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Wisconsin Wetlands Association Statement on Water Quality Taskforce Recommendations

Nearly one year after starting its work, the Speaker's Taskforce on Water Quality issued its recommendations to improve water quality in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) commends the committee of 14 legislators for participating on the taskforce and dedicating a large part of their year to gathering ideas on how to address water quality concerns.

In two appearances before the taskforce, a WWA-led field tour in June, and invited testimony in August, WWA provided information on how restoring wetlands, reconnecting floodplains to adjacent streams, and reestablishing surface and groundwater connections can cost effectively help address water quality problems associated with urgent concerns like flooding and erosion. They also emphasized the need for locally supported, watershed-scale solutions.

"We can't improve water quality if we don't address hydrology – how water moves across the landscape," said WWA's Executive Director, Tracy Hames. *"The package of bills introduced by the Taskforce includes a lot of support for the types of local collaborations we think are needed."*

According to WWA, examples of Taskforce-introduced bills that have the potential to increase locally-led, watershed-scale initiatives to restore wetlands, floodplains, and connections between surface and groundwater include, but are not limited to: Increased funding for county conservation staffing and Producer-Led Grants, creation of a Grazing Coordinator, and creation of a Nitrogen Optimization Pilot Project.

In addition to these and other Taskforce proposals, WWA supports two other bills that encourage, restoration of wetlands, streams, and floodplains to solve problems. Companion bills AB 266 and SB 252 provide funding for a flood resilience project in Ashland County that will demonstrate how restoring upper watershed wetlands can help protect public infrastructure downstream. Companion bills AB 701 and SB 631 will help make restoration projects that improve hydrologic conditions, connections, and functions more common in Wisconsin and more efficient to process.

"The members of the Taskforce on Water Quality have started important discussions that will be ongoing for some time to come," said Hames, *"We look forward to collaborating with legislators, the Evers Administration, and local communities as they continue working to improve water quality and water management throughout the state."*

The Wisconsin Wetlands Association is dedicated to the protection, restoration, and enjoyment of wetlands and associated ecosystems through science-based programs, education, and advocacy. Its more than 1500 members include wetland experts, natural resource professionals, conservationists, hunters and anglers, educators, concerned citizens, and local and regional organizations. For more information, visit WWA online at www.wisconsinwetlands.org.