



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
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46TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Governor Walker's DNR is Not Living Up to its Mission
By Representative Gary Hebl

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' stated goal is to "protect and enhance" the natural resources of Wisconsin "to provide a healthy, sustainable environment." Under Governor Walker's guidance, however, the department has not lived up to its mission. June was an especially unkind month to the Department.

Early in the month, the DNR decided to no longer consider the overall effect on local water levels when considering well applications. This decision was made after Wisconsin Attorney General Brad Schimel stated that 2011's Act 21 only permits agencies the ability to regulate if state law explicitly allows it. However, the decision ignores the Public Trust Doctrine found in our State Constitution that protects lakes, rivers, and other waters for public use. Leaving the door open for water bodies to be drained by numerous high capacity wells makes them unavailable for use, and in clear opposition to one of the principles of the State Constitution.

Later in the month, a report from Wisconsin's nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau indicated, among other findings, that the DNR does not "consistently follow its policies when issuing enforcement letters for certain violations." They found that the DNR did not issue a notice of violation when one was warranted a staggering 94% of the time. To their credit, the officials at the DNR have acknowledged deficiencies and have promised to address it; they will report back to the Legislative Audit Committee in November with an update.

The DNR cited staffing and documentation issues as the cause of some of these problems. This comes as little surprise, as adequate staffing does not appear to be a priority for Wisconsin Republicans. Three hundred and sixty five full-time equivalent (FTE) positions went unfilled in 2015. Governor Walker's most recent budget proposed cutting 67 FTE DNR positions. The Republican-led legislature then added 25 more FTE positions to be cut before sending it to the governor's desk.

Also in June, the DNR released an analysis on frac sand mining that met immediate criticism from Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA), a Wisconsin-based nonprofit environmental law center. In the analysis, the DNR used a study that overlooks the risks of fine particulate matter, a byproduct of sand mining that is released into the air during the mining process. Not

only that, MEA notes that the study the DNR used was not conducted by the DNR itself; instead, it relies on data that was gathered by those in the industry.

Governor Walker and Republicans in Wisconsin have consistently put environmental protection on the back burner. We cannot allow our precious natural resources to be compromised. We have to ensure that the DNR is able to do its job; it is no surprise that the DNR seems to be struggling when it is denied both the funding it needs to function and the authority to regulate items that should be under its control. We must make certain that the DNR is at full strength so that we can be sure that they will be able to protect Wisconsin's lands, its water, and its air.

Rep. Gary Hebl represents the 46th Assembly District, which includes the cities of Sun Prairie and Stoughton, the village of Cottage Grove, and the townships of Cottage Grove, Dunkirk, Pleasant Springs, and Sun Prairie.

Contact Rep. Hebl with any questions or concerns you may have at (608) 266-7678 or via email at Rep.Hebl@legis.wi.gov.

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