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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Kitchens/Cowles bill creates pollution prevention partnership

MADISON, Wis. – Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) has worked with Sen. Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) to introduce a bill today that will reduce the amount of contaminants in Wisconsin’s water by creating a system for buying and selling pollution credits through a third-party central clearinghouse.

“While our current pollutant trading program is well intentioned, we have found that a lack of a third-party system is slowing everything down to the point of ineffectiveness and, as a result, we are not getting the desired outcomes,” Kitchens said.

The Pollution Prevention Partnership Act authorizes the state Department of Natural Resources to allow a permit holder to marginally increase a pollutant discharge if they purchase credits from a statewide clearinghouse or other third-party brokers certified by the DNR. The clearinghouse would act as a statewide broker and credit bank and be responsible for the management of buying and selling water pollution credits and maintaining a registry of credits from all third-party operators in the state.

“By having a central clearinghouse that serves as the broker and manager of the program, the permit holders – especially those with smaller staffs – will have an easier time buying and selling credits because they will no longer be responsible for administering the cumbersome process,” Kitchens said. “It’s a win-win for both the environment and the agriculture industry.”

Under the bill, the production and purchase of credits must lead to an improvement in water quality. To help ensure that happens, credits will be generated at a ratio of 1 credit of pollution from a point-source to a minimum reduction of 1.2 credits of nonpoint-source pollution. Greater ratios will be required depending on the specific practice.

The trades must occur within the same hydrologic area and involve the same pollutants and water quality standards.

“Pollutant trading is a strong strategy recognized by the federal Clean Water Act, but unfortunately it has fallen largely under-the-radar for decades,” Kitchens said. “With our bill, we will be helping lower the compliance costs for permittees while simultaneously reducing nonpoint sources of pollution. With a renewed focus on water quality in the state Legislature, I am hoping my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will come together and support this legislation.”

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