

Friends of Wisconsin State Parks

2015/2017 Budget Concerns

3/12/15

The Friends of Wisconsin State Parks (FWSP) are very concerned over a 28% cut in the 2015-2017 Biennium budget. The cutting of all general purpose tax funding would devastate the Park System. This deep cut would affect the operating practices and services of the Parks. We also have the concerns over the personnel cuts which eliminate most of the Naturalist at our State Parks. These Naturalists are the "heartbeat" of these parks educational program where many of the youth and other parks learn about nature and become regular park users.

The loss of all Stewardship funding would also be detrimental to the Park System. FWSP has the position, that at times there are land purchases that are in everyone's best interest. A property adjacent to an existing park or an extension of an existing trail should be allowed. Matching funds are many times available to help with these purchases also.

The heading to self sufficiency is a noble cause, but cannot be accomplished in the present year. A cut of \$ 4.6 million to the Parks budget makes it so Parks could not function at the user's expectations. The items needed to make Parks sustainable are 3 fold. The Fee increase needs to be approved, spending authority within the department needs to be approved and the general purpose revenue needs to be partially restored.

There are other alternatives being discussed for generating revenues for State Parks. FWSP is in favor of incorporating Corporate donations and these are already in practice for Park improvements, but there is not a mechanism in place to make it work for day to day operating costs at this time. FWSP does accept corporate donations and uses these funds for State property promotion and improvements. FWSP is not in favor of selling naming rights to State properties.

FWSP through our local Friends groups donated over \$540,000 and nearly 187,000 volunteer hours to the State Park Properties. Much of this money is raised through the gift shops, firewood sales and other concession items. This revenue stream would be eliminated if general concessionaires are allowed in the State Parks, and FWSP is not in favor of this practice.

Please plan to attend the Joint Committee on Finance Public Hearing in your area; this is an important part of the budget process. Also contact your local Assemblyperson and Senator and voice your concerns about the urgency of this issue.

Thank you,

Bill Zager

Pres. FWSP