



STATE SENATOR

Eric Wimberger

DISTRICT 30

Testimony on Senate Bill 612

Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues

Tuesday, October 19, 2021

Chairman Stafsholt and Members,

Thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on Senate Bill 612, which would require the DNR to annually stock Lake Michigan with at least 100,000 brook trout. As you know, Mr. Chairman, this bill is part of the Wisconsin Sporting Freedom Package, a group of initiatives designed to preserve and enhance Wisconsin's heritage of fishing, hunting and trapping not only today but for future generations.

This initiative to stock Lake Michigan with brook trout is right in line with the long established practice of maintaining and stocking our lakes, rivers, and streams for the enjoyment of today's anglers and the tradition of future anglers. The brook trout is a particularly popular sport fish because it stays close to the shore of Lake Michigan, making it accessible for all types of anglers. Fishing has an important economic impact on this state's economy and increasing opportunities for more anglers along the shores of Lake Michigan will not only benefit the sport but the local economies as well.

With this bill being one of many important initiatives in this sporting package, I am proud to stand up for the men and women who want to be seen as partners in economic impact, management, and easy access to some of the great resources this state has to offer. Investing in wildlife and protecting habitat is an essential part of Wisconsin's sporting heritage.

I hope you will look favorably on this Brook Trout Initiative as well as all of the legislation in the Sporting Freedom Package.

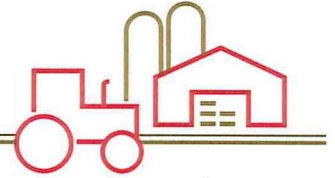
Thank you for taking the time to hear our testimony this morning. I will be happy to take any questions.

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ELIJAH BEHNKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 89th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT



10/19/2021

Testimony on Senate Bill 612, Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues

Chairman Stafsholt and Members of the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues,

Thank you for holding a public hearing today and allowing me to testify in favor of Senate Bill 612, which requires the Department of Natural Resources to stock 100,000 brook trout in Lake Michigan annually.

Wisconsin fishing tourism dates back to the 1800's when transportation became more widely available. People desired refuge from the bustling cities and turned to areas of the state that connected them more to nature.

Over the years when people moved from farms to cities, they looked back on their family pastimes such as fishing, which started the tourism industry in the early 20th century. As recreational driving became more popular at this time, it also added to the growth of tourism to more rural areas known for fishing.

Looking at data that dates back to the 70's through 2000, Wisconsin was stocking hundreds of thousands of brook trout in Lake Michigan. This brought the state a lot of tourism and shore fishermen.

Since 2004, there have been no brook trout has been stocked in Lake Michigan with the exception of 2010, where only 40,546 were stocked. Due to this, Wisconsin's fishing tourism was put on a back burner.

Fishing and tourism bring significant revenue to Wisconsin. Not only would this bill be great for recreational purposes for Wisconsin citizens, it would also benefit Wisconsin's economy. If we can bring more fishing to this state, more people will travel to Wisconsin.

We need to ensure we keep Wisconsin sporting heritage alive, we need to stock more brook trout in Lake Michigan. This heritage is built on the idea of Wisconsinites responsibly enjoying fishing, trapping and hunting. The only way to continue this tradition is to pass SB 612.

Thank you again for holding this hearing on Senate Bill 612 and allowing me to testify in favor of it. I am happy to answer any questions you many have.



Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business, and Rural Issues

2021 Senate Bill 612 Stocking Brook Trout in Lake Michigan October 19, 2021

Good morning Chair Stafsholt and members of the Committee. My name is Todd Kalish, and I am the Deputy Director of the Bureau of Fisheries Management for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Joining me today to assist with questions is Meredith Penthorn, Policy Specialist. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Senate Bill 612 (SB 612).

The DNR incorporates biological, social, and economic factors into all stocking decisions by following a structured, science-based, and inclusive process for developing, implementing, and evaluating stocking initiatives. The department has a long history of collaborating with stakeholders in the development, implementation, and evaluation of management initiatives for Lake Michigan. A requirement to stock at least 100,000 brook trout in Lake Michigan has not been discussed or recommended during any recent stakeholder engagement processes, including the 2020-2022 Lake Michigan stocking planning process.

The department is currently implementing the 2020-2022 Lake Michigan stocking plan, which includes the annual stocking of 50,000 brook trout. This plan was extensively vetted with stakeholders and includes a structured process to evaluate its effectiveness. The current brook trout stocking plan is being evaluated through biological and creel surveys to assess whether the initiative is successful. Results of the evaluation will be assessed in 2022 and 2023, and a determination will be made in consultation with stakeholders to increase, decrease, or change the stocking of brook trout in the fall of 2023.

The department has a structured assessment protocol to evaluate fish stocked in the state. Fish stocking numbers, locations, genetic strains, and life stages are constantly adjusted to maximize survivability and angler catch rates. SB 612 does not allow any flexibility to adjust stocking to maximize its effectiveness. In addition, if angler catch rates of stocked brook trout are very low, we would not be able to discontinue stocking these fish in favor of other species. Stocking is one of many tools the department uses to enhance fisheries throughout the state. A directive to stock a certain number of fish only highlights one tool we have. Other management activities such as habitat protection and enhancement are just as important as stocking.

The goal of many stocking initiatives is to stop stocking once natural reproduction is restored to levels that support a sustainable population. SB 612 does not address stopping stocking even if it is no longer warranted. The department respectfully requests consideration of the existing efforts of the department and numerous stakeholders to develop, implement, and evaluate the current Lake Michigan stocking plan and suggests vetting potential changes through a collaborative stakeholder engagement process that incorporates the relevant biological, social, and economic data.

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



October 19, 2021

RE: *Wisconsin TU is opposed to SB612 – Brook Trout Stocking Quota for Lake Michigan*

Members of the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business, and Rural Issues:

My name is Mike Kuhr, I'm a small business owner, and volunteer leader for Wisconsin Trout Unlimited ("WITU"). Trout Unlimited is our Nation's leading cold water conservation organization. Here in Wisconsin, we're home to over 6,800 members and 21 local chapters working to ensure future generations' access to cold, clean, fishable water. I'm here to express our organizations opposition to SB612, which would require the DNR to stock 100,000 brook trout into Lake Michigan annually.

Our members value the recreational opportunities provided by Wisconsin's woods and waters. We would like to thank Senator Wimberger, Representative Behnke, and the co-sponsors of SB612 for bringing attention to Wisconsin's native brook trout, which can be found in cold, clean streams, spring ponds, and our Great Lakes.

WITU is supportive of efforts to increase brook trout populations in the Great Lakes, including the DNR's current initiative to re-introduce brook trout populations in Lake Michigan. However, we do not support an unfunded, legislatively mandated stocking quota for any Wisconsin water body. In order to best serve the anglers of Wisconsin, we believe fisheries management should be based on science, allowed to change over time, and not dictated by meeting an arbitrary annual stocking quota.

WITU views SB612 as a missed opportunity. Wisconsin's native brook trout populations, which require cold water to survive, are already stressed. Recent studies conclude that our brook trout could lose two-thirds of their suitable habitat in the next 50 years due mainly to rising temperatures. The DNR has recently identified areas, known as brook trout reserves, where these fish have the best chance to thrive. We have the tools in place to protect brook trout – land and easement purchases through the Knowles Nelson Stewardship Program and habitat restoration partially funded by the Inland Trout Stamp, a user fee that hasn't seen an increase since 2006.

If the legislature wants to improve the outlook for native brook trout in Wisconsin, we suggest raising the Inland Trout Stamp fee, which is funding the restoration work needed to protect these fish.

Wisconsin Trout Unlimited looks forward to working with the legislature to create policies that will be beneficial to our native brook trout, Wisconsin anglers, and our communities.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to public service.

Sincerely,

Mike Kuhr

Wisconsin Trout Unlimited, State Council Chair

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The Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited ("WITU") is a 501(c) 3 non-profit organization which consists of approximately 6,800 volunteer members in 21 chapters in Wisconsin working to ensure that future generations have access to cold, clean, fishable water. In a typical year, WITU and its Chapters report over 50,000 volunteer hours, working on conservation projects, youth education events, and operating veterans service programs at the VA hospitals in Milwaukee, Madison, and Green Bay.