



Luther S. Olsen
State Senator
14th District

Senate Bill 596
Testimony of Senator Luther Olsen
Senate Committee on Natural Resources

Thank you Chairman Kedzie and Committee members for having a hearing on Senate Bill 596 today. Representative Ott and I appreciate the opportunity to testify and discuss this bipartisan legislation which makes the simple change of adding Water Trails to the State Trail system.

As you know, Wisconsin boasts a diverse array of natural beauty – all available for residents and visitors alike to explore. Wisconsin offers over 2,700 miles of hiking trails, allowing folks to hike bluffs, explore waterfalls and mighty rivers, and discover pristine forests and thousands of lakes. The startling beauty of Wisconsin nature attracts many visitors; which contribute greatly to a driver in our economy – Tourism.

The Department of Natural Resources promotes state trails for many activities. SB 596 simply adds water trails to the list of state trails. Water trails can provide tangible benefits to river communities. There is often a positive economic benefit from increased tourism and water trails offer enhanced recreational opportunities for residents. It will provide a valuable resource for visitors and residents who wish to enjoy the many miles of rivers in our state, as well as, highlighting a geographic feature that made our state an important and strategic waterway for Native Americans and early explorers.

Additionally this bill removes the prescribed uses of trails – this was requested by the Department of Natural Resources due to the fact that there are a variety of uses on trails already that aren't part of the list (in-line skaters on the urban, paved trails; snowmobiles e.g.), and new uses are coming all the time.

Once again, thank you for your time and attention on this matter today.



Prepared Testimony on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources before the Committee on Natural Resources Regarding SB 596

Wednesday, February 26, 2014

Good morning and thank you Chairman Kedzie and members of the Committee. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today for information only.

As proposed, Senate Bill 596 would amend State Statute section 23.175 regarding State Trails to eliminate the current list of State Trail uses. That current list of uses is neither reflective of all of the uses allowed on state trails nor does it reflect uses allowed on every State Trail. That is to say that all of the uses currently listed (equestrians, bicyclists, riders of electric personal assistive mobility devices, cross-country skiers and hikers) are not allowed currently on every State Trail, nor is that list inclusive of every use that is allowed. Snowmobilers and in-line skaters are examples of two fairly common users on State Trails not included in the list.

This proposed change would continue to allow the department to determine appropriate uses for trails on department lands on a case-by-case basis, through a process that involves planning, research, and public involvement.

SB 596 would also specify that water trails can also be part of the State Trail System. We have seen a growing interest at both the national and state level in water trails (as evidence, the federal government created a "national water trail" designation last year). This legislation would clarify that water trails, although not traditional terrestrial-based trails, can be incorporated into the State Trail System.

Although we are providing testimony for information only, we do believe that there may be a small increase in costs as a result of the proposed changes, mainly for creation of a DNR-facilitated state water trail program. We believe any new costs associated with the program can be largely absorbed by current operations and existing funding.

Thank you for your time.



Rock River Trail Initiative
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February 24, 2014

To: Wisconsin Senate Committee on Natural Resources
Public Hearing February 26th, 10:00 AM, 201 Southeast

Re: Support of Senate Bill 596

Dear Chairman Kedzie and Committee Members:

We appreciate consideration by your committee of Senate Bill 596 to include water trails in the state trails system.

We had the privilege to work with Brigit Brown, state trails coordinator of the Department of Natural Resources, and her colleagues to establish a water trail on the Rock River through the counties of Fond du Lac, Dodge, Jefferson, Dane and Rock, and six Illinois counties. The Rock River Water Trail was opened for paddlers in summer 2012. In August 2012 the *Rock River Water Trail Inventory, Analysis and Plan - Illinois and Wisconsin* was presented to the Illinois and Wisconsin departments of natural resources and the National Park Service.

The Initiative was honored to have the Rock River Water Trail designated into the National Water Trails System by the Secretary of the US Department of the Interior on April 4, 2013. The Rock River Water Trail is the first national water trail in Wisconsin and Illinois.

Water trails can provide tangible benefits to river communities. There is often a positive economic benefit from increased tourism and water trails offer enhanced recreational opportunities for residents. Cooperation among public agencies and private organizations to establish water trails often lead to increased protection for outdoor recreation and water resources, and contributions to public health and quality of life from restoring water resources.

I look forward to offering testimony in support of Senate Bill 596 and to answer any questions of committee members.

Sincerely,

Gregory M Farnham

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The Rock River Trail in Wisconsin and Illinois - River of the Heartland