



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 #761

Environmental Education Grants (UW System)

[LFB 2019-21 Budget Summary: Page 441, #13]

CURRENT LAW

No provision.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$250,000 SEG annually from the conservation fund to create an environmental education grant program. Under the program, require UW-Stevens Point to award 18-month grants to nonprofit corporations and public agencies including counties, cities, villages, towns, public inland lake protection and rehabilitation districts, lake sanitary districts, school districts, and state agencies for the development, dissemination, and presentation of environmental education programs. No more than one-third of the total amount awarded in grants in any fiscal year could be awarded to state agencies. Recipients would be required to match at least 25 percent of the amount of the grant, which could include private funds and in-kind contributions.

Require UW-Stevens Point to consult with the State Superintendent, other UW System institutions, and conservation and environmental groups to assist in identifying needs and establishing priorities for environmental education, including needs for teacher training, curriculum development, and the development and dissemination of curriculum materials. Require the Board of Regents to promulgate rules establishing the criteria and procedures for awarding grants under the program in consultation with the Chancellor and faculty of UW-Stevens Point. If the amount in the appropriation is insufficient in any fiscal year to fund all applications for grants, require UW-Stevens Point to use the priorities established in consultation with other entities for awarding grants. Require UW-Stevens Point to seek private funds to support the grant program.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Prior to 2016-17, the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board (WEEB) awarded grants to corporations, public agencies, state agencies, public colleges and universities, and non-public educational institutions for the development, dissemination and presentation of environmental education programs using moneys from the environmental fund and the forestry account of the conservation fund. The Board consisted of seventeen members, including the State Superintendent, the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources, the UW System President, the President of the Wisconsin Technical College System, two Senators and two Representatives, and representatives of elementary and secondary school environmental educators, conservation and environmental organizations, business and industry, and other stakeholders. Funding for the program totaled \$130,500 SEG from the environmental fund and \$200,000 SEG from the conservation fund. WEEB was located in the College of Natural Resources at UW-Stevens Point.

2. Under 2015 Act 55, WEEB was eliminated as part of a restructuring of UW System appropriations. Act 55 deleted the UW System's program revenue, federal revenue, and segregated revenue appropriations, and instead provided the System with one GPR general program operations appropriation and one GPR debt service appropriation. The WEEB appropriations were deleted effective July 1, 2017, following the final payments of grants awarded in the 2015-16 fiscal year.

3. The conservation fund is a segregated trust fund used to finance many of the state's resource management programs administered by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). DNR programs supported by conservation fund revenues include wildlife and fish management, forestry, the state parks system, and the endangered resources program, as well as programs and operations in other agencies related to environmental conservation. Under prior law, the portion of WEEB funding from the conservation fund was under the forestry account, and was used to fund forestry and school forest grants. In 2016-17, total expenditures under the forestry account totaled \$114.1 million, including \$399,200 for WEEB grants.

4. Prior to its elimination, WEEB awarded grants of up to \$20,000 per project to schools, nature centers, and other groups related to water, forestry, food systems, invasive species, and other environmental projects. Grants were awarded for 18 month periods which typically began on July 1, and ended the following December. In 2015, 86 proposals were submitted, and 46 were funded with grants totaling \$322,975. Grant requests ranged from \$941 to \$20,000 in that year. Examples of grantees include DC Everest School District, which received funding to develop an early childhood environmental education program; Glacierland Resource Conservation and Development in Green Bay, which received funding to educate private woodland landowners on forest health issues and invasive species control; Hurley School District, which received funding to develop an education plan for its school forest; and Friends of Wehr Nature Center in Franklin, which received funding to support sixth graders' participation in a national civics education program with a project related to woodland management.

5. Under the bill, UW-Stevens Point would be required to seek private funds to support the grant program. In 2005, the Wisconsin Environmental Education Foundation (WEEF) was approved as a non-profit organization to raise private funds for WEEB grant programs. WEEF's revenues totaled \$84,779 in 2012-13 and \$64,264 in 2013-14, the most recent years for which fundraising totals

are included in WEEB's final biennial report, published in October, 2015. WEEF was dissolved in 2018, but transferred its remaining assets to the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, establishing a permanent endowment for environmental education.

6. UW-Stevens Point indicates that following the elimination of grant funding in 2015 Act 55, staff and other infrastructure related to the grant program were eliminated. According to WEEB's biennial report, the Board employed one 0.5 FTE employee, with additional time as contracts allowed. Once grant applications were received, grants were reviewed by volunteer reviewers based on their completeness and adherence to program requirements; goals, objectives, activities, and evaluations; overall quality and value of the project; and other metrics.

7. Before the first grant awards would be made under the new program, preparation and planning for the new grants be required, including hiring or assigning staff to work with the program, creating an application and other grant procedures, soliciting and reviewing applications, and making grant awards. Therefore, given these tasks, it could be the case that it would be preferable to begin awarding grants in the 2020-21 fiscal year, rather than 2019-20 as under the bill. [Alternative 2]

8. The Department of Administration indicated in an errata that the program was not intended to award grants for environmental education. Instead, the intent "was to allow UW-Stevens Point to use the funds to best provide and support environmental education." Under this approach, the bill provisions that would establish a grant program would be deleted, and references to "grants" in the proposed appropriation for UW-Stevens Point would be removed. This would allow UW-Stevens Point to use these moneys for environmental education. [Alternative 3]

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to create an environmental education grant program with \$250,000 annually from the conservation fund.

ALT 1	Change to	
	Base	Bill
SEG	\$500,000	\$0

2. Modify the Governor's proposal so that the grant program would begin in 2020-21, rather than 2019-20 as under the bill.

ALT 2	Change to	
	Base	Bill
SEG	\$250,000	-\$250,000

3. Modify the bill as identified by DOA to delete references to a grant program and, instead, provide \$250,000 annually to UW-Stevens Point for environmental education.

ALT 3	Change to	
	Base	Bill
SEG	\$500,000	\$0

4. Take no action.

ALT 4	Change to	
	Base	Bill
SEG	\$0	- \$500,000

Prepared by: Christa Pugh