



WISCONSIN WILDLIFE FEDERATION

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AFFILIATED WITH THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION

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Wisconsin Wildlife Federation's Testimony to Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality

Chairman Novak, Vice-Chairwoman Shankland, Members of the Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality. My name is Jim Swanson and I am a Board Member of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. The Federation is the state's largest sporting conservation organization and is comprised of two hundred and six hunting, fishing, trapping and forestry organizations with well over fifty thousand members. Our members are basically your neighbors that hunt, fish and trap in this state. I personally engage in all those activities.

The water quality of our lakes and streams is critical fish and wildlife habitat and therefore very important for our hunting, fishing and trapping. We have serious continued concern over the state of water quality in a vast number of our lakes and streams. When it comes to paying for the quality of the natural resources of this state, Wisconsin hunters, anglers and trappers are not freeloaders. Besides our normal contribution of income and sales tax like other citizens, the sportsmen and women of this state contribute over a hundred million dollars a year from hunting, fishing and trapping licenses and species stamp fees, taxes on our firearms, ammunition and fishing equipment and scores of millions of dollars of our voluntary contributions for fish and wildlife habitat. In other words we have a large dog in this hunt for clean lakes and streams.

Let me share my personal experiences as a sportsman and landowner:

I first moved to Dunn County in 1987. Shortly after my wife and I arrived here, we got the wonderful news that our first child was on the way. So in December, we did what many young couples do, we bought a house to raise our family. We were extra excited because we were able to buy a house on Tainter Lake. By June, our dream home had become a stench afflicted nightmare because of the algal blooms. When an east wind blew all the scum into our bay, we could not open the windows or even head out on the lake to play. I am an avid canoeist, and have canoed all over Wisconsin, the Boundary Waters and the Arctic. I was looking forward to teaching my daughters to canoe right out of my own backyard. But the green slime prevented me from taking them out on the lake in the summer months. I was especially concerned about the health effects of touching or ingesting the algal mats would have on toddlers. And research has proven my concerns were spot on. It's really bad when you live on a lake and you have to search for clean water to take your children canoeing. I should add we never swam in Tainter Lake.

Last summer I took my square stern canoe out to fish for crappies on Lake Menomin. As I tried to pass under the small bridge that spans the water between Evergreen Isle and the shore, I was stopped by the thick algae mats. The algae was piled so high it was literally impossible to navigate through it. Fishing in the summer on the lakes comes to a standstill. The pea soup water, the stench and the bad tasting fish pretty much shut down fishing on the lakes in the summer. In the winter, the lake is one big ice shack village as anglers take advantage of the clean winter water to catch fish. We would like to be able to utilize our lakes year around.

A study done by UW-Stout Lakes REU project looked at the economic impact of the algal blooms on our local economy and determined that the county loses roughly 36 million dollars every year.

I am a duck hunter and many of my friends also hunt ducks. Many of them travel to other places to hunt. Not because the hunting is bad here, but because they are concerned about their dogs being poisoned by the toxins that are the result of the algal blooms. In the summer, when I walk my own dog, who likes to swim but is not a waterfowl dog, I have to avoid walking near the lakes to protect the dog's health. It is also difficult for my friends with waterfowl dogs to find clean water for dog training.

Finally, I like to note that about three years ago it was a hot dry summer and the algal blooms were at the worst I can remember, North Menomonie, where I live was overwhelmed by the stench from the lake for several weeks. I do mean all of north Menomonie from the bridge over the lake all the way to I94. It was really difficult to enjoy a few brats and a beer in you back yard, when the air smelled like a big pile of sun fermented dirty diapers.

I am not willing to live with the pollution of the lakes and rivers in Western Wisconsin. Since my daughters were born, I have served on the Red Cedar Basin Committee. I have worked on numerous stream restoration projects. In doing so, I've logged hundreds of hours on my chain saw removing timber so the stream banks can be worked on to stop erosion. I've participated in the tree drop project. I've participated in numerous education efforts in the region. I've also made my yard a water friendly space. I am not alone in working locally to clean up the lakes and rivers. Thousands of residents of Western WI are out there doing the same. We need the Legislature to support us in our efforts to clean up the waters of Wisconsin.

My story is the not the unusual. Lakes and streams throughout the state have become unusable for hunting, fishing and trapping due an overload of nutrients. One of the prime examples is Green Bay which has an extensive dead zone where fish cannot survive due to lack of oxygen caused by eutrophication similar to the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico.

What concerns us is that by any objective review Wisconsin's progress for meeting state and federal water quality is far from being a success in terms of reducing nutrients into our lakes and streams.

Wisconsin industrial and municipal discharges from their point source discharges have done an outstanding job of reducing their share of phosphorus and suspended solids in order to meet water quality standards. However our lakes and streams show little overall improvement in terms of eutrophication from excess nutrients. Yes, there are some examples where lakes and streams have improved in water quality and have been removed from the Federal 303 d list of lakes and stream segments that fail to meet state and federal water quality standards. However currently 1,957 Wisconsin lakes and stream segments are on the list and the DNR added 242 lakes and stream segments in 2018 and only 35 were able to be deleted. The great majority of lakes and streams are on the list for failure to meet phosphorus and sediment as a result of contaminated runoff.

Wisconsin initiated its efforts to reduce nutrients from nonpoint sources over forty years ago and has spent hundreds of millions of state, local and federal dollars with funding for agriculture and municipal runoff but is far, far from achieving the state and federal Clean Water Act goals of fishable and swimmable standards in many of our lakes and streams.

Candidly, if we continue to go forward with our current efforts, Wisconsin will never meet water quality standards for phosphorus in its lakes and streams.

The largest contribution of excess phosphorus into our lakes and streams comes from our very important agricultural operations. Any solutions to significantly reduce contaminated runoff from farming operations needs to be very sensitive to the serious economic conditions that Wisconsin farmers are in. **The Wildlife**

Federation is very sensitive to the economic plight of agriculture in this state. Many of our members are farmers or have close personal or business ties to farm operations.

The key strategy the state has adopted to clean up our lakes and streams has been the adoption of farm-based nutrient management plans. However the current foundation for this strategy is seriously flawed in terms of meeting water quality standards in our lake and streams. Why is that the case?

1. Despite sixteen years of efforts to have nutrient management plans prepared across 100% of the ten million acres of cropland, it is estimated that only 37% of the cropland in the state have nutrient management plans.
2. Just having nutrient management plans does not improve water quality in lakes and streams in the state. However as indicated by Wisconsin's Green Fire: "The rate of actual implementation of NMPs that do exist is mostly unknown, although some estimates have suggested that actual compliance with existing NMPs is as low as 15%.
3. The current nutrient management plans are based on state phosphorus standards that **are not correlated** to meeting lake and stream water quality standards.

Unless these shortcomings are addressed, Wisconsin is spending a tremendous amount of taxpayer dollars and will still not achieve water quality standards for phosphorus in our lakes and streams. What do we need to do?

1. The phosphorus nutrient management standard in NR 151.04 (2) (a), Wisconsin Administrative Code, for croplands, pastures and winter grazing acreage needs to be revised from an average of a phosphorus index of 6 or less to an average of 2-3 or less. Nutrient management standards must be directly tied to water quality standards or Wisconsin will never meet water quality standards.
2. Nutrient management plans meeting the above proposed phosphorus standard need to be required for all croplands, pastures and winter grazing acreage in the state. Thirty-seven percent of farms preparing nutrient management plans will not get us to meeting water quality standards.
3. The implementation of the above revised nutrient management plans needs to be required for all croplands, pastures and winter grazing acreage in the state. Fifteen to thirty percent of farms actually implementing nutrient management plans will not get us to meeting water quality standards.
4. The potential economic burden on farmers should be eliminated by 100% cost sharing by the state and federal government for the planning and implementing of nutrient management plans for all croplands, pastures and winter grazing acreage in the state. While some may be objective to 100% cost sharing for planning and implementing credible nutrient management plans, that percentage is what is really needed if we are serious in meeting water quality standards.
5. This new strategy for bringing Wisconsin lakes and streams into compliance with Federal and State water quality standards should be implemented within ten years. This program will take years to develop and implement and we should develop a realistic but urgent time frame to get it up and running.

Unless a plan of this nature is adopted and seriously implemented, your grandchildren and the grandchildren of Wisconsin sportsmen and women will be attending public hearings thirty to forty years from now and having the same discussions on how we can clean up our lakes and streams from excessive phosphorus runoff.

Chair Novak, Vice-chair Shankland and Task Force member, thank you for this opportunity to represent the sportsmen and women of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation at these important hearings.

Submitted by Jim Swanson

Director

Wisconsin Wildlife Federation

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