By Supervisor Wasserman File No. 21-316

**A RESOLUTION**

Calling upon the State of Wisconsin to reauthorize the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Program and increase its appropriations to the largest county in Wisconsin

WHEREAS, in his 1949 “The Land Ethic,” famed conservationist and longtime Wisconsin resident, Aldo Leopold wrote, “A land ethic. . . [affirms nature’s] right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state. . . [changing] the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it.”; and

WHEREAS, according to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Wisconsin has lost approximately half of its wetlands from prior to European settlement, and according to the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission report, “A Regional Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat Protection and Management Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin” 1997 Planning Report No. 42, “of the more than 24,370 square miles of original presettlement vegetation occupying the landscape at the beginning of European settlement in southern Wisconsin, over 99.5 percent has been either significantly degraded or lost.”, and a 2010 update reports degradation of important natural areas has continued in southeastern Wisconsin; and

WHEREAS, in 1989 the Wisconsin Legislature and Governor Tommy Thompson created the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Program (the Program), named in 1993 for Wisconsin conservationists who respectively were a former governor, and a former governor and United States Senator, the latter of whom as a senator helped create Earth Day; and

WHEREAS, according to the Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau (LFB) January 2019 Informational Paper 61, the Program began as a 10-year initiative authorized to spend a total of approximately $231 million to “acquire land to expand nature-based outdoor recreational opportunities and protect environmentally sensitive areas”; and

WHEREAS the State of Wisconsin has twice reauthorized the Program, which the LFB reports resulted in the purchase of 669,806 acres between July 1, 1990 and June 30, 2018, bringing the total of publicly held land to approximately 5.9 million acres, approximately 17 percent of the State’s land area, but without reauthorization the program expires at the end of the Wisconsin 2020 Fiscal Year; and

WHEREAS, the Wisconsin Governor proposed extending the Program beginning in the Wisconsin 2021-2023 Fiscal Biennium for 10 years until the end of Fiscal Year 2031-2032 at a rate of $70 million per year while also designating $700 million in general obligation bonding supported by the State general fund and altering the Program to better reflect the composition of grant applications; and

WHEREAS, the Program has directly benefitted Milwaukee County financially as the Program recently helped fund 2016 Adopted Capital Project WP492-Oak Leaf Trail Root River Extension, which lengthened the Oak Leaf Trail to traverse the Rock Sports Complex and provide another direct connection of the Trail with the City of Franklin (File No. 17-445); and

WHEREAS, as of June 30, 2018, the LFB reports Milwaukee County local governments have received more than $4.8 million and nonprofit conservation organizations have received more than $4 million in grants for land acquisition and local assistance grants from the Program, totaling nearly $9.9 million and conserving 378 acres in Milwaukee County; and

WHEREAS, Milwaukee County would like to see more Program dollars spent in Milwaukee County as the County has roughly a fifth of the State’s population and commerce conducted in Milwaukee County is by far the single largest contributor to State coffers; and

WHEREAS, Milwaukee County would like to see the continuance of the Program to safeguard nature for its own sake but also for future generations to enjoy the wonder and peace of wild areas; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, Milwaukee County hereby calls upon the State of Wisconsin to reauthorize the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Program (the Program) for another 10 years, providing adequate funding for expansion of land available for nature-based outdoor recreational opportunities while protecting and connecting environmentally sensitive areas; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, Milwaukee County requests the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources increase its Program appropriations for land acquisition and local assistance grants in Milwaukee County; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the Office of Government Affairs staff is authorized and requested to communicate the contents of this resolution to the Wisconsin Governor and state policymakers, and support legislation that achieves the criteria outlined in this resolution.