



GAE MAGNAFICI

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 28th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: 2021 Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation

FROM: Representative Gae Magnafici

DATE: February 9th, 2022

SUBJECT: Written Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 672

Good afternoon, Representative Mursau and members of the Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks, and Outdoor Recreation. Thank you for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 672, which requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to prepare a report identifying public access opportunities for publically accessible lands.

Maintaining a solid sporting heritage in Wisconsin is a top priority of mine. As an avid supporter of outdoor recreation and an advocate for transparency in government, I understand the importance of Wisconsinites knowing what public land is accessible to them.

Assembly Bill 672 requires the DNR to report public land access opportunities to the Legislature. This includes lands owned and managed by the DNR, land acquired under the Warren Knowles-Gaylord Nelson stewardship program, and publically accessible managed forest land.

The report will detail access points to the land, miles of roads open or closed, seasonal restrictions, and whether motor vehicles can access the land.

The public should be confident the DNR is reflective of the public's desire to access public lands for hunting and other sporting opportunities.

Thank you to Senator Marklein for co-authoring this bill, and thank you to Hunter Nation for supporting our proposal. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.



Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation

2021 Assembly Bill 672

Report on Access to Public Lands Owned or Managed by the DNR

February 9, 2022

Good afternoon Chair Mursau and members of the Committee. My name is Jim Lemke, Real Estate Section Chief for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Joining me to assist with questions is Skya Murphy, Forestry Tax Law Policy Specialist. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to Assembly Bill 672 (AB 672), related to a report identifying public access opportunities on all lands owned or managed by the department.

The department currently produces the Public Lands Atlas, a comprehensive publication covering much of the information required for reporting under AB 672. The atlas is available to the public for free online and can also be purchased in a printed format or on CD. The publication contains over 460 pages of maps identifying publicly accessible lands owned, managed, or leased by the department. The atlas also includes public access lands owned by towns and counties, the Board of Commissioners of Public Lands and all federal lands within the state of Wisconsin. Within this publication, road access points, parking lots, and boat landings are all identified for easy identification and use by the public. A comprehensive review would be necessary to meet the requirements of AB 672, including an analysis of over 890 DNR-owned properties.

Currently 3,475,373 acres of lands are enrolled in Managed Forest Law (MFL) lands, of which 1,029,893 acres are enrolled and designated as open to public access. Open designation allows public access to the property for hunting, fishing, hiking, sight-seeing and cross-country skiing. As per statute, the department publishes and maintains online maps indicating the location of MFL lands open for public foot access, and further identifies a specific access point to these lands. Each MFL parcel must be accessible by either foot, by public road, or from other land which is also open to public access.

Since the department does not require landowners to report the presence or status of roads on Open MFL, consistent with foot-only access being provided for in statute, producing the report called for under the bill would necessitate collection of new information and creation of records the department does not currently maintain.

Requiring landowners to provide additional information about how to access Open MFL at more than one point and about roads on MFL would require changes to the application process to gather this information from approximately 5,542 landowners, and the department would need additional authority to require landowners to provide this information. Further, the effect of requesting additional information about Open MFL could dissuade landowners from choosing to enroll their land as open to public access.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, I would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



HOWARD MARKLEIN

STATE SENATOR • 17TH SENATE DISTRICT

February 9, 2022

Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation Testimony on Assembly Bill (AB) 672 and Senate Bill (SB) 615

Good morning!

Thank you Chair Mursau and committee members for hearing AB 672/SB 615, companion bills that would require the DNR to prepare a report that identifies public access opportunities on all lands owned or managed by DNR, land acquired under the Knowles-Nelson stewardship program, and open managed forest lands.

In the 2011-2013 biennial state budget, and in subsequent Acts, the Wisconsin State Legislature focused on the importance of providing access to state lands and lands acquired under the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship program. Guidance from the legislature was to improve access through signage, directories and policy. The emphasis was to err on the side of access, understanding that access to the lands funded by public dollars needs to be accessible. Over the past decade additional emphasis has been placed on providing vehicular access especially on established roads. Often these roads are gated and blocked, restricting adequate access to aging hunters and hunters with disabilities and/or mobility challenges.

AB 672/SB 615 would require DNR to conduct an audit to see how much access currently exists, and once complete will give the agency and the legislature the ability to assess how well the DNR is heeding the frequent calls to improve access to its properties.

The senate version of the bill was amended to make two changes. First, the amendment adds the following two categories of land to the list of lands that DNR must include in the report: 1) lands acquired with funding made available to the DNR, and 2) certain wetlands for which current law requires public access, including wetlands that are created, enhanced, or restored through the state's in-lieu fee program for wetland mitigation and wetlands restored with certain state funds. Second, in addition to the report, the amendment requires DNR to publish a single geographic information system (GIS) map identifying each property identified in the report.

Thank you again to the chairman and committee for holding this hearing. These bills are part of the Sporting Freedom package of legislation, which is about simplifying the DNR rules and regulations, so whether you're a seasoned hunter, angler or new to the sport, you can be part of the sporting culture in Wisconsin.

I am proud to be a part of this effort to protect and defend our sporting freedoms and heritage. I look forward to working with my colleagues to advance this legislation.