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FOR INFORMATION CONTACT:  
Evan N. Zeppos  
414-491-6610 or [ezeppos@laughlin.com](mailto:ezeppos@laughlin.com)

**METEOR TIMBER LLC ADDS SECOND, 178-ACRE CONSERVATION AREA TO MONROE COUNTY PLANS;  
MOVE CREATES LARGEST WETLAND PRESERVATION AND RESTORATION EFFORT IN WISCONSIN HISTORY**

***Project to permanently protect over 600 acres, most of which is high-quality wetland;  
plan includes creation of nearly 100 jobs and innovative wildlife habitat enhancements***

MADISON, Wis. – Meteor Timber, LLC, today announced it will establish a second conservation area adjacent to the site of its proposed Monroe County industrial sand project to permanently protect an additional 178 acres, most of which is high-quality wetland, a move that creates the largest wetland preservation and restoration effort in Wisconsin history.

The new easement, coupled with a 465-acre conservation area Meteor has already planned for the site, would protect in perpetuity a total of 643 acres, most of which is sensitive, high-quality wetland – more than 40 acres for every one acre impacted by the project, said Chris Mathis, project manager for the company. The second conservation area would be created on land Meteor owns adjacent to the project site.

“Our company knows sustainability is an important part of operating responsibly,” Mathis said. “That’s why, in addition to investing \$65 million in the area and creating approximately 100 good local jobs, we’ve gone above and beyond with a plan to permanently preserve and restore high-quality wetland on more than 600 acres. This historic plan merits the support of those who want to see growth and economic development, and those who want to preserve the environment – because it does both.”

Meteor has proposed building a sand-drying plant and rail spur in Monroe County that would support a planned industrial sand mine in Jackson County. The plant and railroad would cover roughly 132 acres of the 752-acre site, with the rail spur impacting approximately 16 acres of wetland.

“An exhaustive search found no other sites that would be economically viable for our project. With that in mind, we are focused on ensuring our plans create not only a significant economic benefit, but also a true environmental benefit, as well,” Mathis said. “The state of Wisconsin has never seen a wetland preservation project of this scale. We are pleased to be able to protect this sensitive land in perpetuity, and to further raise the bar by bringing a number of other environmental innovations to the project.”

Beyond the conservation easements, Mathis said the project’s major environmental benefits include the following:

- **Enhancements to wildlife habitat, including a first-in-Wisconsin wildlife eco-passage design:** The project would allow for the expansion of suitable wetland habitat for the state endangered and federally threatened Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake. Additionally, the proposal calls for multiple wildlife eco-passages below the rail spur – four large ones to allow safe passage for deer, bears and other animals, and several smaller ones designed for turtles and reptiles. The smaller underpasses would use a special, open-top channel system – tried successfully in Massachusetts – that would be the first of its kind in Wisconsin.

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- **Rudd Creek restoration and introduction of native trout:** The plan includes a proposed stream alignment that will introduce meanders to a section of the creek that had been channelized for cranberry operations. Dams and other structures will be removed to enhance aquatic habitat with the ultimate goal of introducing native trout to the waterway. The stream will be open to the public for fishing.
- **Elimination of two existing cranberry operations:** The project would remove about 70 acres of cranberry beds from production and restore 47 of those acres into higher-quality wetland. Additionally, ending cranberry operations will stop the ongoing application of fertilizer and insecticides adjacent to Rudd Creek.
- **Removal and leveling of old, unused town roadbed:** Removing the unused roadbed would create an additional 1.5 acres conducive for wetland to return and reduce wetland fragmentation.

The project is subject to review and permitting by the DNR and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the DNR recently deemed Meteor's wetland permit application to be complete. The DNR will accept public comments on the proposal, with a public hearing scheduled for April.

"We appreciate the DNR's thorough and careful review, and remain committed to open and transparent communication as the process continues," Mathis said. "This is a significant opportunity to create nearly 100 jobs and a major economic boost for Monroe and Jackson counties for generations to come, in an environmentally responsible manner that preserves 643 acres of mostly high-quality wetland in perpetuity. We are gratified by the public support our plans have received locally, and we look forward to continued work with the DNR, the Corps of Engineers, local officials and other stakeholders."

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