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Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 592

Assembly Committee on Transportation

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Mr. Chairman and committee members, thank you for holding this public hearing today. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you in support of Assembly Bill (AB) 592. I would like to thank Senator Tiffany for working with me on this important legislation.

A couple of years ago, I heard from some local officials in my district who were experiencing problems with beavers causing damage to some local roadways. Beavers often dam up culverts under or near roadways, which can cause flooding in the area and damage the roadway. This damage and flooding can lead to safety issues for area residents and expensive repairs for local property owners and local governments. While the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) does deploy measures to prevent or deter beavers from plugging up a culvert, such as trapping, this is not always effective.

Under current law, the DNR may remove or authorize the removal of a wild animal that is causing damage or is a nuisance. However, the law does not currently allow the discharging of a firearm within 50 feet of the center of a roadway. This can make it difficult to shoot a beaver that has dammed up a culvert that runs near a roadway. AB 592 creates an exception to this prohibition by allowing the DNR or an agent of a local government authorized by the DNR to discharge a firearm within the 50-foot buffer to shoot a wild animal that is causing damage to a roadway. It is important to note that the DNR still has the discretion on whether or not to allow the discharge of a firearm, under this exemption.

During the drafting process, my office shared the bill draft with the staff at the DNR. After the bill was introduced the department looked at the bill again and requested an amendment that narrows this exemption to only beaver and muskrat and adds flooding and culvert blockages caused by a beaver or muskrat to the definition of damages under the statutes. This amendment also adds the requirement that DNR can only approve the discharge of a firearm under this exemption if the discharge does not pose a threat to public safety. This amendment has been introduced as Assembly Amendment 1.

As a part of the most recent state budget, the legislature made some significant investments in local road funding. AB 592 will help protect the investments made in our local roads by giving our local governments a new tool to help prevent damage to our roads. I am pleased that this legislation has earned the support of both the Wisconsin Towns Association and the Wisconsin Counties Association and I hope that it earns your support as well.

Mr. Chairman and members, thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.