



www.prescribedfire.org

Senator Alberta Darling  
317 East  
State Capitol

Representative John Nygren  
309 East  
State Capitol

Dear Co-chairs Darling and Nygren,

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Directors**

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UW-Madison  
Lakeshore Nature  
Preserve

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Midwest Prairies

Paul Quinlan  
City of Madison  
Parks Division

An open letter by the Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council opposing the proposed elimination of Forestry Mill Tax revenue and replacement with General Purpose Revenue (GPR).

The Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council is comprised of wildland firefighters and prescribed fire practitioners who use fire to preserve the state's natural resources and defend our communities against the threat of wildfire. Safety on the fireline is priority number one. Escape routes and safety zones are identified for every fire incident, made known to all crewmembers, and are continually adjusted to meet changing conditions. According to Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources outreach materials<sup>1</sup>, "*The DNR's role in forest fire protection is to prevent, detect and rapidly suppress wildland fires in areas of the state that have the greatest potential for significant property and economic loss, natural resource destruction and loss of life.*"

Eliminating Forestry Mill Tax funds and replacing it with GPR is very risky. Many other Funds that have been replaced by GPR have seen cuts or outright elimination of the GPR. This fact threatens not only to erode sound stewardship of Wisconsin's natural resources, it also removes an important layer of public safety through reductions to wildland fire suppression resources. The loss could literally cut off escape routes for rural communities across Wisconsin facing wildfire emergencies.

Complicating the matter, the WDNR Division of Forestry will incur these budget reductions while navigating an institutional overhaul that shifts additional responsibilities, including prescribed fire implementation, to the Division. If conditions align for extreme fire behavior, the combination of institutional realignment and cuts to wildland fire suppression resulting from lost Forestry Mill Tax revenue could prove catastrophic for rural communities around the state.

Recent fires in the Great Plains highlight how lack of state resources can affect rural communities during wildfire emergencies<sup>2</sup>. The state of Oklahoma allocates 47 fire engines, 47 bulldozers, and 84 firefighters to its wildland fire program. While across its northern border the state of Kansas allocates three trucks and four employees. As fires raced across Kansas and Oklahoma, burning hundreds of thousands of acres, local volunteer fire departments in Kansas found themselves on their own to defend communities in the fire's path.

The most recent wildfire emergency in Wisconsin occurred in the 2013 Germann Road Fire<sup>3</sup>, which consumed 7,500 acres of mixed pine-hardwood forest and destroyed 104 structures in Douglas County. Fortunately, suppression resources

were available to respond promptly, thanks in part to Forestry Mill Tax revenue. Fire crews protected 77 structures and no injuries or deaths resulted.

The Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council is comprised of natural resource managers from all sectors - private companies, non-profit organizations, state and federal agencies, and private landowners. Common to all of our members is a passion for stewardship of Wisconsin's natural resources, particularly ecosystems shaped by thousands of years of fire ecology. According to the WDNR website<sup>4</sup>, "*without the use of prescribed burning as a management tool, Wisconsin could lose many of its native grassland, wetland, and woodland plant communities.*"

Elimination of the Forestry Mill Tax and replacement with GPR will reduce the state's ability to manage fire-adapted ecosystems, which span the entire state. A 2014 Fire Needs Assessment for Wisconsin published by the Tallgrass Prairie & Oak Savanna Fire Science Consortium<sup>5</sup> highlights the critical need and overwhelming opportunities to manage Wisconsin's natural heritage with responsible use of fire.

We urge the Joint Finance Committee to consider the impact this legislation will have on wildland fire suppression resources and public safety, as well as Wisconsin's long history of natural resource protection and stewardship. Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council members strive to maintain healthy ecological systems and preserve Wisconsin's rich natural resource heritage. The loss of Forestry Mill Tax funding will mean fewer resources to accomplish that goal.

Regards,



Adam Gundlach  
Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council  
Board of Directors, Chair

Sources:

<sup>1</sup>An Overview of Wisconsin Forestry's Program (pg 43-45), Curt Wilson, WDNR Northeast District Forestry Leader - <https://counties.uwex.edu/florence/files/2010/05/2016-Florence-Forestry-Congrence-.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>Why those battling historic fires had no help until it was too late. The Wichita Eagle – <http://www.kansas.com/news/local/article140612018.html>

<sup>3</sup>Germann Road Fire, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources - <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/ForestFire/GermannRoadFire.html>

<sup>4</sup>Prescribed burning - Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources - <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/WildlifeHabitat/burn.html>

<sup>5</sup>Wisconsin Fire Needs Assessment. Tallgrass Prairie & Oak Savanna Fire Science Consortium - <http://www.tposfirescience.org/e-news/wisconsin-fire-needs-assessment.html>

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