

Wisconsin County Forest Administration Grant

Throughout the years Wisconsin's forestry mil tax (segregated funds) has afforded grant opportunities to Wisconsin's County Forests meeting the **state's statutory obligation contained in §28.11(1)**.

For decades the County Forest Administrator Grant provided funding to counties who employ a 4-year degreed professional forester in the position of county forest administrator or assistant county forest administrator. The grant covers 50% of the salary and up to 50% of the benefits for these positions. These grant requests are extremely important to our member counties. In fact, the counties consistently rank the County Forest Administration Grant as their top priority for funding.

Approximately six years ago a change occurred to the County Forest Administrator Grant Program to include the following provision:

28.11 (5m)(am) The department may make grants, from the appropriation under s. 20.370 (5) (bw), to counties having lands entered under sub. (4) to fund up to 50 percent of the costs of a county's annual dues to a nonprofit organization that provides leadership and counsel to that county's forest administrator and that functions as an organizational liaison to the department. The total amount that the department may award in grants under this paragraph in any fiscal year may not exceed \$50,000.

- This is a government to government transaction
- The cost to hire state employees to perform the "department liaison" function identified in state statute would most certainly exceed \$50,000.
- Wisconsin County Forests have limited access to forestry mil tax account funds and this \$50,000 serves to help meet the state's statutory obligation to "**compensate the counties for the public uses, benefits and privileges these lands provide; all in a manner which will provide a reasonable revenue to the towns in which such lands lie.**"

Other considerations for making these dollars available to counties providing efficiencies to the State of Wisconsin and its taxpayers

- Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) Executive Director coordinates activities and communication between 29 individual county forest administrators. This information is shared with members of each county committee overseeing forestry department operations. Without WCFA, WDNR Division of Forestry and other bureaus and divisions within WDNR would need to communicate and coordinate with 29 individual counties
- WCFA Executive Director participates in meetings and communicates with outside agencies and groups including but not limited to:
 1. WDNR and other state agencies
 2. USFS and other federal agencies
 3. Legislators
 4. Counties
 5. Forest Industry
 6. Tourism Industry
 7. Private Citizens

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- WCFA Executive Director provides consistency to 29 county forest programs overseen by 29 independent county governments managing nearly 2.4 million acres of public forestlands, the largest public ownership in Wisconsin
- WCFA Executive Director monitors, analyzes and relays information on federal and state legislation regarding management of national, state, county, industrial and private forests
- It is essential that WCFA employ a person with professional experience and background to represent its members on a multitude of issues to coordinate all of the efforts listed above. County forest administrators face complex resource management issues on a daily basis and WCFA needs an Executive Director with the ability to offer professional guidance
- WCFA Executive Director must have significant knowledge of multiple use management on public lands and sustainable forestry practices gained through on the job experience, a forestry degree, or combination of both. The knowledge and abilities required for this position are consistent with those of a county forest administrator. This makes the request for inclusion of a portion of this person's salary consistent with that of the County Forest Administrator Grant Program and unlike any other position within nonprofit organizations across Wisconsin. These grants to county forest programs help with meeting the state's statutory obligations to compensate the counties for public uses of our lands.
- Funding for this portion of the County Forest Administration Grant does not increase the WDNR Division of Forestry budget. The funding is already in place for the current biennium.