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## Water Quality Efforts Move Ahead in Senate Committee

MADISON— After two public hearings last week and an executive session followed by a public hearing today, the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy, chaired by Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay), has moved twelve efforts from the Speaker’s Task Force on Water Quality ahead.

Four of the bills are led by Cowles in the Senate, including two bills that were unanimously recommended for passage today. The first, Senate Bill 716, prohibits the sale of coal tar-based sealant products beginning on January 1st, 2021, and prohibits the application of such products beginning on July 1st, 2021. These products have been shown to increase the risk of cancer among children and cause harm to water quality and aquatic life.

*“The long-term costs to the state from overexposure to PAH in health care expenses, lost wages leading to lost productivity and tax revenue, and environmental remediation expenditures are substantial. Some of these costs can be avoided by passing Senate Bill 716, and in the process, we can ensure a healthier future for Wisconsin’s youth and cleaner waterways for recreation and aquatic wildlife.”*

The second effort passed by the Senate Committee today, Senate Bill 717, provides the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection with \$250,000 to administer a program to collect and dispose of firefighting foam with PFAS in an environmentally responsible manner. PFAS, an emerging contaminant, has caused groundwater pollution in several areas throughout the state.

*“As the emergencies that require PFAS-containing firefighting foam are thankfully few and far between, the supply of this foam has often passed its shelf life and continues to go unused, and sometimes unwanted. Overtime, deteriorating containment measures may lead to accidental and inadvertent discharges into the environment. Senate Bill 717 helps to create a necessary balance that first reduces the dangers to human health, including firefighters, and negative environmental footprint these chemicals pose. Yet, this bill also ensures that the costs of the complex collection and disposal of this foam doesn’t rest solely on the backs of local governments.”*

Two other bills authored by Senator Cowles were heard by the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy today. The first effort, Senate Bill 715 titled ‘Assistance to Farmers for Conservation’, has several provisions that extends the state’s partnership with farmers to promote land and water conservation practices. The second effort, Senate Bill 718, creates a Nitrate Optimization Pilot Project where farmers work with the UW-System to find new ways to reduce nitrate application and increase yields in their region’s soil conditions.

*“Farmers typically have the best intentions to protect the watershed, but with knowledge on land and water conservation strategies constantly being updated and new economical or technological advances, many farmers don’t have enough time in their day or flexibility in their finances to keep up with the newest land and water conservation measures. These two bills help farmers implement land and water conservation strategies that can store more nutrients in soil and crops instead of those phosphates and nitrates leaching into groundwater or running-off into surface waters. We tackle this objective from multiple fronts by both boosting initiatives that have been proven to work in Wisconsin and by mimicking successful efforts in other states.”*