



**REP. HESSELBEIN OP-ED ON DNR BOARD APPOINTED  
NATURAL RESOURCES SECRETARY**

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It is time to return Wisconsin's Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to the important, non-partisan business of protecting our state's environment and natural resources.

For 70 years the DNR built a long and proud history, leading the nation with environmental protections and conservation methods that established a priceless legacy for generations to come. The DNR stood at the forefront of clean energy, protection of the Great Lakes, phosphorus restrictions, mining safeguards, land conservation and stewardship funding, as well as creating and maintaining our incredible state parks and forests.

This superb legacy was built on non-political leadership. The leader of the conservation department for 70 years was designated by the Natural Resource Board. This board was composed of seven members representing the northern, central and southern regions of Wisconsin who ensured the individual selected as DNR Secretary was strictly committed to the mission of the Department, not to individuals or to corporate investors. Selection by the Natural Resource Board assured the Secretary would lead the agency with resource decisions founded on science, experts and experience, not on the political whims based on favors and outside influence.

The legacy began to change in 1995. Governor Tommy Thompson revised the standing policy and empowered himself to appoint the DNR secretary, providing him with the chance of "gifting" the important position to anyone he deemed suitable. This change dramatically altered the DNR Secretary position from a non-partisan position into a political reward susceptible to favoritism and corruption of purpose.

In 2010, with the Democrats in control of the Senate and Assembly, both houses passed a bill returning the appointment of the DNR Secretary back to the Natural Resources Board. Governor Doyle vetoed the legislation, and a legislative veto override effort failed to achieve the needed 2/3rds majority required (58-38).

Fast forward now to 2013. Governor Walker's appointee, DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp, funnels half of a million dollars into "United Sportsmen of Wisconsin" for hunter mentoring and education only to have the public later discover the scandalous history of the organization. Representatives from the National Resources and Sporting Heritage Committees have created legislation in the hope this type of episode will not happen again, but that is not enough.

We must pass legislation that assures the Wisconsin's environment and natural resources will never be held hostage to the whims and fancies of a sitting Governor. Let us return the selection of the Secretary of the DNR to a board dedicated to protecting our state, not to preserving political influence and power.

*Democratic Representative Dianne Hesselbein was elected in 2012 and represents western Dane County in the 79<sup>th</sup> Assembly District.*

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