

Lake Michigan League of Women Voters
Wisconsin Report, March 2012

Wisconsin - Natural Resources Legislation 2012

Information Thanks to Elizabeth Wheeler, Clean Wisconsin

AB 463/SB368: Relating to: permits for discharges into wetlands; wetland mitigation; wetland mapping and delineation; fees for permits and other authorizations or determinations by the Department of Natural Resources relating to structures, deposits, and other activities in or near navigable waters; making appropriations; and providing penalties.

This bill makes significant revisions to our wetlands permitting program, making it much easier to destroy wetlands in exchange for mitigation (creating new wetlands elsewhere). It also removes provisions of current law that defines some wetlands as high quality and affords them more protections against destruction. This bill passed on 2/21.

AB 426/SB 488: Relating to: regulation of ferrous metallic mining and related activities, procedures for obtaining approvals from the Department of Natural Resources for the construction of utility facilities, making an appropriation, and providing penalties.

This bill makes sweeping changes to Wisconsin's metallic mining laws for iron mines. It removes public participation and process, limits DNR's ability to conduct a thorough review, and grants presumptive approval for mining permits after 360 days. It sets new standards for wetlands, water quality, water withdrawals, and stationary air pollution source permits.

This bill passed the assembly on January 26, 2012. A senate companion bill was circulated that changed several items. The companion bill was expected to be introduced by the Select Committee on Mining Jobs, but in a surprise move, Senator Fitzgerald instead dissolved the committee and introduced the assembly bill as the senate companion. There are bipartisan efforts currently underway to introduce a different bill.

Senators Jauch and Schultz introduced a substitute amendment on February 21st that would strip all of the environmental provisions out of the bill and only make changes to timelines, taxation and cost.

As of Friday, March 2nd, we were notified that on next Monday, the Joint Finance Committee is set to vote on the Open-Pit Mining Bill. If passed, it would remove protections for Wisconsin's lands, water and public health. Not only will it eliminate critical protections for our lakes and beautiful open spaces, but the bill will silence community input when decisions are made about new mine proposals.

Walker Pushes for Compromise on Mining Bill

By Erin Toner, February 28, 2012 | WUWM | Milwaukee, WI

A company called Gogebic Taconite wants to dig a huge open-pit mine in the Penoque Hills just south of Lake Superior. The company has promised the project would create hundreds of jobs that will last for generations, a prospect that appeals to Republicans hungry to deliver on campaign job-creation promises. Conservationists, though, fear the mine would pollute one of the most pristine regions in the state. The Bad River Band of Lake Superior

Chippewa, whose reservation lies just north of the mine site, is particularly concerned runoff from the mine could contaminate their beloved wild rice beds.

Gov. Scott Walker said Tuesday he's using his "bully pulpit" to encourage action on a mining bill before the Legislative session ends on March 15. Walker made speeches in three cities to promote legislation enabling a Florida company to mine for iron ore in northwest Wisconsin. In Milwaukee, Walker spoke at P&H Mining, a company that could benefit from a new mine. The governor says he is not endorsing a specific version of the bill, but does not support a bi-partisan compromise two state senators offered last week.

"We haven't drawn an absolute line in the sand on any of the provisions. Our line in the sand is...it does no good I think for the Legislature to go through this process and have a bill that ultimately, not just this company, but others, walk away from and say well this is still too difficult," Walker says.

The Republican-controlled state Assembly has already passed a mining bill, but there is not enough support for it in the Senate. Walker claims the new mine near Lake Superior would create 1,400 direct jobs, and nearly 1,000 more at suppliers and supporting companies.

The groundwater and wetlands regulations, and sends potential tax revenue to Madison, rather than keeping it at the local level.

An article written by **Sharon Roznik, For Wisconsinoutdoorfun.com, Feb.8, 2012**, provides background on the thought process of one representative, and why we have **AB 463/SB368**.

State Rep. Joel Kleefisch, an Oconomowoc Republican and avid duck hunter, began circulating a bill last week that would require the DNR to create a sandhill crane season.

As the sandhill population grows, more Wisconsin farmers have been complaining about sandhills eating their corn seeds and fledgling stalks. Some kind of damage control needs to be put in place, said Kevin Ebertz, who lives near Greenbush.

Lake Michigan as Water Source for Parts of Ozaukee County

A consulting firm has provided information to Cedarburg, Grafton and Mequon on building a water treatment facility that would use Lake Michigan water for the communities and eliminate the drilling of additional wells. Currently there is a problem with the quality of well water because of chemicals and other pollutants. Additionally there is a serious concern about the amount of salt needed for water softening entering the water system that flows to Lake Michigan. Dissolved salt is not removed by the sewage treatment plants.

This makes good ecological sense but there is a need to carefully watch this matter because of recent attempts to privatize water in southeast Wisconsin.

Report Submitted by Marjorie and Arthur Palleon, Wisconsin Representatives