



# TOM TIFFANY

STATE SENATOR • 12TH SENATE DISTRICT

## **Testimony on Senate Bill 354 Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining, and Forestry Wednesday, December 9, 2015**

Committee Members,

Thank you for hearing testimony on Senate Bill 354.

Senate Bill 354 would simply require the Department of Natural Resources to provide a grant to the Florence Wild Rivers Interpretive Center which is located in Florence County. The grant funding would be used for park and recreation uses, forestry education, and tourist information provided by the center and for its operational costs.

The Interpretive Center has been open since June of 1992 and currently operates through a state, federal, and county partnership. The Florence County Forestry and Parks, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), United States Federal Forest Service (USFS), University of Wisconsin Extension and the Wisconsin Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) all currently have staff in the Interpretive Center. As you can imagine, a lot of people depend on the services provided by the Interpretive Center.

This grant would help ensure that the interpretive center remained open so the agencies and staff that are stationed there can continue to provide the necessary services. This building is strategically located as a major hub for tourist to the area as it sells licenses, registers boats, ATV's, and snowmobiles entering from Michigan. Florence County is a very rural county and having all of these services housed under one roof is a huge benefit to the residents of the area.

Florence County is a tourism dependent area. Last year alone, the Visitor Center welcomed over 20,000 visitors. With businesses few and far between, the county and its economy depend on visitors in both the summer and winter months. The Visitor Center provides these valuable tourists with a one stop shop for all of their recreational licensing needs, while offering literature on all of the great attractions the area has to offer. This is truly a tourism hub for the entire area. The loss of state funding would cause a reduction in staffing and reduce service hours at the Center.

I would ask for your support of Senate Bill 354 to help fund the Florence Wild Rivers Interpretive Center.

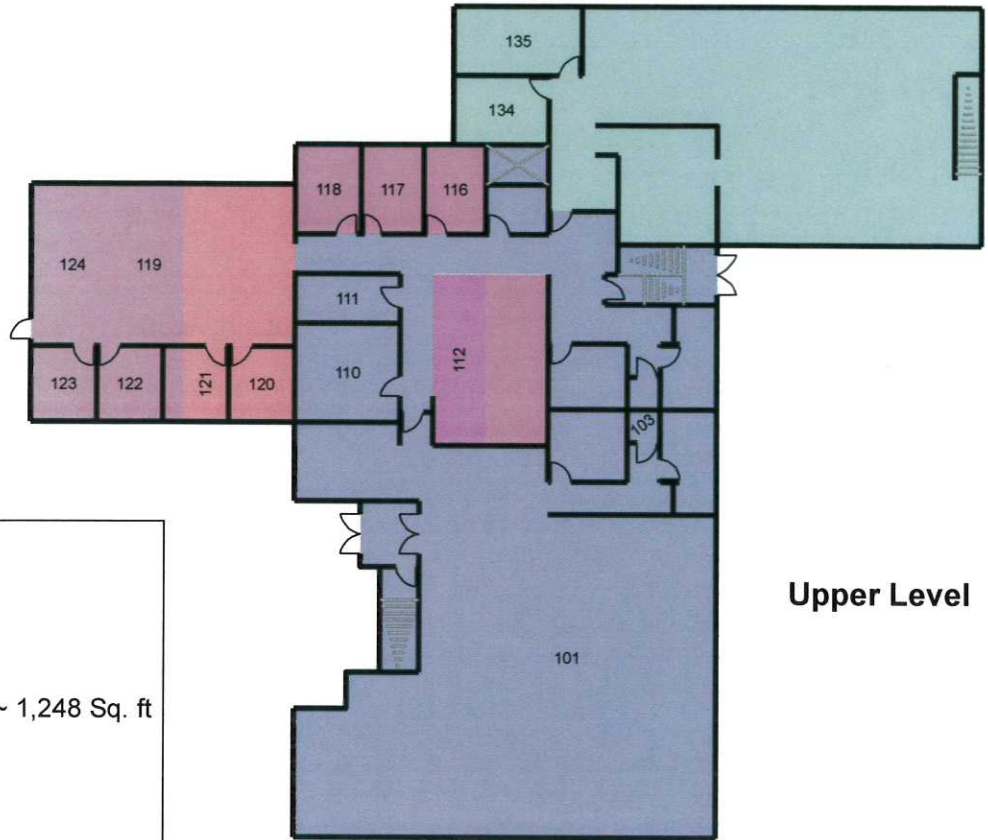
Thank you.












<i>Income</i>	State Budget	YTD 11/1/15
County		
Friends Sales		
Miscellaneous		
WDNR ALIS/VRS		
State	\$22,800.00	
USFS		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$22,800.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
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<i>Cost of Goods Sold</i>		
Merchandise		
<i>Expenses</i>		
WDNR/ALIS/COUNTY BOAT		
Advertising	\$600.00	\$498.83
Bank Service (CC charge)		
Building Operations		
Conference		
Dues & Subscriptions		
Equipment	\$800.00	\$805.53
Exhibit	\$5,000.00	\$1,592.19
Insurance		
Licenses and Fees		
Miscellaneous		
Postage & Delivery	\$900.00	\$789.45
Print/Reproduction Maps	\$1,000.00	\$862.00
Professional Fees		
Programs		
Supplies	\$450.00	\$454.53
Telephone		
Mileage/Conference Shows		
Wages:Director	\$7,230.60	\$5,576.13
Wages:Staff	\$5,907.50	\$4,193.13
Payroll Taxes	\$899.00	\$752.29
<b>TOTAL Exp + COGS</b>	<b>\$22,787.10</b>	<b>\$15,524.08</b>





**Upper Level**

**Legend**

	Common ~ 11,121 sq ft
	DMV ~ 849 sq. ft
	Flo. Co. Forestry & Parks ~ 1,248 Sq. ft
	Friends ~ 863 sq. ft
	USFS ~ 10,920 sq. ft
	UWEX ~ 1,558 sq. ft
	WIDNR ~ 1,645 sq. ft

**Total = 28,204 sq. ft**



**Lower Level**

# Wisconsin County Forests Association

Norman Bickford  
President  
Webster, Wisconsin

Tom Rudolph  
Vice President  
Rhineland, Wisconsin

Beverly Larson  
Treasurer  
Wonewoc, Wisconsin

Greg Sekela  
Director  
Gillett, Wisconsin

Al Mans  
Director  
Marinette, Wisconsin

Carl Vander Sanden  
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Chuck Zenner  
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Ed Kelley  
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Florence, Wisconsin

Bill Schradle  
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Joe Waichulis  
Director  
Thorp, Wisconsin

Michael Luedeke  
Director-at-Large  
Spooner, Wisconsin

Henry Schienebeck  
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Butternut, Wisconsin

Jane Severt, Executive Director  
3243 Golf Course Road  
P.O. Box 70  
Rhineland, WI 54501

December 8, 2015

Senator Tom Tiffany  
Chair, Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining, and Forestry  
Room 409 South  
State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53707-7882

Regarding: 2015 SB 354

Senator Tiffany,


Please accept this testimony from Wisconsin County Forests Association (WCFA) supporting 2015 SB354.

WCFA represents the forestry interests of 29 counties with lands enrolled under state statutes §28.10 and §28.11, Wisconsin's County Forest Law. Collectively our member counties manage nearly 2.4 million acres of forest lands, the largest public ownership in the state.

We feel it is extremely important for the State of Wisconsin to fulfill its obligation to Florence County by providing the state's share of operational funding for the Florence Wild Rivers Interpretive Center. Therefore, we fully support the annual allocation of \$27,000 contained in 2015 SB354.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony, if we can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Sincerely,

  
Norman K. Bickford, President  
Wisconsin County Forests Association

  
Jane F. Severt, Executive Director  
Wisconsin County Forests Association

*Thank you Mr. Chairman & Committee Members*

## Tourism and Economic Development

Good morning ~~and thank you for listening to our testimony today.~~ My name is Wendy Gehlhoff; I have been the Economic Development Director for Florence County for the last 11 years. ~~The top 3 goals of~~ <sup>My job is to grow</sup> the number and size of our businesses, strengthening the quality of life in our communities and attracting new visitors. These goals are directly tied to the continued operation of the Public Information desk in our Wild Rivers Interpretive Center located on US 2. It should be noted that the Center's location on US 2 acts as a doorway to the state of Wisconsin from Michigan coming from both the east and west direction. This year we added an RV Dump Station and Off-Leash Dog Park to the facility as an added service to the traveling public.

Only 12 of our 250 county businesses employ more than 15 employees, so our Chamber of Commerce has a small budget and must do work via volunteers and partnering with my office and the visitor center. Our largest industry cluster by number of businesses and jobs is the tourism industry. So by working to attract new visitors, we are helping our tourism based businesses grow. Visitor attraction takes place by attending targeted trade shows, running radio ads highlighting our key events and recreational assets, website and social media activities and a variety of printed materials. All of these advertising methods send people to our Public Information desk to obtain more information or as a starting point for their trip to Florence County. Over the last 5 years we have worked hard to help people discover our small county and put us on the map. Because resources are tight yielding only a small advertising budget we have leveraged our efforts via Department of Tourism JEM grants and social media – our facebook page has 8,349 likes. One of the JEM grants helped us advertise the new Wisconsin Wild Rivers Tour that we facilitated. This project brought together state departments of Tourism, DOT and DNR along with our local departments to allow creation and placement of new state highway signs marking 15 access points so our visitors can more easily use our state designated Wild Rivers. The starting point for this Wild Rivers Tour is the public information desk at the Wild Rivers Interpretive Center.

The growth of our tourism industry and related tourism businesses is evidenced by our County Sales tax growth. From 2010 to 2014, our County Sales tax grew 19% and we are on track for 3-4% growth this year as well. Our tourism economic impact as measured by the Department of Tourism also grew 4% last year. The public information desk not only answers a wide range of questions that DNR, USFS and County staff do not get interrupted to answer, but they also direct visitors to area businesses that provide the products and services they need. By cutting the DNR portion of the public information desk funding, the public service hours will need to be cut thus reducing the referrals to our local business community. This will hurt the forward progress we have made over the last 5 years in tourism promotion and the associated sales growth for our businesses.

So in closing, I ask that you vote in favor of Senate Bill 354 to reinstate <sup>DNR</sup> funding to our Wild Rivers Interpretive Center. As mentioned, the center sells over \$40,000 in licenses, permits and registrations each year. And more importantly, this center has saved all the co-located agencies a great deal of money since 1992. If the WI-DNR, USFS and County each had their own facility, they would have paid one of their own employee's wages and benefits to staff their own public information desk. The Wild Rivers Interpretive Center saves tax payer money by allowing all agencies to share in the cost of one information desk using an employee at a lower wage with no benefits. Thank you for your time.