



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #588

Aquatic Invasive Species -- Boat Ambassadors (DNR -- Water Quality)

Bill Agency

[LFB 2007-09 Budget Summary: Page 422, #2]

CURRENT LAW

Section 23.22(5) of the statutes requires DNR, as part of the statewide aquatic invasive species management plan, to: (a) create a watercraft inspection program; (b) conduct periodic inspections of boats, boating equipment, and boat trailers entering and leaving navigable waters; and (c) educate boaters about the threat of aquatic invasive species. The water resources account of the conservation fund provides the primary support for the state's aquatic invasive species program. Funds are used for monitoring aquatic invasive species, public education and boat inspection efforts, and for research related to the control of invasive animal and plant species. In addition, funding is used to conduct diagnostic studies, support demonstration projects and develop and distribute information on lakes and river management to lake districts and waterfront property owners.

GOVERNOR

Provide \$215,500 SEG annually from the water resources account of the conservation fund for LTE support to manage aquatic invasive species.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. The bill would provide funding for two LTE "boat ambassadors" in each of the five DNR regions, providing 10 staff for 24 weeks during the boating season. The boat ambassadors would be credentialed law enforcement officers (conservation wardens). These LTE wardens would visit boat landings to conduct public education and enforcement of aquatic invasive regulations.

2. The Department indicates it needs additional staff to enforce aquatic invasive species regulations. They argue that the planned education and enforcement efforts will have a significant effect on boater behavior and slow the spread of invasive species. Further, the recent discovery of viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) in the Lake Winnebago/Fox River system highlights the need to minimize the transport of invasives.

3. While the Governor recommends funding from the water resources account, the boat registration account could also be considered. The Department indicates that combating aquatic invasive species is a Department priority, and that the boat registration account of the conservation fund could be used to fund the boat ambassadors. Article IX of the Wisconsin Constitution specifies that the state’s navigable waters “shall be common highways and forever free” to Wisconsin and U.S. citizens “without any tax, impost, or duty therefore.” As a result, the use of revenue from boat registration fees has been limited to boating safety and law enforcement purposes by court interpretation of this constitutional provision. The boat ambassadors would conduct both boating safety and law enforcement activities. Therefore, the boat registration account would be an appropriate source of funding for this purpose. With Committee action to date, the boat registration account would be expected to have a closing balance of \$400,000 on June 30, 2009. One alternative could be to shift \$215,500 in 2008-09 to the boat registration account. Under this alternative, the boat registration account would have an expected balance of approximately \$180,000 on June 30, 2009. However, shifting additional costs to the boat account would likely increase the need for boat registration fee increases in the 2009-11 biennium.

4. If no additional funds are provided, DNR would continue to rely on volunteer boat inspection efforts to supplement DNR enforcement officers.

ALTERNATIVES TO BILL

1. Adopt the Governor’s recommendation to provide \$215,500 water resources SEG annually for LTE law enforcement support to manage aquatic invasive species.

ALT 1	Change to Bill Funding	Change to Base Funding
SEG	\$0	\$431,000

2. Provide \$215,500 water resources SEG in 2007-08 and \$215,500 boat registration SEG beginning in 2008-09 for LTE boat ambassadors.

ALT 2	Change to Bill Funding	Change to Base Funding
SEG	\$0	\$431,000

3. Delete provision.

ALT 3	Change to Bill Funding	Change to Base Funding
SEG	-\$431,000	\$0

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