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STATE SENATOR • 12TH SENATE DISTRICT

Senator Tom Tiffany

Testimony on Senate Bill 436 – relating to Aquatic Invasive Species Grants

Thank you members of the Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining, and Forestry for allowing me to testify on Senate Bill 436.

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) make their way into our lakes through many different avenues, such as boat hulls, to ballast water, and bait buckets. AIS can cause severe damage to local lakes affecting local businesses and tourism. This is especially true in Northern Wisconsin where the presences of AIS can choke a lake, killing native species and ruining businesses that depend on a vibrant fishing industry.

Currently the Department of Natural Resources provides around \$2 million annually in grant funds to local qualified organizations and governments to control and treat established populations of AIS. Senate Bill 436 would stream line the grant process allowing those local organizations to continue their work on containing an identified AIS breakout. When an AIS is identified, it is important that local volunteers and DNR experts move quickly to contain the outbreak. Streamlining the grant process will allow resources to quickly flow to an identified AIS with the hopes of containing the outbreak before it spreads.

Senate Bill 436 expands the management tools available to volunteers that are available for grant funding. Lake surveys and watercraft inspections would now be covered under Lake Management Planning grants. The best way to stop AIS is finding it before it has a chance to enter un-impacted bodies of water. Watercraft inspectors are the front line of lake protections and this bill would make those efforts available for funding.

Again, I want to thank the committee for allowing me to testify on SB 436. Aquatic invasive species ruin lakes, destabilize ecosystems, and diminish property values. It is vitally important that we remain vigilant and grant volunteers the tools to prevent and isolate outbreaks. SB 436 will help in our fight against aquatic invasive species.

Tom Tiffany
Wisconsin State Senator
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BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON SPORTING HERITAGE, MINING, AND FORESTRY
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Good morning, Chairman Tiffany and members of the committee. I'm Carroll Schaal, Lake and Rivers Section Chief in the DNR Bureau of Water Quality. I oversee the grant programs that are the subject of this proposal and I'm here to testify for information only. The department supports locally-led lake and stream protection and SB 436 expands a 2006 law that recognized citizen volunteers monitoring lakes and inspecting watercraft for aquatic invasive species (AIS) needed dedicated support that isn't dependent on the success of a grant application.

The Department currently uses this authority to contract with a defined network of over 1,000 participants allowing us to deliver more efficient funding for basic protection activities that are needed for all lakes such as water quality and AIS early detection monitoring. Contracts pay for training, supplies, and laboratory analyses and data management services matched by donated volunteer time. It has allowed us to make sure that funding is going to where it is needed and that these services don't overlap or are duplicated.

This bill expands the network to rivers and watersheds by allowing contracts to support stream-based volunteer monitoring programs such as the Water Action Volunteers and Riverine Early Detectors. The bill expands opportunities for county and regional coordination and participation in the Healthy Lake Initiative, stream and watershed protection and AIS prevention. It also allows the Department to expand and replace a current grant program that annually reimburses lake organizations for some of the cost of controlling aquatic invasive species if they are operating in compliance with an approved plan.

Our lake, river and AIS grant programs are already paying for these essential activities. This bill simply helps streamline the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have or provide further information to the committee and its members.