

Gov. Evers Announces Approval of Largest Forest Conservation Effort in State History

Written by GOV Press Wisconsin

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<http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/forest-conserve-s451.png>



Plan adds 54,898 acres of the Pelican River Forest near Rhinelander to conservation project, funded by a grant from the U.S. Forestry Service Forest Legacy Program.

MADISON — Gov. Tony Evers Tuesday, during his 2024 State of the State address, announced the approval of an additional conservation easement covering 54,898 acres of the Pelican River Forest to complete one of the largest conservation projects in Wisconsin history. Altogether, over 67,000 acres of the Pelican River Forest will be protected, ensuring the forest will remain open to the public in perpetuity for outdoor recreation activities such as fishing, hunting, skiing, trapping, and hiking.

Relevant excerpts from Gov. Evers' 2024 State of the State address are available below:



"Conserving and protecting our natural resources and land continues to be a top priority for my administration. I'm also excited to announce tonight I'm approving the largest forest conservation effort in state history. In partnership with the Biden Administration and the Conservation Fund, we've approved the conservation easement for the Pelican River Forest's

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remaining acres to protect the forest for generations of future Wisconsinites to use and enjoy. This is a big deal, folks."

Following this announcement, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is moving forward with the acquisition of the easement with the Conservation Fund, which is expected to be completed by the end of the week.

"This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to protect nearly 70,000 acres of forestland provides greater access to nature, strengthens local economies, and enhances climate resiliency," said Clint Miller, central Midwest regional director at The Conservation Fund. "The Conservation Fund and its partners are very grateful to the Richard King Mellon Foundation for their bridge financing loan and for the individual, foundation, and corporate support that helped provide a match for federal Forest Legacy Program funds—including a \$600,000 lead grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation through Walmart's Acres for America Program. Because so many worked so tirelessly to get this project done, Pelican River Forest will stand tall for generations to come."

In addition, the Pelican River Forest conservation project has broad support from local governments, Native Nations, outdoor advocacy groups, local businesses, and thousands of individual Wisconsinites. The approved acreage under this conservation easement has been modified to address concerns from one local town in the Pelican River Forest footprint to accommodate future economic development growth and align with their comprehensive land use plan. All other townships within the footprint of the easement have language in their land use plans in support of industrial forest and recreational opportunities as an important component of their long-term vision.

The conservation easement will be funded by a grant from the U.S. Forestry Service Forest Legacy Program (FLP). In April 2023, Republicans on the Joint Committee on Finance voted to prevent the use of Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program funding to complete the conservation easement after months of inaction and obstruction. In response to this and other instances of abuses of power by Republicans, in October, Gov. Evers and Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul [filed a lawsuit](#) against Republicans in the Wisconsin State Legislature for obstructing basic government functions, including the blocking of conservation projects through the Stewardship Program. Despite attempts from Republicans to block this project, the Evers Administration has continued to work cooperatively with [The Conservation Fund](#) to complete the conservation easement and protect these valuable lands.

Strategic conservation of the state's valuable natural resources is expected to have positive benefits on the local and regional economy, including minimal to no impact on property tax revenues and maintaining high timber harvest and tourism revenues. Conserving the Pelican River Forest also makes significant progress towards Gov. Evers' [Trillion Trees Pledge](#), which includes conserving 125,000 acres of forestland by 2030. According to the DNR, the Pelican River Forest conservation easements will achieve 55 percent of the governor's goal. In addition, the Pelican River Forest conservation easement will:

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- Protect 58 miles of rivers and streams and 22,334 acres of wetlands;
- Protect more than seven miles of Class I and II designated cold-water trout streams;
- Ensure the land remains forested and is sustainably managed as a working forest;

- The property is third-party certified under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, adhering to strict social and environmental standards.

- Store approximately 19 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO₂e);
- Annually, it is estimated the property will sequester 125,000 MTCO₂e over the first five years of management. Permanently secure public access and open 56 miles of roads designated for motorized vehicle use

- Permanently secure public access and open 56 miles of roads designated for motorized vehicle use;
- Connect important snowmobile/ATV/UTV trail routes to Oneida County's 1,100-mile trail network; and
- Protect the headwaters of the Wolf River, which supplies clean drinking water to over 40,000 people who live downstream in cities and towns like Wausau, Merrill, Keshena, and New London.