

WHY MFL “closed” LANDOWNERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO RECEIVE “COMPENSATION” FOR USE OF THEIR LANDS

Background: In 2007, then Senator Russ Decker inserted a provision into the budget that prohibited landowners (who managed over 2 million acres of MFL closed acreage) from being able to receive any compensation from others in exchange for allowing recreational use of their lands. The budget bill was signed into law by Governor Jim Doyle. **That change affected all, not just new, MFL agreements. This provision in the MFL bill rights that wrong.**

- 1) “Compensation” defined by MFL:** A landowner and hunter cannot have any agreement that requires any service, gift, or payment of any kind, in exchange for recreational use of MFL “closed” land. For example: **Aldo Leopold's *Riley Game Cooperative*, a national model for landowner/hunter cooperative relationships, would be illegal under the current MFL** as it was an agreement between the landowners and hunters where the hunters provided habitat improvement in exchange for the right to hunt the land.
- 2) Contractual Agreement and Property Rights:** Prior to the change in 2007-2008, MFL landowners signed **what they believed was a contract with the state**. The leasing ban was a major change made by the state without allowing landowners any real recourse.
- 3) Tax Fairness:** MFL landowners pay **\$10.68/acre** in taxes compared to the **\$3.17/acre average tax rate paid on agricultural land**. For lands enrolled in the USDA Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), landowners receive payments of over \$100/acre and are allowed to receive compensation for leasing their land and continue to get agricultural property tax rates. **MFL is the only conservation program where landowners cannot receive compensation for recreational use of their land.**
- 4) Economic Benefits to Rural Areas:**
 - Provides **taxable income** for a woodland owner between harvests. Harvests of woodland occur on average every 25 to 30 years.
 - Hunters and recreational land users visiting an area **support local economies** by patronizing hotels, restaurants, taverns, grocery and other stores.
 - **Landowners will reinvest the income** into their land and hire land management providers to help manage their property.
- 5) Conservation:**
 - The additional income received by leasing will discourage breaking up larger woodlots and promote **sustainable forestry** as landowners will be less likely to turn to questionable practices like pasturing woodlands in lieu of entering MFL. This in turn will help grow quality wood for the future of the state's wood products industry.
 - Hunters and recreational users who lease land help manage the property for the **benefit of wildlife**.
 - Hunters tend to voluntarily sustainably manage the species they hunt. This will **help deer management** in the state. Other species also benefit as a result.

- **Hunters will have the opportunity for quality hunting experience on private land** without the issues of unrestricted public access on open lands.
- **The hunting experience on “open” land will also improve** as hunting pressure will decrease with more hunting being made available on private land.
- **DNR hunter recruitment programs would benefit.** It would once again be legal for hunters and landowners to have formal agreements where the hunter does specific kinds and amounts of work for the landowner in exchange for recreational use of their land.

This one, simple, common sense action will benefit: Wisconsin's wood products and tourism economies; hunters and the economy it supports; wildlife and habitat; and will help to restore the faith of Wisconsin's Woodland Stewards in the MFL program.