



The League of Women Voters of Dane County, Inc.

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Statement for the Dane County Environment, Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

The League of Women Voters of Dane County is here to express our support for full funding of the Conservation Fund. We are requesting \$5 million of new bonding, in addition to the carry-over from 2010 and 2009 budgets. We know that expenditures from the Conservation Fund bring great value to Dane County and to its residents.

Opponents say that the County cannot afford that amount during this recession, but such an argument presumes that placing land in public ownership is a luxury that can be delayed for better times. In our view, protecting land that is included in the County “Parks and Open Space Plan” is a necessity that should not be delayed. In Dane County growth goes on apace. Meanwhile valuable wetlands and open space are giving way to development.

The members of this committee must be more aware of the value of wetlands and open space than are most other Board members. The costs and dangers of flooding are great. Flooding on the Gulf of Mexico shores and flooding in Arcadia, Wisconsin, are obvious evidence of what happens when development encroaches on the natural features of the land. Reputable geologists and hydrologists are among the many experts who predict that our area is likely to experience increased rainfall even while other parts of the state and the country suffer drought.

The increase in impervious surfaces that accompany development cause flooding that risks the safety of people and damages property and property values. We saw in 2008 what happens to homes and public services when heavy rainfall makes its way down the Yahara chain of lakes. The Conservation Fund will protect the natural resources that absorb and clean stormwater run-off.

But purchase of open space for public use has further values. Its recreational value is especially important in bad economic times for people whose incomes don't let them go to the Caribbean or the Arctic. Hunters, hikers, campers, parents, children, and the elderly too appreciate recreational opportunities closer to home and less consumptive of gasoline.

We want to mention also a point that you all know well—the lower cost of land at this time. Five million dollars would buy many more acres now than when times are better and development pressures increase. You all also know better than League members do that land purchases by Dane County will come from the Capital Budget, thus spreading the cost on to future users—a very ethical practice in such a case.

In short, we see present expenditures from the Conservation Fund as valuable expenditures, and we urge you to recommend the earlier proposal of \$5 million for the budget you will propose.

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