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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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DNR Testifies on Budget Requests

As the budget process continues to move forward through the legislative process, the Joint Committee on Finance has opportunities to ask questions of departments and their reasons for requesting funds. While I do not sit on this committee, I want to share some highlights from the briefing on the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

DNR Secretary Preston Cole was asked various questions ranging from the cost of their projects to how to make the park stickers less sticky. Some of the more important issues came about when state senators and representatives asked about the wolf hunt for example. Senator Felzkowski wanted to know, "By not having the hunt, who are you representing?" After some back and forth, the DNR said they plan to continue the hunt for 2021 after they were sued this winter later announcing they would not have one for 2020.

Senator Bernier also brought up that a constituent of hers had open records requested the DNR and their response was that due to the pandemic, they would not be able to fulfil requests on physical documents. I find this to be an urgent matter. Our government should be as transparent as possible to the people that foot the bill. Secretary Cole was also bothered by this and rightfully said he would look into this and remedy the situation immediately.

Another big point that kept being asked was when the employees of the DNR would be returning to work. Senator Marklein, the Co-Chair of the committee, asked how many employees were currently working in the DNR office. The DNR said 80% of their staff were working remotely, however, they could not say what they were doing working from home. It was also brought up that by having DNR Wardens and a few other DNR staff be in person and not allowing others to, that they were picking who was essential and who was not. In our district and many others across the state, businesses, farms and towns have been unable to have the DNR address their issues but Wardens were able to be in person.

While the DNR budget is not as large as other agency requests, it is important to ensure that our tax dollars are being used to serve the people as best we can while preserving sporting heritage and land across the state.

If you would like to weigh in on any pending legislation or budget proposals, please feel free to contact my office with questions, comments, or concerns at Rep.Pronschinske@legis.wi.gov.

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