



Budget Proposal Slashes Environmental Protection, Silences Citizen Voices

"Our plan will use common-sense reforms to create a government that is limited in scope and ultimately more effective, more efficient and more accountable to the public," [Mr. Walker told lawmakers and other officials in a speech in Madison.](#)

For those who care about clean water, air and land, the budget released by the governor this week is a Trojan horse full of hidden damage. The proposals go far beyond the slashing of dollars from the DNR and its programs and flies in the face of claims of "more accountability."

Provisions in this budget paint a clear picture of an administration concentrating power in the politically appointed DNR Secretary and silencing the public's voice when it comes to the natural resources that belong to us all.



It's also important to point out that several of the provisions (such as the first three listed below) are not budget-related and result in absolutely zero savings. To date, provisions include:

Stripping Natural Resources Board of its regulatory powers.

The 7-member Natural Resources Board, made up of citizens appointed by the governor, can approve, oppose or modify DNR policy proposals, and must conduct their business transparently and with robust public input. The NRB has been a vehicle of inquiry for everyday citizens with questions or concerns about DNR policy-making. Walker's budget proposes to strip the regulatory authority from this board and make it advisory only - advice the DNR secretary can take or leave.

[Current NRB member Christine Thomas put it best:](#) "Our transparent and open process has been the envy of most states for decades. Every other piece of government that interacts in the policy process has the right to do it behind closed doors. And we don't."

Neutering the Conservation Congress. Conservation Congress is a venerated tradition of local anglers, hunters, conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts who elect delegates to advise the Natural Resources Board on how to responsibly manage Wisconsin's natural resources. The proposed changes in the state budget make the Conservation Congress an advisory body to an advisory board.

Eliminating grants to non-profits to engage citizens with their local waters and natural areas. DNR has historically contracted with non-profit organizations (including the River Alliance) to educate and engage citizens around natural resources, from hunting and fishing outreach and education to river planning, lake management, land trust assistance, forestry certifications, open space protection and naturalist education.

These contracts and grants were a bargain for the DNR, leveraging a small amount of money for a huge amount of work across the state with thousands of local citizens. DNR's own internal analysis found they could not accomplish this work internally with the same amount of money. Eliminating funding for these groups cuts off yet another avenue for meaningful participation and resource protection by ordinary citizens.

Freezing the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund. The Governor's budget proposes to functionally dismantle the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund until 2028. While dressed up as a way to keep the DNR from buying too much land, this change also closes the door for local Wisconsin communities to match their funds with Stewardship funding for parks and open space.

Slashing DNR scientists. The budget eliminates scores of staff positions in DNR, but specifically targets scientists. The budget would cut the tiny 33-person science staff by more than half. The thinking behind this seems to be if the science behind resource management conflicts with the politics of resource management, you get rid of the science.

All of us who care about clean water, and fair, transparent decision-making around water have our work cut out for us. Our elected leaders have made it clear they are looking to hear what their constituents think. In the coming months, we will need your help in sending a clear message to the Capitol that clean water and the right to fair access to policy-making are not negotiable in Wisconsin.