



Joint Finance Committee

*Public Hearing on Department of Natural Resources Biennial Budget Submission
Informational Testimony
By DNR Secretary Designee Preston Cole
April 4, 2019*

Good morning Co-Chair Nygren, Co-Chair Darling and members of the Committee. My name is Preston Cole, and I am the Secretary Designee for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to share my vision and answer your questions about the DNR's Biennial Budget Submission.

The budget requests a total of \$1.1-billion for the Biennium. That revenue would fund approximately 2,529 FTEs for the two-year period.

The budget also includes funding for several initiatives addressing a wide array of issues connected to protecting and managing Wisconsin's abundant natural resources.

I would like to highlight a few of those initiatives.

YEAR OF CLEAN DRINKING WATER

Nearly every program in our agency touches water quality including:

- Regulating public and private drinking water supplies
- brownfield cleanups
- sustainable forestry practices
- land acquisition
- urban and farm run-off
- end-of-pipe permitting
- air deposition
- infrastructure in state parks
- the health of our fisheries
- – And, the list goes on.

Wisconsin is home to a wealth of bountiful natural resources, including clean drinking water. And clean drinking water in Wisconsin is a public health priority.

Unfortunately, clean water is not something all Wisconsinites currently have access to. As a result, thousands of people in our great state question whether they can turn on their taps and have safe drinking water.

That said, we are facing challenges on several fronts, including legacy contaminants affecting our Great Lake harbors; persistent contaminants like nitrates in wells, lead laterals and emerging contaminants like PFAS in groundwater and public drinking water supplies.

But with Governor Evers declaring this the “Year of Clean Drinking Water,” his budget takes important steps to tackle those challenging issues.

For example, the Governor’s budget helps provide assistance to those hardest hit by well contamination through a five-fold increase in well compensation funding. At the same time, we realize short-term fixes to contaminated wells do not address the root cause of the problem. In short, we need to address the source – or sources – of well contamination.

That is why the Governor has directed us to help fund the completion of the Southwest Wisconsin Geology and Groundwater Study (SWIGG) to identify the sources of well contamination across a three-county area.

This budget also provides \$40-million in bonding authority under the safe drinking water loan program to help fund lead service line replacement.

We are also investing in additional staffing resources to help handle permitting, compliance and enforcement at large CAFOS so that we can ensure that these large businesses operate safely and handle liquid manure from these facilities in an environmentally responsible manner.

And we’re investing in the science of drinking water quality by adding five new research science staff. Two will focus specifically on PFAS, and three will work on general water quality issues.

The budget also includes funding for four project positions to help communities implement restoration and improvement plans for impaired waterbodies.

The Governor’s budget provides nearly \$1.5 million per year in additional grants for improving water quality in rivers and lakes.

Finally – the Governor’s budget provides the state’s share of the funds needed to clean up the remaining legacy contaminant toxic hot spots in Milwaukee and along the St. Louis River near Superior.

The Department of Natural Resources is an integrated, multi-disciplinary natural resource agency. We have been a national leader on topics ranging from:

- The state's landmark groundwater law
- The impact of acid rain on our lakes
- Reducing mercury and other toxins
- Reducing phosphorus in lakes
- And, remote sensing tools to assess recreational and drinking water risks from harmful algal blooms.

But we do not do this work alone. As the Governor is fond of saying, we have to connect the dots every day.

We have strong partnerships with the two sister agencies, the Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection and the Department of Health Services.

That is why when our agency testified at the first Water Quality Task Force meeting our three agencies testified jointly, to emphasize the importance of these agency partnerships in working with the agricultural community and understanding the connection between pollution on the landscape and its impact on human health.

SCIENCE-BASED DECISION MAKING AND EFFICIENT OPERATIONS ARE PARAMOUNT

As evidenced by the above initiatives and as you heard in his budget address, the governor is firmly committed to science-based decision making and streamlining operations at all levels of government. Here is what that looks like at the DNR.

SCIENCE

General Operations. The commitment to science-based decision making is reflected in the DNR's operations by adding a new natural resources science advisor who will report directly to the Secretary.

Forests. Governor Evers has proposed \$278,000 annually for cost-share grants to local fire departments to strengthen forest fire suppression capabilities, and \$165,000 annually for county forest grants that help administer the statewide county forest program and support sustainable forestry practices on the county forests. Additionally, the governor has proposed \$225,000 annually to fund recommendations of the comprehensive Wisconsin Forestry Practices Study.

Wildlife The department is committed to making its decisions based on science and technology, and in close consultation with other states facing similar wildlife challenges, especially when addressing diseases like CWD that respect no political boundaries or state lines. Future investments need to be planned and strategic, with buy-in from stakeholders and decision makers entrusting us with financial resources and unlimited creative partnerships to address this problem. The results of these analyses could be the basis of a new scope statement for rulemaking, information to guide a legislative/funding request, and projects that we can initiate without new funding or laws.

EFFICIENCY

Parks. For our nationally recognized state parks, we've known for quite some time that our park system continues to see a steady increase in attendance. The governor has proposed providing an additional \$1.43 million in each fiscal year for parks operations costs. The funds would pay for additional LTE staff during peak operating times, provide additional supplies for park facilities and cover costs associated with additional electrified campsites.

License renewals. In order to reduce the amount of time hunters, anglers and trappers spend filling out paperwork, to streamline license renewal, the governor proposes the department establish an automatic renewal option for hunting, fishing and trapping licenses.

TAKING A LEADERSHIP ROLE

As we move into 2019, my leadership team and I are committed to working with our customers to find solutions to our most pressing natural resource management issues.

These budget initiatives help address just a few of the many areas that need the attention of all us to find the answers to issues that impact our citizens every day.

Clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, public safety in the outdoors and ample opportunities for recreation are non-partisan issues for our citizens.

We also put a high value on our partnerships with the public, associations and interests groups who have a role in resource management and protection.

We will work closely with this legislative body to understand your priorities, the public will and how that will shape natural resource policies in the future.

Thank you again and I would be happy to answer any questions you have.