



# WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

P. O. Box 7882 Madison, WI 53707-7882

January 3, 2006

The Honorable Carol Roessler, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Audit  
Room 8 South, State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53703

The Honorable Sue Jeskewitz, Co-Chair  
Joint Committee on Audit  
Room 314 North, State Capitol  
Madison, WI 53703

Dear Co-Chairs Roessler and Jeskewitz:

We respectfully request that the Joint Committee on Audit conduct an audit of Wisconsin's wetlands permitting and mitigation programs. The audit should include a comparison of Wisconsin's wetlands designation and permitting processes to similar programs in the state of Minnesota, as well as internal review of processes utilized by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) by comparing process efficiency in three or more of its regions.

The people of Wisconsin and Minnesota value their wetlands for the role they play in conserving wildlife and fish habitat, maintaining floral diversity and providing flood protection. Both states are proud of their natural environments, and each is dedicated to protecting those resources for generations to come through its public policies.

The audit we propose affords the opportunity for a side-by-side review of the two states' programs to determine how they compare in balancing the need for wetlands preservation with responsible economic development. A comparison of each state's laws, policies and procedures regarding wetlands permitting and mitigation standards will provide valuable information for Wisconsin policymakers and program administrators.

We ask that the Audit Bureau include in its examination the following aspects of Minnesota's programming:

- Wetlands classification, mapping and delineation: We understand that both states utilize qualified private sector professionals to review and map wetlands throughout the state. Please review and compare the two state's processes in this area, and the efficiency of the two systems.
- Mitigation ratios: Please review and compare each state's use of mitigation ratios. In addition, we would appreciate an examination of Wisconsin's use of ratios and comparison between DNR regions.
- Use of credits: It's our understanding that Minnesota law includes incentives that promote better overall habitat creation or restoration. We would appreciate a review of Minnesota's system and a comparison to similar provisions in Wisconsin law, rules or policy.

- Permitting rates: Please compare the number of wetland permits requested and granted in the two states annually, for the past ten years.


As a final aspect of the audit, we ask for a review of administrative procedures between the various Wisconsin DNR regions to determine efficiency, efficacy and consistency of processing and decision-making relating to wetlands permit issuance. This should include:


- A review of three DNR regions handling of wetlands permit requests, comparing the West-Central region and two others and including at least the following factors:
  - The number of applications received and number approved over a given time period;
  - A comparison of the length of time, number of steps and amount and type of information required for approval;
  - Frequency and manner of communication with applicants during the course of approval; and
  - The amount of wetlands affected.

Wisconsin and Minnesota both place a high priority on building a stable economy and protecting the natural beauty of our environment, and our shared values give us an excellent opportunity to learn from each other. A careful review of Minnesota's methods will provide a wealth of information and ideas for Wisconsin policymakers for review of our own wetlands protection efforts.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. We stand ready to answer any questions you or committee members have regarding this proposed audit.

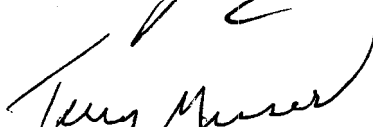
Sincerely,

  
Sen. Ron Brown

  
Sen. Dave Zien


  
Senator Sheila Harsdorf


  
Rep. Barbara Gronemus

  
Rep. Terry Musser

  
Rep. Mark Pettis

  
Rep. Robin Kreibich

  
Rep. Jeff Wood

  
Rep. Scott Suder

  
Rep. Terry Moulton