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Holding Our Environment Hostage: NRB Chair's Abuse of Power Leads to Disastrous Decision on Wolf Hunt

MADISON, WI — While Clean Wisconsin fully supports the lawsuit filed by Attorney General Josh Kaul yesterday to remove the chair of Wisconsin's Natural Resources Board (NRB), it shouldn't have to come to this.

Last week, the NRB voted to allow hunters and trappers to kill 300 wolves in Wisconsin this fall. The decision comes on the heels of what is widely seen as a disastrous hunt last February, when wolf hunters blasted past the 119-animal quota set by the Department of Natural Resources and killed 218 wolves in the less than three days.

The NRB's action demonstrated contempt for the tradition of resource co-management between Ojibwe tribal governments and the state. Wolves hold a sacred place in Ojibwe culture, and Native American tribes strongly opposed holding another hunt. But tribal voices were ignored.

The decision also disregarded the state's own experts within the Department of Natural Resources, who are still struggling to calculate the toll on Wisconsin's wolf population from February's hunt, which was held during breeding season. DNR scientists sought to limit the second hunt to a more modest 130. But expert voices were ignored.

Presiding over the vote and supporting the decision was NRB chair Fred Prehn, whose term on the board ended three months ago. Prehn has spent those months pointing to a 1964 state Supreme Court case as cover for his blatant power grab, claiming that until the legislature confirms his replacement, he is entitled to stay. And nothing has happened. There he sits, meeting after meeting, vote after vote, keeping out a qualified, lawful appointee. As we are distracted debating the meaning of a 57-year-old court decision that never says NRB members can overstay their terms, Prehn's abuse of power grows with help from the legislature.

It is no surprise that abuse of power leads to bad decisions like the one we saw last week, a decision that violates long-standing promises to tribal governments, abandons

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science, and recklessly damages Wisconsin's fragile eco-system. As long as Prehn remains in this illegitimate role on the board, more bad decisions surely lie ahead. Our land, water, and wildlife are at stake.

Our mission is to protect Wisconsin's clean air, clean water and natural heritage. For decades, we have advocated for strong environmental protections with policymakers, always with the understanding that everyone at the table wants what is best for our state. Prehn and those who support him have turned their backs on that understanding and on the public that put him in the seat he now clings to. As we have been relentless in our work to protect Wisconsin's environment, we must be relentless in calling attention to what's happening at this small, seven-member policy board. The NRB has become a glaring example of what's wrong in Wisconsin. And we all see it.

*On behalf of its more than 30,000 members, supporters and its coalition partners,
Clean Wisconsin protects and preserves Wisconsin's clean air, water and natural heritage.*

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