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STATE SENATOR TWENTY-SECOND DISTRICT

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In Wake of Stepp's Resignation, Wirch Renews Call for Independent DNR Secretary

Madison – Earlier this week, Department of Natural Resources Secretary Cathy Stepp announced that she was stepping down to take a job with the Trump administration's Environmental Protection Agency. In response, State Senator Bob Wirch (D-Somers) issued the following statement:

“During this time of transition, I think we need to have an honest evaluation of our current situation. In recent years, and particularly under Governor Walker and Secretary Stepp, political considerations and the will of big business have come to play much too big a role in decision making at the DNR, while our precious resources have paid the price. We need to acknowledge that a Governor-appointed DNR Secretary was a failed experiment and return to what worked in the past. We must allow the true stakeholders – the hunters, the anglers, the conservationists, the outdoor enthusiasts – to choose the chief steward of our forests, air, water and wildlife. I'm calling on the Republican majority in the Legislature to give consideration to my bill, Senate Bill 171, which would restore independence and accountability to the DNR through a Secretary appointed by the citizen members of the Natural Resources Board. We must safeguard the DNR from the politics of this and future administrations,” Wirch said.

Until 1995, the DNR Secretary was appointed by the seven citizen members of the Natural Resources Board. Legislation returning the position of DNR Secretary to its nonpartisan roots passed in 2009, when Democrat Jim Doyle was Governor, with broad bipartisan support in both the Senate and Assembly, gaining the support of several current Republican and Democratic legislators. It was vetoed by then-Governor Doyle.

The Wirch bill, Senate Bill 171, was introduced on April 13, 2017, and referred to the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy. It has twenty-nine legislative co-sponsors.

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