

Environmental Regulation Restores Water Quality, Protects Public Rights, and Enhances Local Economies

Speaker's Task Force on Water Quality

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Case studies from the past 40 years in the Wisconsin River Basin ("The Hardest Working River in America")

1. **ACID RAIN:** precipitation in Wisconsin was found to be 10-100 times as acid as "normal" rainfall
 - * 2000 lakes were found to be susceptible to acidification
 - * a dozen lakes were already becoming more acid
 - * conventional wisdom said preventing acid rain was "too costly," "not a Wisconsin problem", "electric rates would drive away business"
 - * just the opposite happened; a 50% cut in SO₂ was mandated for utilities, who switched to low sulfur coal instead of building costly smokestack scrubbers; they locked in low cost coal contracts that kept Wisconsin electric rates among the lowest in the nation for decades
2. **WISCONSIN RIVER CLEAN-UP:** zero oxygen in three 40-mile segments of the river due to point source pollution from paper mills and cities
 - * discharge of waste was cut by 93% at a cost of ≈ \$350 million for 15 paper mills
 - * industry and elected officials participated in the design of the cutbacks
 - * no plant shutdowns, no companies moved to Alabama, Wisconsin is still the #1 paper state in America
 - * no lawsuits
 - * a whole new industry was developed to design and build wastewater treatment plants
 - * over \$350 million in economic development along the river in the Wausau area alone (after clean-up)
 - * over 100 products are now made from the "waste" that formerly polluted the river
3. **ALDICARB:** an insecticide used by Wisconsin farmers to kill Colorado potato beetles
 - * discovered in groundwater in the Central Sands in concentrations above health standards
 - * the manufacturers claimed that without the insecticide, profitable yields would not be possible
 - * UWEX found that yield would be profitable with 8-10 beetles (not zero)
 - * the insecticide is now banned in certain soil types in the Central Sands
 - * profit per acre increased when costly Aldicarb was phased out
4. **DAMS:** the Wisconsin River has 26 hydroelectric and 21 storage dams
 - * under the relicensing of hydro dams, millions of dollars of public benefits were ordered, while still allowing power generation without combustion of fossil fuels (eg. boat landings, fish and wildlife enhancements, public interest flow regimes)
 - * no hydro dams were removed
 - * small dam removals restored fish habitat and avoided costly dam repairs (up to \$ 2 million per dam), which saved taxpayers money
 - * dam removal opponents claimed homeowners' value would drop; real estate value actually increased after dam removal

5. **SHORELINE ZONING:** in Vilas and Oneida Counties, shoreline real estate accounts for over 75% of the total assessed value
 - * \$200 - \$400 million tourism economy in each county
 - * UW study showed that property values would shrink by 15-17% if overdevelopment, poor water quality, or AIS affected a lake
 - * science-based lake classification zoning rules, administered locally, had been effective for over 15 years in northern WI
 - * the State Legislature removed local control and severely weakened zoning protections

6. **NONPOINT SOURCE POLLUTION:** the most significant source of pollution left in "The Hardest Working River in America" is nutrients from agriculture
 - * point source nutrients have been controlled; inadequate regulation of nonpoint sources
 - * Point sources say they have cleaned up their mess, so why doesn't agriculture have to do the same?

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED FROM ENVIRONMENTAL REGULATION?

Effective Regulation

- * State and Federal minimum standards and goals
- * Locally designed strategies to meet goals
- * Economic analysis to insure efficiency
- * Public involvement (especially regulated cos. and elected officials)
- * Adaptive management to continue what works and phase out what doesn't work
- * SCIENCE-BASED management (data, logic, sound business decision-making)

Poor Regulation

- * No goals
- * "One size fits all"
- * No adaptive management
- * No economic analysis
- * No local control
- * Decisions based on political philosophy, rather than science

CONCLUSIONS:

Our history has shown:

- * science-based environmental regulation, if properly implemented, can protect the environment, public rights, and local economies
- * Wisconsin's water protection system has not had a comprehensive review and modernization since the 1980's
- * piecemeal changes have left Wisconsin's water with LESS protection at a time when there are MORE threats to water quality than ever before
- * the economic impact of degraded water quality is likely greater than the cost of prevention and restoration, especially as clean water becomes more scarce in other states
- * clean water and a sound economy go "hand in hand"