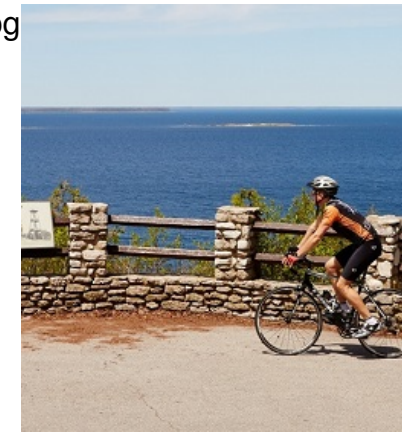
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In the 2nd of 3 columns about clean water, Sen. Smith discusses how water is our key to prosperity and encourages us to think about future generations when considering the next big company coming to Wisconsin for our natural resources.

MADISON - Last week I wrote about how water is life. This week I hope to show how important water is for all of us to not only survive, but also to thrive.

In my Capitol office hangs an old re-election poster for former Governor Gaylord Nelson. The founder of Earth Day, Governor Nelson was one of Wisconsin's fiercest advocates for our environment. He was also a pragmatist – he understood not only how important clean water was, but he also acknowledged its importance for our economy.

Milk, cheese, beer, and paper -- these are quintessential Wisconsin products. Each of these water-dependent products requires large amounts of clean water.



Water is abundant in Wisconsin. Our 1,017 miles of Great Lakes shoreland offer our state excellent access to the world's largest supply of freshwater. Wisconsin's "west coast," is mostly lined by the Mississippi River, which is the 2nd largest watershed in the world. We even have more lakes than Minnesota! Wisconsin is so watery that 17% of our state is covered by water.

Every decision about water we make as representatives and senators in the State Capitol has a globally significant impact. We know how important water is, but so do companies hoping to gain access to our water.

In 2003, Wisconsin limited the ability of local governments to oppose Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs). CAFOs are defined as operations with more than 1,000 animals on the farm. Here in the counties within the 31st Senate District, we have 24 of the 272 dairy CAFOs in Wisconsin.

High capacity wells on CAFOs pump vast quantities of water in a very small area, and the massive volume of animal waste generated at these facilities is too much for the surrounding cropland to handle as fertilizer. America's Dairyland has always looked to small family farms to supply our country with high-quality milk and cheese. Low milk prices are driving smaller dairy farms out of business and CAFOs are taking their place. Without relief, more family farms will continue to struggle and large CAFOs will continue to expand.

In 2010, our 31st Senate District became the epicenter of the frac sand industry in Wisconsin and across the nation. The rush for high quality sand to support our U.S. and Canadian oil and natural gas hydrofracturing operations created a demand far exceeding our expectations in Wisconsin. Cleaning the tons of sand going across North America requires a lot of water and the chemicals used during the process leave serious concerns about water quality.



In 2011, the massive iron mine proposed by Gogebic Taconite created a frenzy of changes to water and air protections for the iron mining permit process. In 2017, the "Prove it First Law" was repealed for sulfide mining companies looking to come to Wisconsin. These changes lower the bar for potential mining companies to come to Wisconsin and pollute our water.



Most recently, in 2017, the state carved Foxconn out of environmental protections. Foxconn will

also be able to pump up to 7 million gallons of water per day to manufacture liquid crystal display (LCD) screens. Only 4 million of the 7 million gallons will return to Lake Michigan daily. The harsh chemicals used in the manufacturing process leaves serious questions about water quality surrounding the facility and what pollutants will return back to the Great Lakes.

As you can see, there's no shortage of companies lining up for Wisconsin's water and natural resources. The million dollar question we need to ask ourselves is: are the long term consequences worth short term economic gain?

Next week, I'll be writing about how water is our most precious resource and how we can preserve it for our lives and our prosperity. Former Governor Gaylord Nelson once said, "the ultimate test of man's conscience may be his willingness to sacrifice something today for future generations whose words of thanks will not be heard."

Our water is the key to our state's prosperity. It will be our children's and our grandchildren's prosperity too. The next time a big company or industry asks Wisconsin to roll back water protections for their profits, we need to ask ourselves how this decision before us contributes, rather than harms our water. If we make the right choices today, the words of thanks will be said.