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September 25, 2013 Testimony on Assembly Bill 380,

Relating to: a cumulative preference system for sturgeon spearing permits and the transfer of a sturgeon spearing license to a minor.

Good morning Chairperson Ott and members of the Committee.

Today, I would like to speak in favor of Assembly Bill 380, legislation that will encourage participation in one of Wisconsin's favorite past times – sturgeon spearing.

The need for this bill was identified at the 2012 Fish and Wildlife Spring Hearings where there was broad public support for changing the way the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) issues upriver sturgeon spearing tags.

Under current law, the DNR issues permits to limit the number of persons allowed to take sturgeon. If the number of applicants for permits exceeds the number of available permits, the DNR must issue the permits according to a cumulative preference system. Under this system, each season an applicant for a permit who does not receive a permit is issued one preference point. Applicants fall within a preference category, and a higher priority is given to those categories with more preference points.

As sturgeon spearkers know, it can take up to five years to receive a tag. Sometimes, a person will know in advance that they will not be able to use a harvest tag in a given year. Unfortunately, the way that the law is written, if you do not apply, you cannot receive any preference points. Additionally, if a person applies for a tag and doesn't use it, all accumulated preference points will be lost.

In order to correct this problem, the bill provides two application options: you can either apply for a sturgeon spearing permit, or apply for a preference point only.

Secondly, this legislation changes the process for transferring a license to a minor. Under current law, during a period beginning on November 1, someone who has a sturgeon spearing license can transfer the license to a minor by applying to the DNR and paying a transfer fee. This bill changes the beginning of the transfer period to October 1.

The story of Wisconsin's Lake Sturgeon is something we can all be proud of. It is the only population of sturgeon in the world to have been nearly extinct, and then revived through the efforts of many dedicated people. I'm honored to have a part in keeping sturgeon spearing an integral part of Wisconsin's fishing heritage.

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Testimony of the Department of Natural Resources

AB 380. Sturgeon (Steineke) Cumulative preference system for sturgeon spearing and transferring of licenses

Sturgeon spearing is a very popular recreational activity on the Lake Winnebago System with an economic impact to the region during the average 12 day season of over \$3.5 million dollars. The Department has conducted and managed annual seasons there since 1932. Lake sturgeon are very vulnerable to over exploitation, and as such, Fisheries staff, working closely with the Winnebago Citizens Advisory Committee develop annual harvest caps and have worked over the years to develop the current season format and harvest management objectives. The three lakes upstream of Lake Winnebago (the Upriver Lakes – Buttes des Morts, Winneconne, and Poygan) have a separate annual spearing season (concurrent with the season on Lake Winnebago in February) in which effort is managed through a lottery limiting the number of licenses issued there each year.

This bill will provide important license options to sturgeon spears applying for or receiving via the lottery a sturgeon spearing license for the annual winter sturgeon spearing season on the Upriver Lakes. To maintain sturgeon harvest from these lakes at acceptable and safe levels, the Department limits the number of licenses issued to 500 per year out of more than 4000 annual applicants. Under this bill applicants would be able to apply for a preference point OR a chance at being drawn for a license. Also a person issued a license from the lottery would be able to transfer their Upriver Lakes sturgeon spearing license to a youth after October 1 giving them an opportunity to then purchase a spearing license for Lake Winnebago prior to the October 31 sales deadline. License numbers are not restricted on Lake Winnebago. This bill was discussed and supported by the Winnebago Citizens Sturgeon Advisory Committee at their September 2012 annual meeting.

The Department would be happy to provide any additional information or answer any questions.

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