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To: Assembly Committee on Environment

From: State Representative Clint P. Moses

Date: June 8, 2023

Subject: Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 157

Thank you Chairman Oldenburg and committee members for allowing me to testify on Assembly Bill 157, relating to the creation of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) habitat work plan.

Assembly Bill 157 will require the DNR to create a plan every 2 years that outlines goals and priorities for habitat work on lands overseen. The DNR owns and manages over 1.6 million acres of properties on behalf of Wisconsin's 5.9 million residents. The properties provide a wide range of recreation opportunities and diverse of habitats throughout the state.

The DNR does complete specific habitat management plans for each individual property within the Divisions of Fish, Wildlife, Parks and Forestry. However, there is seldom if ever a **single** report that establishes annual goals, progress and outcomes for the overall state habitat management. Without targets, tracking and reporting, it is impossible to determine if the agency is meeting its obligation to manage these lands. Any successful organization knows you cannot improve on what you don't measure.

In addition, I introduced an amendment to include the Joint Finance Committee and relevant standing committees in the legislature, such as the Assembly Committee on Environment to receive the habitat plan from the DNR. This way the natural resources board as well as the legislature are able to see the outcomes for our state habitat management.

This bill will increase transparency and accountability on how the DNR manages land. This bill will provide insight on the DNR plans and goals, while allowing the Legislature and DNR to address their budgets to suit the needs of Wisconsinites. Outdoorsmen and women deserve to be informed on how the DNR plans to manage our public lands. Put simply, Assembly Bill 157 will increase transparency on our public lands and insure good stewardship.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 157.



Romaine Robert Quinn

STATE SENATOR • 25TH SENATE DISTRICT

From: Senator Romaine Robert Quinn
To: Assembly Committee on Environment
Re: **Testimony on AB 157**
Relating to: Department of Natural Resources habitat work plan
Date: June 8, 2023

Thank you for hearing Assembly Bill 157. This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources to create a biennial work plan that establishes priorities and goals for habitat work on lands managed by DNR and measures progress on established priorities and goals. DNR must annually report its progress under the work plan to the Natural Resources Board. Assembly Amendment 1 requires that the report also be sent to the Joint Committee on Finance and the relevant standing committees.

DNR manages over 1.6 million acres of properties on behalf of Wisconsin residents. These lands include a wide ranging diversity of habitats throughout the state, but what is often lacking is a single report that conveys progress, goals, and outcomes associated with their management. The state needs a common set of priorities and goals to measure success when maintaining our state lands.

Every two years during the state budget process, the Legislature considers how to allocate resources to the stewardship program and the department overall. A work plan that coincides with the budget would be a valuable resource in the process and help the Legislature make spending decisions.

It is my understanding the department has a variety of monitoring and requirements in place for habitat management. Under this bill, the DNR could provide a master plan for habitat work, as well as identifying all individual habitat work plans within the agency, and include beneficial information such as which types of habitat are receiving work, which species are affected, and the costs and funding sources for all habitat work projects.

This legislation has received bipartisan support, unanimously passing the Assembly Committee on Environment (9-0) last session. The companion bill SB 159 passed yesterday in the State Senate on a voice vote.

The goal of the bill is to increase transparency and accountability on managing the state's lands. Residents of the state, especially those who love the outdoors and recreation, deserve to know how the state is managing their lands. Thank you for your consideration.



Assembly Committee on Environment
2023 Assembly Bill 157
Department of Natural Resources Habitat Work Plan
June 8, 2023

Good morning, Chair Oldenburg, and members of the Committee. My name is Tim Lizotte, and I am the Land and Habitat Conservation Supervisor for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Management Program. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Assembly Bill 157, related to the department's habitat work plan.

Assembly Bill 157 requires the department to develop a department-wide habitat management work plan with specific habitat priorities and objectives, following the state's biennial budget cycle. The bill also requires the department to annually report on habitat management accomplishments to the Natural Resources Board.

Currently, each habitat program within the Divisions of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and Forestry create annual habitat work plans specific to their program and aligned with available staff and appropriate funding resources. Planned habitat treatments and accomplishments are tracked with the Wisconsin Field Inventory and Reporting System (WisFIRS) geospatial database. All terrestrial and selected aquatic habitat work is tracked in WisFIRS. Habitat planning and accomplishments are publicly reported on the department's website through the Annual Property Implementation Planning (APIP) process. APIPs share the major scheduled and completed forest and habitat management treatments. Additional reports are generated to meet requirements associated with habitat stamp funding and federal grants.

In planning for FY24, the wildlife program dramatically revised habitat work planning and funding allocation utilizing a new habitat strategy. Starting with FY24, funding is allocated based on project submissions in a semi-competitive format. Projects are developed by field biologists and evaluated based on newly developed habitat management guides and priority maps. The guides delineate primary management goals and techniques for six critical cover types within the state. The priority maps spatially delineate high, medium, and low priority areas for each of these cover types statewide. Funding is preferentially allocated to high priority geographies first, whereas low priority areas are generally not considered for the limited funding we must allocate. For FY25, implementation of the habitat strategy will be enhanced by including additional cover types and developing habitat quality evaluation metrics. By FY26, high priority areas will have habitat goals tied to measurable, time-explicit objectives. The goal of this process is to focus increasingly limited resources towards areas where gains can be made for the greatest overall ecological and social benefit.

Habitat management remains a top priority for the department, and the programs that manage habitats are already collaborating to focus resources on areas of mutual interest for greater overall benefit to the state of Wisconsin. While habitat plans and accomplishments are currently reported by program, unified planning and reporting across all programs could continue to improve our effectiveness and maximize best uses of state and federal funds, as well as critically important funds from hunters, donors, and granting organizations. Under this bill, planning and reporting systems would likely need to be

significantly updated, which would require additional spending by all programs involved. Funding integrity and intent would need to be maintained as the habitat programs have varied goals and funding sources. While this is achievable, the timeline and total costs are *hard to determine*. Without additional funding, the costs of updating our planning and reporting systems could reduce the amount spent on habitat management in the interim.

It should be noted that the department's 2010 Managed Lands Needs Assessment identified a significant gap between available resources and those needed to optimally manage Wisconsin's habitat resources. Since that time, costs have increased, along with challenges such as a growing number of invasive species. Adjusting the 2010 assessment for inflation, we estimate a habitat funding gap of approximately \$4.7 million. Recently, the Natural Resources Board (NRB) adopted a resolution at their April 12, 2023, meeting "in support of the provision of adequate funding for habitat management programs and the maintenance of public lands and facilities for the benefit of wildlife and the people we serve." The NRB resolved that the resolution be transmitted to the Joint Committee on Finance. Additional habitat funding could also assist with the development of a more comprehensive, unified, and effective approach to *habitat management across the department*.

To clarify the bill, authors could define the target wildlife species and the *habitat management practices* desired for planning and reporting and the overall intent of the bill, as individual programs may already be meeting the goals identified here. If the need is not currently being met, ensuring those needs are well *defined will greatly aid developing a comprehensive system* to meet reporting and work planning needs while increasing efficiency and speed of implementation.

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