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Joint Committee on Finance
La Crosse Public Hearing

April 25, 2011

Dear Sirs and Madams,

Our organization strives to promote a balance between the needs of the environment in our Kickapoo Watershed and the needs of our communities. We care about the economic vitality and the ecological diversity of the land and water. The 2011 proposed budget is a threat to that balance and several of the non-budgetary items are of grave concern for the overall health of our communities and environment.

The Valley Stewardship Network has over a decade of experience in monitoring the quality of our rivers and streams. We urge you to keep oversight of commercial construction site erosion control in the DNR. Erosion from construction sites is the major source of sediment in our waters, and the budget moves this responsibility to a department with no experience or expertise in erosion control. We urge you to leave this oversight with the DNR to help protect our waterways from erosion.

We are also concerned about the proposal to remove the limits on phosphorous in waterways. Phosphorus, the leading cause of algae growth, is in fertilizer, manure and wastewater. These limits stipulate how much phosphorus would be permitted to run off farmland and be discharged through pipes, and set the stage for allowing farmers and factories or cities to work together to get the most phosphorus reduction in the most cost-effective manner. Our farmers understand the importance of clean water and without these limits in place it will weaken our efforts. Just last summer, with broad support, new rules were approved and are now being set aside without having a chance to work. We urge you to maintain the rules for limiting phosphorus in waterways and allow the DNR to enforce the rules.

The surrounding land of our watershed is a diverse rural landscape which supports small and mid-size family farms and we want to preserve and strengthen our rural way of life. We urge you to fund the Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin grant program and Farm to School.

The 2011 budget eliminates the Buy Local Buy Wisconsin grant program and removes language from the state statute. This project builds local food system infrastructure in the state and strengthens rural communities. The top funded project in 2010 is building a 7 Rivers Region cooperative to support institutions in purchasing locally grown products. The Fifth Season Cooperative's plan is to become a food distribution and marketing business that grosses one million in the next three years. While most other government programs are getting a 10% cut, this grants program was prepared to take its share of reductions, too. A 10% reduction would have brought it down to \$200,000 per year in funding. But it is not prudent to eliminate a grants program that has a proven track record of economic development. We urge you to support Buy Local, Buy Wisconsin grant funding at \$200,000 per year.

Farm to School programs support the health of Wisconsin children, farms and communities by connecting schools with local farms. The farm to school programs in Vernon, Crawford and La Crosse counties are providing fresh fruits and vegetables to children who are getting excited about eating healthy! These efforts help fight childhood obesity and help children develop healthy habits for a lifetime. We work with all three counties on their Farm to School efforts and the results are additional markets for farmers, support of a local economy and fresh and health food for our children. We urge you to fund the F2S program at \$540,000 funding level which provides for a staff position to administer the program and grant funding to help schools implement these programs. We rely on this funding to continue building on our success.

Sincerely,

Nicole Penick
Food and Farm Program Manager

Katya Leonard
Water Quality Program Manager

Mary Benson
Member Relations Manager