



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #536

Forestry Education and Awareness Center (DNR -- Forestry and Parks)

[LFB 2005-07 Budget Summary: Page 368, #10]

CURRENT LAW

State forests are managed to provide a full range of benefits, including soil protection, public hunting, protection of water quality, production of recurring forest products, outdoor recreation, native biological diversity, aquatic and terrestrial wildlife, and aesthetics.

The Department also operates three tree nurseries (Hayward, Boscobel, and Wisconsin Rapids) which produce and distribute seedlings (trees and wildlife shrubs) used for reforestation and conservation purposes. Each year, the nursery distributes between 18 million and 20 million seedlings.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$200,000 SEG in 2005-06 and \$400,000 SEG in 2006-07 from the forestry account to plan for, and begin operating, a facility on 66 acres of land that the state has offered to purchase from Milwaukee County on the former Milwaukee County grounds to promote public awareness of sustainable forestry and its benefits.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Under 2001 Act 16 (the 2001-03 biennial budget bill), \$400,000 was provided on a one-time basis from the forestry account to begin planning for this project. In June, 2003, DNR agreed to purchase over 66 acres of land from Milwaukee County for \$249,000 from the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship 2000 program. The property was valued at over \$725,000 at

that time. As of May 5, 2005, DNR had not yet completed this acquisition. The Department also commissioned site use and development plans for the project, commissioned several studies to determine appropriate educational and tourism market niches for the project, and began early-stage property management efforts. Milwaukee County officials expressed a strong interest in locating the forestry demonstration center on the county grounds, in lieu of other development options. Local residents were also concerned that private industrial development might alter the current appearance of the grounds away from green space (including existing forested land) towards a more developed urban landscape.

2. The funding provided under the bill would support program management, fundraising, program and exhibit design, contract staffing, exhibit development, and basic property maintenance. Priorities include contracting for an executive director to guide project planning efforts and to work with other organizations in the community to secure outside funding and cooperative assistance with the forestry center's development. Overall project costs (over the next eight or more years) are estimated at \$15 to \$30 million for buildings, grounds, displays, demonstration areas, and a state forest. Preliminary plans for the demonstration center include a 20,000 square foot facility containing an artificial forest depicting Wisconsin's forest ecosystems. Plans include space for classrooms, interactive interpretive stations emphasizing the economic, social, and ecological value of forests, and a 200-person theatre. The building may also include a demonstration area where carpenters could volunteer to show how wood is converted into various household products. Development of the grounds could include a portable sawmill and milling machines to be used to demonstrate how trees are converted to lumber and molding. The 235-acre northeast quadrant of the Milwaukee County grounds already contains 50 acres of mature hardwood forest, which may be expanded by an additional nine acres under the proposal, and would be incorporated in tours and demonstrations.

3. The Department anticipates the development, construction, and operation of the forestry educational center to be a cooperative endeavor. DNR indicates potential partners include the Milwaukee County Parks Department, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD), City of Milwaukee Forestry Department, City of Wauwatosa Forestry Department, Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association, Wisconsin County Forest Association, Lakes States Lumber Association, Wisconsin-Michigan Timber Producer's Association, Wisconsin Paper Council, Natural Resources Foundation, Milwaukee Area Convention and Visitor's Bureau, Wisconsin Christmas Tree Growers Association, Wisconsin Nursery Association, DOT, DPI, DATCP, Commerce, U.S. Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, State Historical Society, Trees for Tomorrow Environmental Center, University of Wisconsin-Extension, United Paper Workers, and the Governor's Council on Forestry, as well as individual corporate sponsors. DNR indicates that the facility would be constructed and operated in cooperation with one or more of these partnerships. Funds and in-kind contributions are expected from several of these organizations; DNR indicates that several lumber-producing organizations have already pledged to donate materials needed for the construction of the demonstration center. Should these partnerships develop to meet DNR's expectations, a significant part of the anticipated \$15 to \$30 million cost of the construction of the demonstration center and the surrounding grounds would be provided by a variety of organizations, groups, and local governments.

4. However, DNR indicates that such a large collaborative effort is anticipated to require extensive planning and fundraising over a prolonged period of time to meet project goals.

5. The area surrounding the proposed forestry center is primarily green space, and would include a planned 48-acre stormwater retention pond to be constructed by MMSD to alleviate flooding problems along the Menomonee River. The retention pond would be owned by MMSD, but would be managed by DNR as a wetlands area. Department staff indicate that groundbreaking for the forestry center would not occur until at least 2009, as MMSD holds a temporary easement on the 11 acre unforested area where the center would be located, and construction at the center could not begin until MMSD completes the detention basins. The temporary easement on this parcel to MMSD for a construction staging area was a condition of the sale of the 67 acres to the State.

6. It may be argued that the delayed construction schedule required by MMSD's construction easements on the property might somewhat mitigate the urgency of funding this initiative during the current biennium. To the extent that funding from the forestry account may be in immediate demand for other purposes, it could be argued that this request may be more relevant in subsequent biennia. Providing \$150,000 in 2005-06 and \$165,000 in 2006-07 would support efforts to contract for an executive director to oversee the project, pursue partnership building and outreach, and begin program development, as well as support a contract for fundraising and marketing efforts. Further funding relating to the development of exhibits, site planning, and basic property maintenance could be revisited in the future.

7. Alternatively, as the forestry center is anticipated to be a large collaborative effort, requiring extensive planning and fundraising over a prolonged period of time to meet project goals, it may be argued that funding for project coordination, fundraising, program and exhibit design, contract staffing, exhibit development, and basic property maintenance could be funded to position the Department favorably for future action as the property becomes available for building and development.

8. Surveys commissioned by DNR indicate that the forestry center may serve as many as 150,000 students annually when operational. Further, given its position near a large urban center, it is likely to generate additional tourism interest. Forestry division staff indicate that they intend to coordinate programs and opportunities at the forestry center with the LEAF initiative (Learning Experiences and Activities in Forestry), a new kindergarten through twelfth-grade sustainable forestry curriculum developed in association with the Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education at the University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point. The comprehensive forestry curriculum includes multiple knowledge areas (such as science, math and social studies). Further, an additional component emphasizing urban forestry concepts is anticipated to be developed in conjunction with the forestry center's operations.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Governor's recommendation to provide \$200,000 in 2005-06 and

\$400,000 in 2006-07 from the forestry account to plan for and support program management, fundraising, program and exhibit design, contract staffing, exhibit development, and basic property maintenance relating to the development of a forestry education center in Milwaukee County.

2. Provide \$150,000 in 2005-06 and \$165,000 in 2006-07 to contract for an executive director to oversee the project, pursue partnership building and outreach, and begin program development, as well as to support a contract for fundraising and marketing efforts.

<u>Alternative 2</u>	<u>SEG</u>
2005-07 FUNDING (Change to Bill)	- \$285,000

3. Maintain current law.

<u>Alternative 3</u>	<u>SEG</u>
2005-07 FUNDING (Change to Bill)	- \$600,000

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