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For Immediate Release
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May 5, 2017
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Rep. Felzkowski (Czaja) Aquaculture Bill Passes Assembly *Bill removes red tape to help aquaculture industry thrive*

Madison- the Wisconsin State Assembly passed a bill Tuesday afternoon authored by Representative Mary (Czaja) Felzkowski (R-Irma) that would accomplish many necessary reforms for the aquaculture industry.

Aquaculture is a \$21 million dollar industry in Wisconsin and supports almost 500 jobs. Unfortunately, the industry has declined in recent years due to burdensome and inconsistent regulation. This bill would accomplish the following:

1. Allow access to appropriate genetic strains of fish and fish eggs that will strengthen a successful public-private partnership between private fish farms and state fish hatcheries.
2. Allow for proper maintenance, repair, and construction of fish farm facilities by making the following changes that will cut down on the number of burdensome permits currently required for even simple repairs:
 - a. Allow maintenance and repair of artificial waterbodies used for aquaculture near navigable waterways.
 - b. Define and allows normal aquacultural activities in artificial wetlands created for aquacultural activities.
 - c. Add maintenance of aquacultural roads to the exemption for farm, forest, and mining roads Requires DNR add aquaculture to the agricultural wetland filling general permit for projects affecting up to 10,000 square feet of wetland.
 - d. Limit DNR review of practicable alternatives for wetland projects onsite or adjacent to an existing aquacultural facility.
3. Address burdensome issues with water use reporting and wastewater permitting.

“While the aquaculture industry is thriving nationwide, strangling regulations and overly burdensome permitting in Wisconsin are keeping our fish farms from realizing their true potential,” said Rep. Felzkowski. “We worked with Trout Unlimited, Ducks Unlimited, Wetlands Association, and the DNR to come up with a strong proposal that we believe strikes the appropriate balance between supporting the industry and protecting our environment.”

This bill would also help to alleviate a supply issue. Wisconsin currently has a substantial deficit in the amount of fish and seafood that is provided from local fisheries compared to what is consumed. Moreover, 86% of US seafood consumption is imported, leading to a seafood trade deficit of \$10 billion nationwide. This bill will help our state’s aquaculture industry grow to more greatly meet demand for seafood across our state and country.

“Without private aquaculture, Wisconsin would quite literally not be able to meet the demands of tourists, sport fishermen, or commercial fishing operators,” Felzkowski said. “This bill will fix some of these issues so our aquaculture industry has the ability to more greatly benefit our state’s economy.”

The Wisconsin Assembly approved this measure and it now goes to the Senate for approval.

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