

Madison Legislators Leap into 2016 with Assault on Natural Resources

Written by Wisconsin Conservation Voters, Jonah Hermann
Tuesday, 05 January 2016 10:48 -



Seven Bills Rolling Back Natural Resource Protections to be heard on Tuesday and Wednesday.

MADISON - The Legislature is holding hearings on at least seven bills that roll back protections for air, land, and water and gut local government authority – and that's just in the first few days after the holidays.

Kerry Schumann, Executive Director of Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters, said, "From developing on lake beds to filling in wetlands to taking away local governments' authority to protect the health of their communities, the Legislature is starting 2016 off with a pretty loud message to Wisconsinites: that they are putting the wishes of big developers, factory farms, frac sand mining companies, and other polluting interests above the needs of their constituents."

Of the bills being taken up early this week, the most concerning are the Polluter Grab Bag, AB 600/SB 459, and the Developer Grab Bag, AB 582/SB 464.

Lowlights of The Polluter Grab Bag, AB 600/SB 459, include:

- Not only does the bill allow developers to build on lake beds – but they could also get that public land for free and restrict the public's access to the lake.
- The Polluter Grab Bag would lead to more development in wetlands by removing protections for the 20% of wetlands that aren't federally protected and creating incentives for companies or individuals to develop on properties that contain wetlands.
- □ The bill allows each person who owns property on a lake to dredge up to three dump truck loads of lakebed sediment every year.

Lowlights of The Developer Grab Bag, AB 582/SB 464, are:

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- The Developer Grab Bag bans counties from placing moratoriums on new development, a tool often used to give a local government time to determine policies and procedures before an industry has moved in and it's too late.
- The bill takes away local governments' ability to create new zoning requirements to deal with new industries or projects if a company has simply "expressed interest" in locating there.
- The bill provides financial incentives to develop land that is held in conservation easements or is deliberately undeveloped.
- The bill increases the tax burden on residential property owners by exempting rich developers from paying their fair share of taxes for their land.
- The bill allows developers to "shop" for the judge they want if there is a challenge to their development permit.

According to Schumann, "The Polluter and Developer Grab Bags open the floodgates for developers, frac sand mining companies, factory farms, and other special interests to make our water dirtier, fill in our wetlands, and run roughshod over local communities and private citizens."

The full list of anti-conservation bills being taken up Tuesday and Wednesday include:

- AB 600: Polluter Grab Bag - Assembly Committee on Environment and Forestry on Tuesday
- SB 464: Developer Grab Bag - Senate Committee on Insurance, Housing, and Trade on Tuesday
- SB 479: Undermining Dane County Zoning - Senate Committee on Insurance, Housing, and Trade on Tuesday
- SB 434: Undercutting Natural Resource Protections in State Forests - Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining, and Forestry on Tuesday
- SB 288: Nuking Wisconsin's Energy Priorities Law - Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy on Tuesday
- AB 603: Further Meddling in Shoreland Zoning - Assembly Committee on Natural Resources and Sporting Heritage on Wednesday
- SB 432: Privatizing Wisconsin's Water - Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Public Works, and Military Affairs on Tuesday

"We are stunned that the Legislature would schedule all of these attacks on natural resources just days after the holidays, when citizens have little warning and no time to make arrangements to come to Madison. We know that these bills – especially the Polluter and

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Developer Grab Bags – don't reflect Wisconsinites love of the places where we live, work, and play," concluded Schumann.

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Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to electing conservation leaders, holding decision makers accountable, and encouraging lawmakers to champion conservation policies that effectively protect Wisconsin's public health and natural resources.

You can follow legislation impacting natural resources on our Conservation Vote Tracker, a real-time accountability tool that provides you with a complete picture of what conservation issues are in play and how legislators are performing: <http://conservationvoters.org/vote-tracker/>