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NEWS RELEASE

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**Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter Testifies on State Budget’s Impacts on
Natural Resources, Jobs, and Public Safety at Brillion Budget Hearing**

Brillion: Today Sierra Club Conservation Chair Will Stahl registered to testify before the Joint Finance Committee at the public hearing to discuss our organization’s serious concerns about the state budget’s impact on Wisconsin’s natural resources. Our top concerns are Governor Walker’s proposed freeze to Stewardship land purchases, elimination of 66 DNR positions, stripping of the Natural Resources Board’s authority, reduction of Managed Forest Land program staffing and oversight, as well as deep cuts to environmental education, state parks, recycling, and programs designed to reduce runoff pollution that threaten our lakes, rivers, and streams. We are also dismayed about the excessive level of highway borrowing in the proposed Transportation Budget, along with the repeal of Wisconsin’s effective complete streets law and the elimination of state funds for Transportation Alternatives Program that enhance public safety by supporting programs like Safe Routes to School. Below are segments of his testimony.

“Here in northeastern Wisconsin, we are fortunate to be surrounded by beautiful water resources, from Lake Michigan to Lake Winnebago to the Fox River. Unfortunately, waterways in our area have been impaired by increasing amounts of agricultural runoff pollution, and this diminishes canoeing, kayaking, swimming, and fishing opportunities, lowers property values, and threatens drinking water safety. We urge the Joint Finance Committee to reverse the proposal to eliminate the Fertilizer Research Council and its innovative manure management studies, restore \$1.6 million in funding to county Soil and Water Conservation Departments who work with farmers and restore \$920,000 in funds for nutrient management plans to reduce runoff pollution” said Will Stahl, Conservation Chair, Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter.

The Sierra Club is dismayed to see the proposed cuts to positions at the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – especially those related to science, education and research. “It is dangerous to cut science positions at a time when Wisconsin’s natural resources face daunting, unprecedented threats, from climate change to algal blooms to Chronic Wasting Disease and more. Having in-house scientific experts at the DNR is the foundation of sound management and policymaking,” said Shahla Werner, Director, Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter.

The Sierra Club has grave concerns about Governor Walker’s proposal to freeze Knowles-Nelson Stewardship land purchases, which have protected over 500,000 acres of land since 1989. Stewardship lands benefit all Wisconsinites by supporting our \$18 billion forest products industry and the 60,000

jobs it supports, by protecting habitat, connecting youth to outdoor learning opportunities, and enhancing recreation such as wildlife watching, fishing and hunting. “Last year Sierra Club members worked with the Natural Heritage Land Trust and other groups to purchase and permanently protect 198 acres of forest, prairie and wetlands habitat adjacent to John Muir’s Marquette County boyhood home, an acquisition that may not have happened without Wisconsin’s Stewardship program,” added Stahl.

The proposed transportation budget eliminates complete streets and state funds for the Transportation Alternatives program critical for bike paths and sidewalks that foster pedestrian safety and healthier, cleaner alternatives to driving. We agree with Rep. Ripp, the Transportation Builders Association and others who are concerned about the \$1.3 billion in bonding being too high. One way to reduce debt would be to delay or even cut unnecessary highway projects like the I-94 east west corridor that is slated to cost taxpayers \$850 million. Projects like that don’t make sense given that the local community opposes the project, people are driving less, and given that we could fix this section of road for a fraction of the cost and expand transit to alleviate traffic. How do we seemingly have an unlimited appetite for highway spending at the same time we are making devastating cuts to public education and natural resources?

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Founded in 1892 by John Muir, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Sierra Club’s mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth’s ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out those objectives. The Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter is made up of 15,000 members and supporters from throughout Wisconsin working to promote clean energy and protect land and water resources.