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Testimony on Senate Bill 614

Thank you Chairman Stafsholt and committee members for hearing our testimony on Senate Bill 614. This is a simple bill to require the Department of Natural Resources to create a biennial work plan to set priorities and goals for lands they manage. It should be a simple request that would help the Legislature make spending decisions every two years.

The DNR owns and manages 1.6 million acres across the state. 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 for this process.

The state needs a common set of priorities and goals to measure our success by when growing and maintaining our state lands. This is a common sense request to the Department that should have been done a long time ago.

Residents of the state, whether they are hunters, trappers, anglers, snowmobilers, or just lovers of the outdoors deserve to know how the state is managing their lands.

Thank you for taking my testimony and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



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

From: State Representative Clint P. Moses

Date: October 19, 2021

Subject: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 614

Thank you Chairman Stafsholt and committee members for allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 614, relating to the creation of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) habitat work plan.

Senate Bill 614 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 5.8 million residents. The properties provide a wide range of recreation opportunities and diversity of habitats throughout the state. The DNR manages these lands, but there is seldom if ever a single report that establishes an annual goal, progress and outcomes associated with this 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.

This bill will increase transparency and accountability on how the DNR manages land. This bill will provide insight on the plans of the DNR and allow Legislature to address their budgets to suit the needs of Wisconsinites. Outdoorsmen and women deserve to be informed about the plans of how the DNR manages land. Put simply, this Senate Bill 614 will increase transparency on our public lands.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 614.



Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Small Business and Rural Issues

2021 Senate Bill 614 Department of Natural Resources Habitat Work Plan October 19, 2021

Good morning Chair Stafsholt and members of the Committee. My name is Anne Reis, Public Lands Specialist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Senate Bill 614 (SB 614), related to department habitat work plans.

SB 614 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.

Current habitat work completed by the department is work-planned annually by the specific habitat management programs within the Divisions of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and Forestry. Existing habitat management planning is in place to accurately allocate funding, and accomplishment reporting is largely administered to meet requirements associated with stamp funding and federal grants. For habitat planning work, the department follows the Annual Property Implementation Plan (APIP) process. The APIP process allows the department to monitor property planning implementation and track habitat work affected by forest certification. All forest and non-forest, and some aquatic habitat work, is entered into the Wisconsin Field Inventory & Reporting System (WisFIRS). Data and information contained in this system are provided for review on the department's website. Additional work planning, budgeting, and reporting systems exist, and others are in development, to accommodate program business needs.

By its nature, habitat management work can be affected by several variables, especially site access and precipitation. For this reason, planning for two years could be problematic at the property scale as these variables may not allow the work to take place during the biennium. Developing work plans at a regional or statewide scale instead addresses this issue. Existing planning systems have the capacity for including aquatic habitat management planning and reporting in the future, however there would be additional workload to incorporate aquatic habitat management work into a biennial work plan and report. Funding would be needed to continue development of data systems, for annual maintenance and programming costs, and training for staff.

The bill authors could consider clearly defining the habitat management practices desired for planning and reporting. Defining habitat management into forest and non-forest would best fit our current approach to scheduling and reporting, minimizing the need for new system development, maintenance, and training. Adding aquatic habitat management would require considerable new system development.

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.