173,236	119,892	6.60
Forest	125,240	101,995	3.00	Sauk	199,834	140,180	6.90
Grant	165,444	114,163	5.00	Sawyer	124,308	95,549	2.50
Green	196,346	142,884	3.00	Shawano	183,491	130,970	3.45
Green Lake	226,714	156,938	5.80	Sheboygan	215,043	152,997	5.00
Iowa	173,708	125,719	3.75	Taylor	168,089	121,573	3.00
Iron	135,857	111,729	3.25	Trempealeau	189,183	128,603	9.00
Jackson	150,993	131,489	2.00	Vernon	183,659	129,142	12.00
Jefferson	221,856	151,690	5.00	Vilas	175,208	124,162	3.00
Juneau	165,341	117,651	3.00	Walworth	219,581	149,606	6.00
Kenosha	155,270	131,244	1.66	Washburn	131,176	110,616	2.20
Kewaunee	218,110	157,770	7.00	Washington	190,325	136,353	10.00
La Crosse	227,576	153,985	7.00	Waukesha	249,846	178,218	6.90
Lafayette	127,522	94,309	4.00	Waupaca	203,224	137,436	5.30
Langlade	109,201	93,687	3.00	Waushara	208,456	140,703	5.90
Lincoln	114,281	99,277	2.50	Winnebago	227,430	161,726	7.00
Manitowoc	233,877	158,494	5.00	Wood	<u>199,392</u>	<u>148,041</u>	<u>5.50</u>
				Total	\$13,038,704	\$9,439,100	370.28