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Wetland Restoration Bill Clears Wisconsin Senate

Just in time for Wetlands Month, the State Senate passed a bill that will improve the permitting process for wetland restoration, floodplain reconnection, and channel improvement projects in Wisconsin. Passed today, Senate Bill (SB) 91 establishes an efficient general permit process for wetland, stream, and floodplain activities that improve hydrology and restore the landscape's natural abilities to address water-related challenges.

"The remarkable thing about this bill is it recognizes our landscape's natural capacity to manage water with healthy wetlands, streams, and floodplains," said Tracy Hames, Executive Director of the Wisconsin Wetlands Association.

Increasingly, wetlands are being valued as solutions to water management problems because they help keep lakes and rivers clean, store floodwaters, and build resilience to more frequent severe weather, while floodplains are critical for slowing water down. Many Wisconsin communities are exploring restoration as a wise investment and cost-effective way to reduce flood risks and storm-related damages.

"This bill shows there is broad support for restoring our natural infrastructure to address water-related problems we're facing," said Hames. *"In addition to addressing these problems directly, restoring healthy hydrology also yields co-benefits for fish & wildlife."*

The general permit created in SB 91 was also a recommendation of the Climate Change Task Force *Focus on Wetlands* for building watershed resilience.

SB 91 was authored by Senators Cowles and Bewley, and passed on a voice vote through the State Senate. It now goes to the State Assembly for consideration, where companion legislation (Assembly Bill 85) has been authored by Representatives Oldenburg and Steineke. The bipartisan legislation also has the support of 30 co-sponsors from both houses and both parties. Once passed by the Assembly, the SB 91 will head to Governor Evers' desk for his approval.

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