



August 23rd, 2023

Testimony of Senator James in favor of SB 34

Thank you, Chairman Stafsholt, and other members of the committee, for hearing this bill today.

SB 34 provides a very simple fix to an error in legislation that has already been passed. Wisconsin has two free fishing weekends, one in January and another in June. These events allow Wisconsinites to enjoy fishing without the requirement of license or stamp.

The January free fishing weekend, established by the Legislature in 2011, was meant to coincide with Martin Luther King Jr. weekend. The reasoning behind this was to allow people to enjoy the outdoors while they already had time off of work and school in memory of the great civil rights hero.

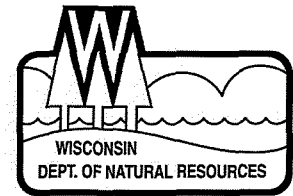
Unfortunately, the statute language currently says, "3rd full weekend in January." In years such as 2023 and 2024, the 3rd full weekend in January is *after* the MLK weekend. This bill simply changes the language to "the full weekend prior to the third Monday in January" to make sure it aligns with MLK day.

Our free fishing weekends have allowed thousands of people to enjoy our natural resources. I thank you for your consideration of this simple correction. Let's pass this bill and make sure that all can continue to take advantage of this holiday.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jesse James".

Senator Jesse James
23rd Senate District
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Senate Committee on Financial Institutions and Sporting Heritage

2023 Senate Bill 34

Modifying the Designation of a Free Fishing Weekend in January

August 23, 2023

Good morning, Chair Stafsholt, and members of the Committee. My name is April Dombrowski, and I am the Recreational Safety and Outdoor Skills Section Chief for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Senate Bill 34, related to the changes to the free fishing weekend in January.

Free Fishing Weekend aligns into the department's Learn to Fish programming, offering additional opportunities to gain participation in this outdoor activity. Under current law, free fishing weekend is the third weekend in January. Under this proposal, free fishing weekend would be the full weekend prior to the third Monday in January. As a result, in some years, like 2023, this change would result in the free fishing weekend occurring a week earlier in January than under the current law. However, this proposal would also establish a consistent date aligned with the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday.

Ice conditions can vary greatly from waterbody to waterbody for fishing in January and providing this free fishing opportunity on a later weekend could provide more time for ice to strengthen, providing better ice conditions and opportunity for ice anglers. This is only noted in years when the free fishing weekend would occur earlier (2 of the next 10 years, 2024 and 2029) and is highly dependent on annual variability in weather conditions.

It's additionally important to note that certain organizations are already familiar with the current rule language and plan events around those dates; this change would require them to adjust venues around potential new dates in the future.

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.