



JOAN BALLWEG

STATE SENATOR · 14TH SENATE DISTRICT

Contact: Sen. Joan Ballweg

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(608) 266-0751

Session Series: Supporting Wisconsin Through Our State's Natural Resources

Even under divided government, the Wisconsin Legislature and my office were successful in accomplishing a lot of great things for our state this session. I am introducing a new series of columns, which will take a deeper dive into issues we addressed in sectors ranging from agriculture to health to public safety.

Wisconsin is home to over 15,000 lakes, over 43,000 miles of river shoreline and millions of acres of public land. These natural resources support and affect many important industries ranging from agriculture to tourism to paper and logging. This session, I was appointed to the Senate Natural Resources Committee. I also had the opportunity to lead efforts in this area with my Joint Committee on Finance colleagues in the Senate.

Wisconsin has a deep history of stewardship, and in the state budget, the legislature made investments to continue that tradition by raising the state's waterfowl stamp for the first time since 1997. Revenue from this stamp helps Wisconsin complete waterfowl and wetland conservation projects. Additionally, we approved a four-year reauthorization of the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson Stewardship Program in the state budget. This program was created in 1989 with the goal of preserving valuable wildlife and their habitats, protecting water quality and expanding opportunities for outdoor recreation. This program has supported important projects across the state, including the purchase of what is now known as the Tichora Conservancy in Green Lake, preserving our state's beautiful natural areas for generations to come.

Conservation is just one aspect of supporting our state's natural resources, the legislature also made investments in protecting our state's water quality. I led the charge in approving additional funds for both the Producer-Led Watershed Program and County Conservation Staffing Grants. Together, these programs help farmers implement best practices when it comes to taking care of their land and water. The Producer-Led Watershed Program allows farmers to share best practices on how to conduct nonpoint source water pollution prevention and control. From there, conservation staff assist by providing expertise on how to implement those practices.

Additionally, we voted to continue to fund the recently created Office of Outdoor Recreation, housed within the Department of Tourism. This office is tasked with promoting our state's natural resources and expanding our status as a destination for outdoor fun and relaxation, celebrating all that Wisconsin has to offer.

On the committee side of things, we were able to make strides in this area as well. Bills of significance that passed through the natural resources committee and were ultimately signed into law include:

- [2021 Wisconsin Act 47](#), which specifies riparian rights for property owners whose land abuts an artificial waterway or flowage. Wisconsin is home to approximately 240 flowages, and this legislation provides clarification for thousands of waterfront property owners.
- [2021 Wisconsin Act 67](#), which delays the sunset for the Private Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Grant Program. This program assists residential and small commercial owners, who meet conditions, in covering the cost of repairing or replacing failing onsite wastewater treatment systems. Repairing these systems is important in preventing potentially hazardous untreated water from getting discharged into our groundwater, which can cause contaminated drinking water, contribute to water pollution and increase the population of disease-bearing organisms.
- [2021 Wisconsin Act 173](#), which allows the Department of Natural Resources to utilize up to \$5.6 million in unobligated Stewardship funds from previous years to work through a backlog of water infrastructure projects. Examples of projects include the replacement of water systems and addition of new wells and drinking fountains in high-use areas.

These investments reinforce that Wisconsin is a beautiful place to live and raise a family and continues to make us a vacation destination for folks from across the United States.

I am two years into my four-year term, and I am looking forward to building upon the important work done this legislative session. I will take this summer to research and refine proposals, hold listening sessions, tour facilities around the district and assist with constituents navigating state processes. If you have ideas or suggestions for future proposals, please do not hesitate to reach out to my office.

To reach Sen. Ballweg with questions or comments please call (608) 266-0751 or email Sen.Ballweg@legis.wi.gov. Visit her website, legis.wisconsin.gov/senate/14/ballweg, to subscribe to her weekly e-update.

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