



## Assembly Committee on Environment

### *Clearinghouse Rule 19-007* *Aquaculture and Fish Farms* *October 31, 2019*

Good morning Chairman Kitchens and members of the Committee. My name is Scott Loomans, and I am the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Division Administrator with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Clearinghouse Rule 19-007, relating to aquaculture and fish farms.

This rule establishes policies that reflect the directives in 2017 Wisconsin Act 21 and pertain to the department's relationship with private aquaculturists. Act 21 directed the department to review its administrative rules with the aim of facilitating greater cooperation between the state and private entities in raising and stocking fish. The Act specifically directed the department to promulgate rules standardizing fish donation procedures and defining the role of genetics in departmental fish stocking strategies.

This rule streamlines the process for accepting donations of live fish or fish eggs from private entities to stock into waters of the state. Previously, the department had to receive approval from the Natural Resources Board for such donations, and the lengthy timeline for approval precluded timely use of the fish or eggs in department propagation and stocking programs. Under this rule, fish and egg donations would be approved by the Fisheries Management bureau director, which would allow private entities to more quickly transfer the fish or eggs to the department for stocking efforts.

In addition, this rule states that the department will establish stocking strategies that recognize the economic impact of game fish species and provide good fishing opportunities. These stocking strategies will aim to protect and enhance the genetic integrity of native and non-native, stocked fish species, including salmon, rainbow and brown trout, in a manner that will ensure that the genetic strain of fish is best adapted to the water in which the fish will be stocked. Importantly, the rule states that stocking will be used as a restoration tool with a goal of reestablishing natural reproduction in the local population.

The rule also provides that the department will consult with private aquaculturists to develop stocking strategies and raise and stock fish. Through Act 21 and this rule, department fish hatcheries will be able to provide surplus fish and fish eggs of the appropriate genetic strain for private aquaculturists to raise. This will help the department meet statewide stocking goals and provide additional fishing opportunities for anglers.

These proposed rules were developed collaboratively among private aquaculture representatives; sport, commercial, and charter fishing representatives; and DNR staff. The DNR organized and facilitated two

task teams consisting of representatives from these diverse stakeholders to create these rules. These task teams convened eleven public meetings from the fall of 2017 through the fall of 2018. The DNR also gathered and incorporated input from the Wisconsin Aquaculture Association at their annual meetings in March, 2018 and February, 2019, and convened a public hearing in March 2019.

In addition to the proposed rules, the task teams cultivated a public/private stocking partnership to meet stocking goals in Lake Michigan, revised internal DNR policy to allow fish to be transported from VHS positive to VHS negative areas with proper testing, developed BMPs for mosquito fish, and initiated a process to restructure the DATCP hatchery classification rules.

The department appreciates the Legislative guidance and direction to increase the flexibility in our ability to disseminate fish or eggs to private entities; form and enhance public/private relationships to meet goals of mutual interest; and clarify and simplify appropriate rules, policy, and guidance. The department believes that we have fostered solid public/private relationships through this initiative and put into place legacy mechanisms to ensure current relationships will be maintained and additional relationships will be developed and enhanced in the future. We also believe that the rule, policy, and protocol changes that were made through this initiative will enhance our efficiency to collectively address fisheries management issues and improve fishing for current and future generations.

On behalf of the DNR, I would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.