



MELISSA AGARD
STATE SENATOR

Earth Day State Parks (SB 287) Testimony

Thank you Chairman Stafsholt and members of the committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business, and Rural Issues for having this hearing today. My name is Senator Melissa Agard and I am excited to be speaking before you today on Senate Bill 287 which would waive state parks admission fees on Earth Day.

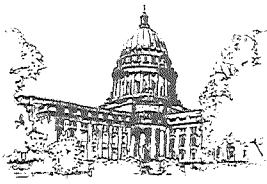
This is a simple but important bill. Wisconsin's heritage is rooted in our outdoor recreation and natural areas. National, State, County and City parks belong to all of us - they are an equalizer and they empower us in so many ways.

It is clear that we have a moral obligation to our earth and to generations to come to continue this tradition and promise. Allowing more people into our state parks and eliminating barriers to access will only inspire more and more Wisconsinites to get outdoors and protect and conserve our natural resources.

John Muir once said, "In every walk with nature one receives far more than they seek." By inviting more people into our state parks on Earth Day, we are planting seeds that will carry on the legacy of our public lands by teaching future and current generations how to preserve, conserve, and enjoy all that our shared resources have to offer.

This is one step to making sure that our state parks are accessible to all who wish to visit. Waiving state park admission fees on Earth Day not only carries on Wisconsin's long heritage of valuing our outdoor spaces, but also begins to break down barriers to access for all Wisconsin families.

I want to thank you again for holding this hearing and I look forward to answering any questions you have.



WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Dianne Hesselbein

79TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony of Rep. Dianne Hesselbein
Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business, and Rural Issues
SB 287 and AB 269: waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day
May 12, 2021

Chairman Stafsholt and members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this public hearing on Senate Bill 287. 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, last year was the 50th 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.

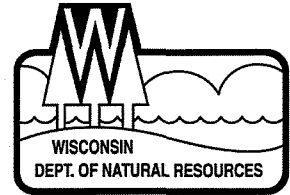
The idea for the proposal comes from one of the teachers in my district. She told me that she wanted to bring her class to a state park on Earth Day to commemorate the positive impacts of a healthy environment on our community. Unfortunately, it was too expensive. I've heard the same complaint from Girl 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 287 and AB 269.

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Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues

2021 Senate Bill 287

Waiver of fees for admission to state parks on Earth Day May 12, 2021

Good afternoon Chair Stafsholt and members of the Committee. My name is Diane Brusoe, and I am the Deputy Administrator for the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Division of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 287 (SB 287), 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 21 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 287, 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, and 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. 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. 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.