

FORUM

A voice for peace, social justice and reform since 1917

Our working lands need protection too

STEVENS POINT — Gov. Jim Doyle's budget bravely breathes new life into the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, and that's good.

But the budget does not boldly proclaim a meaningful state commitment to working land preservation, and that's not good.

On stewardship, Doyle didn't waste any time protecting and enhancing the important land acquisition program. The current stewardship legislation isn't set to sunset until 2010, but Big Jim wants to reauthorize now and bump spending to \$105 million a year for 10 years, up from \$60 million. It's worth noting that the Stewardship Fund leverages many millions more in matching funds from partners and is good for the state's economy in many ways.

The fund has helped protect more than 475,000 acres of high-quality recreation and environmentally sensitive land in Wisconsin. The vast majority of that has gone to lands available to the public for hunting, hiking, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing and other outdoor activities. Some acquisitions, like the 69,000-acre Wild Rivers Legacy Forest in northern Wisconsin last year, will provide working forest land for Wisconsin's wood-dependent businesses.

There'll be some carping about the big boost in bucks for the Stewardship Fund, but we're in the midst of a land value boom that shows no signs of abating.

As for private land preservation, the clock is ticking. Wisconsin is losing farmland faster than any other state in the Midwest — 5 percent of what was left in 2000 was gobbled up by 2005. We have about 14 million acres of agricultural lands left, and not every one needs to be saved.

But finding ways to preserve much of this land has never been more important. Working lands provide food, fuel and fiber in an uncertain world. Keeping these lands working supports rural communities and businesses across the state. The lands also have the ability to mitigate global warming by sequestering carbon and provide an array of other ecological services.

The easy thing to do is to shrug and say the loss of working lands is inevitable, and let the market rule. That's easy, but wrong. All or most of the services these lands provide are lost in the conversion to other uses.

Supporters of farmland preservation hoped the governor's budget would include funding for a state purchase of development rights program. That and other steps were recommended by a broad-based Working Lands Initiative Steering Committee, which studied Wisconsin's working lands for more than a

Bill Berry



year and issued a report last summer. The budget didn't include any of the key recommendations.

PDRs are more nuanced and harder to understand than outright purchases of land. In a voluntary PDR program, farmers sell only development rights to the land in return for a perpetual easement that keeps the land in agricultural use. This serves as an advance on the farmer's retirement fund — the value of his or her land.

While PDRs are a given in many Eastern states, they're a relatively new idea in Wisconsin. A couple of towns, including Dunn in Dane County, have programs. A binding referendum in Washington County, north of Milwaukee, will ask citizens this April whether to establish a PDR program there and commit \$800,000 annually in county matching funds. Says businessman John Torinus, one of the leaders of the PDR movement in the county: "It's a defining moment for the county and a bit of a defining moment for the state."

PDRs alone won't save Wisconsin's working lands. First off, owners or renters must make a profit on operations. All the more reason to protect them from conflicting uses. Other recommendations from the Working Lands group included establishing agricultural enterprise zones — blocks of land where it's understood that agriculture is the major activity. It also recommended tweaking the state's farmland preservation law, which hasn't been able to stem the loss of farmland.

• • •

Stewardship is a reminder that this state has a rich history of conserving some of its best resources. If you think working lands are resources worth protecting, get used to the idea that they are under great pressure on a landscape scale. Then get used to the idea that preserving them will require landscape-scale solutions.

What Wisconsin needs right now are some rural champions to step forward and speak as one about the need to take bold steps. At risk is some of the richest, most productive farmland anywhere in the world and an equally rich way of life that helps make Wisconsin special.

Bill Berry of Stevens Point writes a semi-monthly column for The Capital Times. E-mail: billnick@charter.net

Bush must learn when to fold 'em

Why is it that a course of action that is regarded as folly in virtually every other comparable endeavor is seen as virtue and wisdom when America wages war?

In poker, do we call a player a "defeatist" who, seeing a losing hand, folds rather than increasing the bet?

No, we recognize that every good poker player knows better than to throw good money after bad.

In games of strategy such as chess and Go, what do we call a player who ignores the signs that a part of the board is escaping control and continues to invest in that lost territory? Soon enough, we will call that player the loser of the game.

In business, what do we call an executive who continues to bank fortunes on a losing marketing strategy rather than cut the losses? We call him a bad businessman.

But when the United States gets embroiled in some ill-conceived, ill-executed, losing war — such as Vietnam a generation ago and Iraq today — Americans are supposed to see it as sign of weakness, rather than wisdom, to read the handwriting on the wall and act accordingly.

Why is that? It is supposedly "defeatist" to admit when something has failed. It is condemned as a sign of lack of manhood to confront reality and cope with it.

If either Vietnam or Iraq had been a matter of national survival for the United States, "never give up" might make sense. But what sense can it make when the arenas of America's ill-fated military ventures are just small parts of a much larger global chessboard in which a whole variety of interests are at stake?

Andrew Bard Schmookler
Guest Columnist

Just as the poker player with a bad hand saves chips for the hands to come, and the Go player who has been outflanked on one part of the board will redirect an attack to another part, so also a prudent nation, with global responsibilities and interests, will maintain a proper perspective on any given arena of action.

Even if it is granted that such things as "national honor" and "demonstration of will" are factors in a great power's standing in the world, neither of these can be so weighty as to justify exercises in futility.

Can it reasonably be argued that the enemies of the U.S. will be more respectful and afraid of the U.S. if, in the name of national honor, it persists in its folly rather than demonstrating its ability to adjust to realities and maintain strategic perspective?

• • •

With President Bush's most recent call for yet another blunder, it is imperative that Americans grasp the real dangers of "defeatism." What we should worry about is not the mind-set that recognizes and adapts to the reality of failure when it is a fait accompli. The defeatism that should worry us is the mind-set that is at war with reality, that loses perspective and that insists on magnifying a defeat into a larger disaster than it needs to be.

Andrew Bard Schmookler, who lives in Albuquerque, N.M., is the author of "The Parable of the Tribes." He wrote this for The Baltimore Sun.

Voice of the People

Shame on WIAA for ridiculous new policy on photographs

Dear Editor: There is a great way to force the WIAA's hand on its ridiculous photo policy during tournaments. Don't cover any regionals, sectionals or state games with photographers, relegate the stories of the games to deep inside the sports section, and put a two- or three-paragraph limit on any articles about the game. Then see what the WIAA thinks about that!

How would the WIAA like it if there was barely any coverage of their tournament games? My guess is they never thought about that possibility while making their money-grubbing decisions.

Plus, let's not forget the company or companies that demanded this from the WIAA. How greedy are these companies that don't want to have any competition for images from the games? What are they afraid of? If

they are so good at their trade, why do they have to demand that their competition be eliminated?

How is the WIAA going to enforce this policy? Is it even enforceable? Will they collect fines? Are they going to ban all other photographers/videographers from these events? Take cameras away from fans in the stands?

When my daughter played in the state softball tournament a few years back, I GLADLY paid for a reprint of a picture that was on the front page of the sports section. I paid a good sum for it. I am thrilled to have it. Now the WIAA is going to take away the photographer's right to make money on the very sports they promote AND take away the ability of players, parents and fans to buy from those photographers? I can't even believe they

can legally do that. As a photographer who covers some local high school teams myself, I am outraged at this decision. I know, firsthand, that those photographers who cover sports for smaller newspapers are not exactly swimming in money to ply their trade. For that matter, why shouldn't the photographers from the bigger newspapers be able to sell their pictures? Now they can't make extra money selling pictures the players and parents WANT from them?

Give me a break. Greed, greed, greed. That's the WIAA. The WIAA has made many bad decisions and this is one of the worst. Shame on them.

Todd K. Olsen
Verona



Schultz captured essence of Bo's wife

Dear Editor: We are at our winter home in Palm Springs, Calif., and I read on the Internet the article you ran about Kelly Ryan.

The things Rob Schultz wrote are true — she is a special person. She is a true friend, and I miss her when we are out of Wisconsin.

She and Bo are totally genuine. They don't ever forget people they have met along the way. No matter

how successful he is, they won't change. We have been behind them all the way from Platteville, through Milwaukee and now on to Madison. Their whole family is so special to us.

Thanks for the memories, Bo and Kelly!

Go Badgers!
Ruth and Dave Rogers
Menomonee Falls

Thanks for article on Bo, Kelly Ryan

Dear Editor: I thought it was a great article about Kelly Ryan and the Ryan family as a whole — a piece I've really wanted to read for a while.

Bo is such an even-keeled guy that you almost can't imagine that he has a family or a life outside of basketball. I assumed he was married but had never heard about his wife or his kids. Still, you always knew that Bo must have a life somewhere outside of basketball, and you wonder what that'd be like. For as great a coach as he is, I think all of us in Wisconsin (or beyond) want to get to know him even more — his family too.

Bo, I believe, will go down as one

of the great coaches in Wisconsin basketball lore. He's already accomplished things (i.e., winning conference championships in his first three years) that nobody would have ever thought of. Rick Reilly's column and the increased exposure he's getting on TV could very well lead to him being considered one of the all-time greats.

But it's great to know Bo is such a simple guy — just like all the rest of us — that he'll play solitaire on his cell phone to pass the time on the ride from Middleton.

Andrew Westley
Burlington, Vt.

Polar bears deserve better from Coke

Dear Editor: Did you see the Coca-Cola ad during the Super Bowl? It was a spoof of "Grand Theft Auto" and had choruses of people singing, "You're going to be remembered for the things you say and do." I couldn't agree more — and Coke's ambivalence about the polar bear's demise is deafening.

Coke could help educate the public about the plight of the polar bear, their unofficial mascot. This would not be difficult for a company that

can spend \$2.6 million on a Super Bowl ad, but so far, Coke has been mum.

If Coke were to put a little info about the polar bear and global warming on each of its cans between now and April, they would educate millions about the problem, and get tens of thousands involved. It would be huge. But, so far, Coke has been silent.

Lonny Peet
Madison

Steve Busalacchi
Madison

The Brilliant Mind of Edison Lee by John Hambrick

