



Prepared Testimony on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources before the Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage Regarding AB 809

Thursday, February 27, 2014

Good morning and thank you Chairman Ott and members of the Committee. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to provide information on the proposed legislation.

Assembly Bill 809 would facilitate completion of a 7.4 mile extension of the Pecatonica State Trail from Belmont in Lafayette County west into Platteville (Grant County). The Department of Natural Resources has owned the majority of the former railroad corridor for this extension for a number of years but development of the trail has not been able to move forward due to its location with respect to some of the adjacent landowners along the trail.

AB 809 would oblige the Department to complete the real estate work necessary to be able to move forward, in cooperation with our partners at the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and Lafayette County, with development of the trail into Grant County and Platteville. Local groups working in conjunction with the City of Platteville are enthusiastically working on the west end of the trail. When completed, the trail will provide a key component of the transportation and recreation network for the City and UW-Platteville. This trail will also provide connection into the State Trail System for southwestern Wisconsin.

We do not anticipate any ongoing expenses to result from this legislation. The immediate costs of the real estate work would be covered by existing funding, largely from the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program.

Thank you for your time.



TOM TIFFANY

STATE SENATOR • 12TH SENATE DISTRICT

February 27, 2014

Mr. Chairman and members, thank you for holding this hearing.

The hearing you are conducting today is very timely in regard to changing the bobcat season. Over the last few years, I have been hearing from sportsmen across the north that bobcat numbers have increased significantly.

To verify if these anecdotes are accurate, I called for a bobcat hearing in Crandon about a year ago. I found the responses at the hearing informative. Two themes were repeated throughout the discussion in Crandon. One, bobcat numbers are on the increase. Two, bobcats are becoming more prevalent south of Highway 64.

I would like to thank the DNR for expanding the bobcat season to south of Highway 64 with the proposed rule change. I support the WI Bear Hunters Association position, as well as others, on bobcat tags being harvested statewide regardless of zone designation.

The focus of my testimony is on numbers north of Highway 64, which has had a season for a number of decades. Here are a few of the important pieces of information hunters, trappers and concerned sportsmen shared with us at the Crandon hearing:

1. 71% of bobcat tag holders have seen greater numbers of bobcats. This data point is important because hunters are one of the best sources of information of wildlife numbers.
2. Incidental take is high. High numbers of bobcats are being taken by trappers though they are not trapping for bobcats.
3. Concern was expressed about the statistical analysis being used by the DNR to set current numbers. The analysis goes back approximately two decades. Those testifying commented that much has changed in the past 20 years and the statistical analysis may be outdated.
4. Tracking surveys being used are inadequate. While providing some information, the surveys are not comprehensive enough to achieve an actual population count.
5. While Wisconsin has been reducing bobcat harvest numbers over the last decade, Michigan and Minnesota have been increasing their numbers. All three states have similar habitat in their northern areas.

Northern Wisconsin has seen an explosion in predator numbers in the last 20 years. In some areas of the north, predators' favorite food, white-tailed deer, are scarce. For example, Florence County experienced a 38% decline in deer harvest during the 2013 deer season.

My recommendation to the DNR is to increase permits whenever possible in both the northern and southern zones for increased opportunity for hunters and trappers based on updated, current data.

My office is happy to facilitate a meeting with the DNR and knowledgeable stakeholders to verify the significant increase in the bobcat population in northern Wisconsin and to help achieve appropriate harvest goals for the northern zone.

Thank you for hearing my testimony. If any members wish to contact me directly about the very informative Crandon hearing, my staff can furnish you with my personal contact information.

CLEARINGHOUSE RULE 13-067

TESTIMONY

FEBRUARY 27, 2014

Thank you Chairman Ott and members of the Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage Committee for allowing me time to speak to you today regarding Clearinghouse Rule 13-067. Specifically I am here in support of the proposed changes to the rule with regard to bobcats.

There are three reasons that I support this rule:

1. The increased opportunity that is allowed by having the remaining portion of the state open for all sportsmen, hunters and trappers alike, to harvest a bobcat.
2. Secondly, the statewide continuation of the 24 hour emergency closure portion of the rule that will insure that the harvest of bobcats will not exceed the sustainability of this most sought after species.
3. Third, I support this rule change because it allows the harvest permit holder the opportunity to move to the other remaining portion of the state should one of the zones be closed due to the 24 hour emergency closure rule.

I believe that this approach to managing the species is the best of both worlds, for the species and the sportsman combined. I appreciate and thank you again for allowing me to speak to you today and would like to answer any questions you may have.

Submitted by

Al Lobner, President

Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association