

Resolution to reinstate the Forestry Mil Tax to Fund Wisconsin's Forestry Program

Whereas, Wisconsin's woodlands were cut over and burned in the late 1800's and early 1900's; and

Whereas, in 1927 the Wisconsin legislature decided it was time to provide a stable source of funding to restore, acquire, preserve and develop the forests of the state and to promote sound forestry practices and did so by amending the Wisconsin Constitution to create the Forestry Mil Tax; and

Whereas, that Constitutional provision provides that two tenths of a mil on all taxable property in the state must be used for "the purpose of acquiring, preserving and developing the forests of the state and for other specified forestry purposes"; and

Whereas, because of the availability the Forestry Fund created by the Mil tax, Wisconsin's forests have been restored to cover about 16 million acres or 46 percent of Wisconsin's land base; and

Whereas, the Forestry Mill Tax has provided a stable source of funding to provide for DNR services like the private forestry program, fire protection, managing the county forest program, insect and disease control, invasive species control, urban forestry, forest tax administration, the Managed Forest Law and the acquisition and management of the State Forests; and

Whereas, Wisconsin's forestry industry is very important economically, adding about 6.4 billion dollars annually to the economy and supporting 60,000 jobs each year; and

Whereas, Wisconsin's forests are critically important for the provision of fish and wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, the tourism industry, protection of water quality and quantity and flood protection; and

Whereas, while the State Constitution does authorize the collection of the Forestry Mil Tax and specifies what the resulting revenue from the tax must be spent on, it does not mandate that the Legislature actually collect the tax; and

Whereas, the Governor and the Legislature in the 2017-2019 budget, for the first time since 1927, decided not to collect the Forestry Mil Tax and instead shifted the funding for the state Forestry Account to General Purpose Revenue tax collections; and

Whereas, this shift in funding for the Forestry Account from the stable Mil Tax to GPR revenue results in all of the Forestry programs having to compete for GPR funds with other major state programs such as K12 education, corrections, the University system and Medicaid. As a result, funding for the Forestry programs will be far less certain and will be dependent on the variability of the GPR tax collection; and

Whereas, this shift in Forestry program funding is a step backward in addressing the needs of forestry in Wisconsin and is not in the best interest of a long-term sustainable forestry program and the citizens of Wisconsin.

Therefore Be It Resolved, that the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation at its annual meeting in Stevens Point, Wisconsin on April 20 and 21, 2018 strongly supports the reinstatement of the Wisconsin Forestry Mil Tax as a stable funding source for the Wisconsin Forestry programs and urges the Governor and the Legislature to reinstate the Forestry Mil Tax to fund Wisconsin Forestry programs.

Submitted by:

The Wisconsin Division of the Izaak Walton League of Wisconsin
The Wisconsin Woodland Owners Association
The WWF Forestry and Parks Committee