



Robert Bohmann, Chair
1105 Melvin Ave.
Racine, WI 53402
608-235-5825

Larry Bonde, Vice-Chair
22514 Rockville Road
Kiel, WI 53042
920-286-3327

Joe Weiss, Secretary
Jayne Meyer, Public Relations
Alan Suchla, Historian

MEDIA RELEASE

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Contacts: Rob Bohmann, 262-498-4605

Wisconsin Conservation Congress Opposes Proposed Change to Natural Resources Board; Urges Citizens to Take Action by Contacting Their Legislators

Racine - The Conservation Congress is calling on conservationists, outdoor recreationalists, and sporting groups of all kinds to contact their state legislators and request that the state's independent Natural Resources Board (NRB) be allowed to retain their policy making authority. The recently proposed 2015-2017 state budget would strip the board of its authority to make conservation policy for the Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The NRB is part of an 88 year-old system that was engineered to keep conservation insulated from political influences. And throughout the history of the board, Wisconsin has remained a national leader in environmental protection and conservation efforts.

In a recent letter addressed to Governor Walker and Wisconsin State Legislators, Rob Bohmann, Chair of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress (WCC), stated, "This proposed change would take the policy-making authority from the public arena to the political arena. Giving the policy-making authority solely to the department secretary would potentially allow for important natural resource decisions to be made behind closed doors without any public vetting."

The budget item eliminates the NRB's policy-making authority and makes the board advisory to the DNR secretary. Under the proposed changes in this budget, the WCC would become advisory to the DNR secretary as well.

He goes on to say, "Any potential gains in efficiency that may result from this proposal do not justify the loss of an open and transparent government. The division of power and citizen involvement is essential for the long-term management of the state's resources which are held in public trust and belong to all citizens of the state."

Currently, natural resource policy decisions are made at public meetings which citizens are welcome to attend, participate in, or view online. The NRB utilizes research and recommendations from agency experts, as well as input from the Conservation Congress, sporting groups, and citizens to help shape the decisions they make.

“The unsurpassed level of citizen involvement we have in the management of our state’s resources is the envy of many other states,” said Bohmann who is Chair of the Conservation Congress, the NRB’s statutorily created citizen advisory body. “Nowhere else in Wisconsin state government do the people of this state have such a direct avenue for input as through the Wisconsin Conservation Congress and the Natural Resources Board.”

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As established by Wisconsin State Statutes, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress is officially recognized as the only natural resources advisory body in the state where citizens elect delegates to represent their interests on natural resources issues on a local and statewide level to the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources. Their mission is to represent the citizens of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's greatest asset, our abundant natural resources, for present and future generations to enjoy.