



***Wisconsin Wetlands Association Testimony on SB 95
Presented by Brian Vigue, March 9, 2017***

The Wisconsin Wetlands Association is a statewide, non-partisan, non-profit wetland conservation organization. We envision a state where wetlands are healthy, plentiful, and support ecological and societal needs, and where citizens care for, appreciate, and interact with these natural resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our feedback and suggestions on SB 95, the Fishing for our Future Act. I'd like to begin by expressing our appreciation to Senator Tiffany for reaching out to our organization early on in the bill drafting process with regard to the bill's wetland provisions. We've found the discussions we've had with your office, and your consideration of our concerns, to be very helpful. We believe that the deliberate, collaborative approach you've taken has addressed several wetland policy concerns we had with last session's legislation.

As we've discussed, siting of commercial infrastructure in wetlands can be harmful to the resource and can often be risky for the business owner. This may be particularly true for aquaculture, where the dynamic hydrology inherent to wetlands creates a challenging environment for managing operational water levels and protecting equipment. That said, we also recognize the need for businesses to be able to manage their existing facilities and grow.

For this reason, we appreciate and support the substantial efforts you've made to ensure that most of the wetland provisions are limited in scope to impacts from expansions of existing facilities or impacts to artificial wetlands. These provisions are both practical and consistent with existing state law.

As noted in our written comments, we recommend two additional refinements to ensure that this bill does not inadvertently create incentives to build in wetlands where viable alternatives are available.

Our first recommendation is to remove the exemption from wetland permit requirements for construction of *new* roads. Our second is to clarify that the intent of this legislation is to support the establishment, operation, and expansion of *commercial* fish farms. On the latter point, our goal is to discourage the establishment or expansion of recreational fish ponds into wetlands. This is important because there are thousands of registered, non-commercial fish farms in Wisconsin. We support the expansion of Wisconsin's aquacultural industry, and

believe that judicious use of an exemption is appropriate to commercial operations only. Our recommendations have been submitted as an attachment to this testimony.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony today, and we appreciate the collaborative approach employed by Senator Tiffany and representatives from the Wisconsin Aquaculture Association. This is how we prefer to work. To the members of this committee, please consider us a resource and know that we are available to help you and your staff craft policies that protect and restore wetlands while providing a smooth and streamlined process through which our businesses and communities can grow.

Please don't hesitate to contact us with any additional questions or concerns you may have.