

# CRANES

## Capital Region Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability

*On behalf of its member organizations and individuals, advocating collaboratively for the environment of the South Central Wisconsin region (eight counties: Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Rock and Sauk) toward a high quality of life; an ecologically sustainable and just culture; and, the celebration of the beauty of this place, both natural and built.*

*VISION The Capital area's environment, including water, land, and air resources, will be conserved or restored to ensure the region's quality of life and the beauty of this special place, for all who live or visit here, now and in the future.*

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16 November 2009

Dane County Board of Supervisors  
ATTN: Chair Scott McDonell and Supervisors  
County Board Office  
210 Martin Luther King Junior Blvd  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Chair McDonell and County Supervisors,

On behalf of the *Capital Region Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability* (CRANES), I am writing about the proposed 2010 budget.

This has been a historically difficult budget to prepare, and we are grateful for the work done to date by Supervisors, County Executive Kathleen Falk, County employees, and our nonprofit colleagues who help deliver services to the our neighbors.

We request approval of the \$1 million in funding for the Land & Water Legacy Fund.

We continue to **question borrowing for Conservation funding "at the lowest level in a decade"** (Wisconsin State Journal, 16 November 2009). While we appreciate very much those who have worked to retain \$1 million for Conservation funding in the proposed budget, this deepens an already problematic cut proposed previously by the Executive, to \$2.5 million (from over \$7 million last year). This proposed 2010 Conservation funding represents **a cut of over 80%** from the previous year and the deepest 2010 program cut: over ten times the next deepest program cut.

Given all the facts about the ramifications of this we wonder if the voters will find the proposed 2010 funding so low as to be **"penny wise, pound foolish."**

**By referendum, 76% of the county's voters supported public investment in Conservation funding**, with its multigenerational benefits. We have little doubt that, if a referendum were held today, voter support would be even higher, and for spending more, not less.

Farmers, municipalities, and even developers, throughout the county are eager to access the land protection or acquisition funds of the Conservation program. The current real estate market means that the County's response to this demand can be delivered with possibly the greatest value ever for current taxpayers and future generations.

Sadly, the proposed 2010 slash in funding follows on a freeze in certain Conservation expenditures during the 2009 budget year. **Even though these frozen funds are bring carried forward for 2010, so too are the needs those funds were to meet, which were already backlogged.**

The effects of delaying such investments can be profound for the local economy, sometimes depriving it of millions of dollars in state or federal matching funds.

If Dane County Sheriff Deputies had supported the 2009 purchase of the Ice Age Trail expansion, the County would have received \$2.2 million from state and federal sources for next year's budget. That would have meant that County employees would have to take only a 1.6% pay cut instead of the 3% pay cut they are taking now. Because much of this money would be spent locally, the ripples will be felt throughout our community, at a time when many boats already are being rocked.

Conservation funding represents a tiny portion of the total County budget, less than 2%. Meanwhile, the need for Conservation expenditures has increased county wide.

The value of Conservation investment should be apparent now more than ever, following the disastrous weather of 2007-08.

These storms took lives. Two City of Madison north side residents were killed by an unnatural combination of precipitation and lightning in August 2007; another died from a lightning strike that was one of many during a "super storm." Experts have noted that, because lake levels already were extremely high, and the ground hard from a previous drought, should a subsequent September storm have tracked over Madison, large portions of that city's downtown would have flooded.

In 2008, there was \$68 million in property damage countywide due to flood damage. Civil infrastructure was overwhelmed, necessitating emergency pumping of millions of gallons of sewage into our marshes, rivers and lakes, which are of course connected to our drinking water supply. Dozens of homes were made uninhabitable.

**Thus it is not hard to imagine that more lives could have been lost in 2007-08 due to lightning flooding, directly, or indirectly through contamination of drinking water and diseases from unsanitary conditions. One need only think of New Orleans.**

These unnatural storms and flooding are predicted to continue and worsen in coming decades. Climate change researchers are forecasting that, based on trends and evolving conditions, 24-hour/ four-inch rains will increase in frequency. Area rains have become "flashier" due to overdevelopment, particularly at the north end of the Yahara River watershed (including the Upper Yahara and Lake Mendota subwatersheds), which has exponential consequences for Lake Monona and downstream. **Avoiding development of upstream land and the resulting addition of impervious surface through Conservation investments in acquisition or protection are the most cost-effective and sustainable ways to mitigate the effects of the now unavoidable near-term effects of climate change.**

Wise leaders in urban areas protect their residents from natural disasters. Even wiser leaders, with multigenerational vision, protect the sources of drinking water from contamination. For instance, generations ago New York City leaders purchased vast area of land in the Catskill Mountains, to protect their drinking water sources. The result: New York City today enjoys the best drinking water of any major city worldwide.

It should be noted that this quality has been achieved in **the most-cost effective way: Conservation.** Recent studies in New York have shown that land protection and conservation for drinking water quality is several times more cost-effective, and energy efficient, than trying to clean up water that has already been polluted.

Like our colleagues in the human services sector, we worry that **the 2010 budget cuts now endanger human safety. Moreover, we argue that while severe storms and flooding directly create the potential for human injury and even death, they also can make human services undeliverable, just when they are most needed.** Again, think of New Orleans (or, nearer and more recent, Cedar City, Iowa, in 2008). Now consider what sort of disaster would ensue if flooding took place during the late Spring or early winter, when temperatures are below freezing.


Like many, we see a need to increase the rainy day fund. Conservation funding is, literally, a "rainy day" fund. We agree with Supervisor Dennis O'Loughlin (albeit perhaps more literally!): "There are storm clouds out there. We need a major review of our budget priorities. Let's figure out what it costs to run this county and tax accordingly." (Wisconsin State Journal, 16 November 2009).

In view of all the above, we will be grateful if the County Board maintains the proposed \$1 million for Conservation funding. But we also request restoration of the Executive's original proposal of \$2.5 million (perhaps by reallocating funds saved by private funding of the manure digesters).

**Finally, we urge serious consideration of restoring the original \$7.2 million that was proposed for Conservation Funding in 2010, should County revenues exceed projections; in that scenario, Conservation funding should be the County's first priority.**

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns, and our request for approval of the \$1 million in funding for the Land & Water Legacy Fund. Your sustained support of the Dane County Conservation Fund, Land & Water Legacy Fund, and the work of the Land and Water Resources Department, through these challenging economic times, will be much appreciated.

With urgency,



Gary Werner