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Joint Committee on Finance

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Terrestrial Invasive Species Grants (Natural Resources -- Fish and Wildlife)

[LFB 2021-23 Budget Summary: Page 430, #5]

CURRENT LAW

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has broad authority to conserve native plants, animals and landscapes. Terrestrial invasive species are non-native species that do harm to native species and local ecology. DNR currently provides management best practices to limit the introduction and control the spread of terrestrial invasive species. The Department also restricts or prohibits certain species from being introduced in the state. DNR currently administers an aquatic invasive species program to monitor invasive species in the state's waters and to assist local governments to create invasive species management plans. DNR provides grants for up to 75% of the cost of projects to prevent or control aquatic invasive species, and for education and inspection programs at boat landings.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Invasive species can have deleterious impacts on Wisconsin's native wildlife. According to the Invasive Plant Association of Wisconsin, invasive fruits and berries can replace native plants that sustain bird populations. For instance, the multiflora rose, a restricted invasive species, provides less nutrition to native insects and birds. After it is introduced to an area, it has the potential to reduce songbird populations. Garlic mustard, another restricted invasive species, produces large leaves that block light to native seedlings, crowding out nascent prairie and forest growth. The ecological damage caused by invasive species can cause economic harm. For instance, a 2011 study by the U.S. Forest Service and supported by The Nature Conservancy estimates that the gypsy moth, which is endemic in eastern Wisconsin, and other invasive foliage feeders have caused \$410 million in lost property values.
2. Terrestrial invasive species can be introduced to the state through a number of vectors,

including intentional planting, accidental transit, or other methods. Kudzu, a Wisconsin restricted species that can smother trees and forests, was introduced in the U.S. as an ornamental vine. In the 1930s, the species was widely planted to control soil erosion. It is now established in much of the southeastern U.S. and has been found as far north as Great Lakes states including New York, Illinois and Indiana. The fast-growing plant has no native predators and can expand to new areas through its deep, rapid-growing root network.

3. Other invasive species have been introduced to Wisconsin through accidental transit. The emerald ash borer, a beetle that bores into the trunks of ash trees, disrupting the flow of sap and nutrients through their phloem, has killed hundreds of millions of ash trees in North America. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that the emerald ash borer costs an average of \$1 billion in damage each year. The emerald ash borer is believed to have entered the U.S. in the wood of shipping crates. According to DNR, the emerald ash borer can be transmitted by traveling in untreated wood products.

4. Terrestrial invasive species can be controlled through early detection and the development and implementation of management plans. DNR administers an aquatic invasive species grant that provides up to 75% of the costs of projects for local governments to monitor and control aquatic invasive species. Eligible projects include education and public outreach, developing management plans, controlling pioneer populations before they become endemic, limiting the spread of established populations, and prevention of population incursion into new waters.

5. Assembly Bill 68 / Senate Bill 111 would provide \$540,000 conservation fund SEG annually for grants to cooperative invasive species management areas (CISMAs) for surveying, monitoring, and controlling terrestrial invasive species. CISMAs are organizations of landowners and land managers that work to develop a management plan to control invasive species within a defined geographical region. DNR notes that the grants would likely be split-funded, with funding coming from the fish and wildlife, forestry, parks and endangered resources account. This is similar to other SEG funding arrangements for natural heritage conservation operations.

6. DNR reports that CISMAs can extend the reach of the Department to monitor and control invasive species. Since the groups are local associations of landowners and land managers, they can respond quickly to survey and implement management plans to control local invasive species spread. DNR also indicates that these local groups may be able to detect invasive species earlier than DNR would be able to. In addition, the groups may prompt more cooperation from private landowners than DNR itself may be able to encourage.

7. CISMAs vary in size, capacity, and public support. The Wisconsin Headwaters Invasive Project, a CISMA that operates in Oneida and Vilas Counties and receives operational support from the Lumberjack Resource Conservation and Development Council, performs citizen science projects including monitoring and reporting invasive plants and insects, as well as garlic mustard inventory and removal projects. The Lower Chippewa Invasive Project maintains a trailer and plant management equipment that it lends to groups to perform invasive species control activities. The Southeastern Wisconsin Invasive Species Consortium provides grants for up to \$2,000 for member groups to conduct invasive species control activities such as replanting native species and habitat restoration.

8. Other states provide public support for CISMAs. For instance, New York is divided into eight units known as Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISMs). PRISMs have an institutional sponsor, such as a university or a nonprofit conservation organization, and receive continuing support in the form of five-year contracts from the state's Environmental Defense Fund. The Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program, a PRISM serving northern New York's Adirondack Mountains and Lake Champlain areas, has four staff members who collaborate with property owners, state agencies, and conservation groups on invasive species management plans and projects, and who develop research on invasive species best practices.

9. There are currently 15 CISMAs in the state covering 37 counties. DNR expects three additional CISMAs to form, bringing the total to 18. The proposed amount would provide grants of up to \$30,000 to these 18 CISMAs annually. Currently, CISMAs receive limited operational support from DNR. DNR reports that the grants would provide stable funding and coordination for CISMAs. DNR indicates that grants would fund public outreach and education, specific control projects including invasive plant removal and herbicide spraying, surveying and monitoring, and hiring staff. Given the damage that can be caused to Wisconsin's natural landscape by terrestrial invasive species, the Committee could consider authorizing DNR to award terrestrial invasive species grants and providing \$540,000 SEG annually for these grants [Alternative 1a].

10. As described above, the proposed funding could provide \$30,000 to 18 CISMAs annually. While DNR expects there to be a total of 18 CISMAs in the state, there are currently only 15. The Committee could consider providing \$450,000, which would be sufficient to provide \$30,000 annually to the 15 CISMAs that are currently established [Alternative 1b].

11. Many grants awarded by DNR require that grant recipients provide a cost share. Typical cost shares range from 25% to 50%, with DNR providing the remaining 75% to 50%. DNR indicates that it would be unlikely to require a cost-share amount or percentage for terrestrial invasive species grants. The Department reports that CISMAs have limited capacity to raise funds. Requiring a cost-share could dampen participation in the grant program and limit the ability of CISMAs to dedicate funds to other mission critical areas. However, it could be argued that cost-share requirements ensure oversight and prudent management of projects, since grant recipients contribute their own funds to the project. Aquatic invasive species grant recipients, for instance, must pay at least 25% of project costs. The Committee could consider requiring a cost-share of at least 25% with DNR paying the remaining 75% [Alternative 2].

12. Requiring a cost-share could have the effect of extending state support. For instance, \$30,000 provided by DNR would fund a project of at least \$40,000. Under Alternative 1a (providing \$540,000 SEG), the total value of projects that could be funded would be \$720,000. Under Alternative 1b (providing \$450,000 SEG), the total value of projects that could be funded would be \$600,000. Alternatively, if the Committee were to provide \$405,000 and require a 25% cost share, the total value of projects that could be funded would be \$540,000 [Alternative 1c].

13. Many CISMAs are run by volunteers. As such, they are unlikely to have the capacity to raise significant funds to conduct projects. Additionally, without full-time staff or stable funding, CISMAs may be unable to hire grant writers or fund raisers. To avoid dampening the impact of terrestrial invasive species grants while ensuring that CISMAs are invested in projects funded by

DNR, the Committee could consider authorizing CISMAs to use volunteer labor or in-kind donations to match grant funds [Alternative 3].

14. Under Alternative 3, DNR could establish an hourly "wage" rate and allow CISMAs to use the number of hours worked by volunteers on a grant-funded project multiplied by that wage rate to count toward their match requirement. DNR indicates that the Department would likely request CISMAs to track the time they spend on a project. Additionally, CISMAs who receive donations of herbicides, pesticides, tools, or other equipment for a project could use the value of those donations to secure their match.

15. In addition to providing dedicated funding to CISMAs, AB 68/SB 111 would reallocate one vacant position from fisheries management to natural heritage conservation to administer the terrestrial invasive species grants and to coordinate invasive species programming with CISMAs and other local groups. DNR indicates that the Department does not have the staffing capacity to administer these grants under its existing staffing allocation. Reallocating the position would provide a dedicated position to both award grants and coordinate terrestrial invasive species programming. The Committee could consider reallocating the position and deleting \$18,600 in 2021-22 to reflect the timing of the hiring of the position [Alternative 4].

16. Alternatively, the Committee could take no action [Alternative 5]. CISMAs could be eligible to receive other grants for habitat management, tree planting, and other activities supported by terrestrial invasive species grants. Without a dedicated source of funding, however, CISMAs may lack coordination to prevent or respond to larger invasive species infestations.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Authorize DNR to award grants for terrestrial invasive species management and provide one of the following amounts:

- a. \$540,000 conservation fund SEG annually.

ALT 1a	Change to Base
SEG	\$1,080,000

- b. \$450,000 conservation fund SEG annually.

ALT 1b	Change to Base
SEG	\$900,000

- c. \$405,000 conservation fund SEG annually.

ALT 1c	Change to Base
SEG	\$810,000

In addition to one of the above,

2. Require grant recipients to provide a cost share of at least 25%. (DNR grants could support the remaining 75%.)

3. In addition to Alternative 2, authorize grant recipients to provide in-kind donations and volunteer labor to provide the required cost share. Authorize DNR to create rules to determine how to account for these.

4. In addition creating the terrestrial invasive species grants, reallocate 1.0 position from fisheries management to natural heritage conservation to coordinate with CISMAs and administer the grants. Delete \$18,600 SEG in 2021-22 to reflect the timing of the hire.

ALT 4	Change to Base
SEG	- \$18,600

5. Take no action.

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