

Former DNR Secretaries

January 10, 2017

Governor Scott Walker
State Capitol
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Re: Proposal to Split the Department of Natural Resources into Five State Agencies

Dear Governor Walker:

The following six former DNR Secretaries serving for 36 years from 1975 through 2011 urge you and the Legislature not to adopt the current proposal to split the Department of Natural Resources into five state agencies. The six Secretaries have served under several Republican and Democratic Governors.

The current unitary organizational structure of DNR was created under Republican Governor Warren Knowles and approved by a Republican Legislature. The unitary organizational structure was recommended by the Kellett Commission chaired by Bill Kellett, the former President of the Kimberly Clark Corporation. The purpose of the Commission's recommendations in creating the current Department of Natural Resources from a number of other agencies was to bring together all the closely interrelated conservation and environmental functions to increase government efficiency and effectiveness, reduce costs and to provide one focal point for Wisconsin citizens to have their conservation and environmental problems addressed.

It is our experience from administering the agency that the issues that the DNR deals with on a daily basis require constant interaction between the Department's 25+ Bureaus. Just a **few examples** of the difficulties caused by the separation of these programs into five agencies are:

1. There is a close interaction between fisheries and water quality and water regulation functions. This is both at a policy level, an environmental permitting level and when specific problems arise, just a few examples are dealing with fish kills; setting lake and stream standards; alteration of streams, lakes and wetlands; and dealing with urban and agricultural runoff to name just a few. The strength of the Kellett Commission Reorganization was the recognition that one agency should coordinate that necessary interaction to assure that we had healthy lakes and streams to maintain the quality fishery which is important to sportsmen and women and the state's tourism.
2. Currently DNR has credentialed law enforcement staff in Parks, Forestry and the Bureau of Law Enforcement that houses Wisconsin's conservation wardens who enforce both conservation and environmental laws. Secretary Stepp has recently combined all these DNR law enforcement functions into the Bureau of Law Enforcement to save costs and promote more organizational effectiveness. Under the proposed agency split there would be law enforcement responsibilities

in the Fish and Game agency for fish and wildlife, in the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection for Forestry, the Department of Tourism for Parks and the new Environmental Agency for civil and criminal environmental violations. It should be noted that neither the DATCP nor Tourism currently has credentialed law enforcement experience. The law enforcement split would also be very confusing to citizens when they counter an environmental or conservation violation and wish to report the violation.

3. Forest management and wildlife management are highly correlated resource management functions. This applies to both game management and nongame and endangered species. The management of DNR's 600,000 acres of State Forest lands and policy oversight of 2.4 million acres of County Forest Lands and 3.3 million acres of Managed Forest Law lands are critically important to maintaining and in some cases increasing individual wildlife species. The involvement of the Forestry program with the Wildlife Bureau in game management programs and the Natural Heritage Conservation Bureau in nongame and endangered species is critically important in setting policy for the management of forest lands and often on daily land management decisions. Under the proposed DNR split three agencies (Fish and Wildlife, DATCP and the Department of Environmental Protection) would have to be involved in the long term policy setting and daily operational decisions about the wildlife on these lands.

It should also be noted that the current DNR Forestry program also does all the forestry management on Fishery areas, Wildlife areas, State Natural Areas and State Parks. Under the DNR split proposal you would have forest management decision making and coordination under four state agencies (Fish and Wildlife, DATCP, DEP and Tourism).

One of the major examples given by the DNR split proponent is the lower deer population in Northern Wisconsin. While there are other causes of the reduced Northern Deer Herd such as winter weather and predators, the major reason for the lower deer numbers in the North is the maturity of the forest. The Legislature has sought to address this maturity in part by increasing the percentage of acres in State Forests to be actively harvested and by focusing DNR foresters' responsibilities on DNR land management including park, forestry, fish, wildlife and state natural area lands. Under the proposed DNR split you would now have the Forestry Program and the Wildlife Program in two agencies complicating the ability to continue the current DNR effort to increase deer habitat in Northern Wisconsin. This would clearly be counterproductive to the proponent's stated goal of increasing the Northern deer herd.

4. Currently the DNR's Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation has the responsibility to set state nongame and endangered species (both animal and plant) policies and for the management of the 681 State Natural Areas which are managed for their nongame and endangered wildlife and for rare plant species. Under the DNR split proposal, policy and management of those lands will be split into four agencies (Fish and Wildlife, Tourism, and DATCP and DEP). This would be costly and far less effective to do than under the current agency structure.

Governor Walker, we have addressed just a very few of the many policy and day-to-day management activities that are closely coordinated by having a unitary Department of Natural Resources. There are scores of other such interactions that are critically important to manage Wisconsin's Natural Resources in an effective and efficient manner.

We would like to address three other issues relating to the proposed DNR split:

1. The current Natural Resources Board has oversight responsibilities over all state natural resource management programs and is able to assure that the DNR is managing those programs in a coordinated manner. The Natural Resources Board has provided average Wisconsin citizens direct access to the Board as decision makers on all conservation and environmental policy decisions. Under the proposed DNR split, only the Fish and Wildlife Agency will have a conservation based board. While the Forestry program will have the DATCP board for citizen access, that board undoubtedly will have an agricultural direction and not an integrated natural resource management expertise. The Parks program, all of the state environmental programs and the Stewardship program will not have citizen board oversight allowing direct citizen input. Along with citizens in general, conservation and environmental organizations that focus on broad integrated natural resources management, including the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, will have to work with five different state agencies in order to represent their citizen members on conservation and environmental matters.
2. Current information on the proposed DNR split plan indicates that the split will not have any additional costs to the Wisconsin citizens in taxes or license fees. The Legislative Fiscal Bureau however indicates that there will be significant future costs from the split. The state of Michigan is a perfect example. In 1995 the Governor of Michigan, by Executive Order, split the Michigan DNR into two agencies, a conservation agency and an environmental agency. The Michigan's equivalent of our Legislative Fiscal Bureau documented that the cost of the split was \$4 million. However since no additional state funds were provided to complete the split, the costs were absorbed by cutting the agency's front line staff which provided direct services to the public.

As pointed out by the Legislative Fiscal Bureau the proposed Wisconsin DNR split will have significant personnel costs. The new DEP will have several new high level staff including a Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Assistant Deputy Secretary, Division Administrators and additional Bureau Directors and Section Chiefs for the typical agency administrative functions such as Human Resources, IT, Legal Services, Public Information, Budget and Fiscal Management. Also the movement of the Forestry program to DATCP will double the size of that agency and the addition of the Parks program to Tourism will increase that agency tenfold. The expansions of those agencies will result in increased compensation for all of the above mentioned Office of the Secretary and administrative bureaus in both of those agencies.

A DNR split into five agencies will also lead to significant disruption to the functions of the current DNR as the split is planned and implemented, all at loss of services to Wisconsin's citizens.

3. Lastly, the proponent of the DNR split into five agencies correctly indicates that several other states have divided their conservation and environmental functions into two or more agencies. As former agency Secretaries who had frequent interaction with other states' Conservation and Environmental Directors, the feedback we received from those individuals was that they were jealous of the Wisconsin integrated agency natural resource system since it allowed effective and efficient coordination of the many complex issues that are interrelated between conservation and environmental programs. Wisconsin should not move backward in natural resource management by splitting the DNR.

Governor, we hope that this information is helpful in your assessment of the proposal to split the DNR into five separate agencies. We remain available to you and your staff to address the information in this letter or any other related questions you may have.

Sincerely yours,

Anthony S. Earl, Former Secretary
1975-1980

Bruce Braun, Former Deputy Secretary
On behalf of
C.D. "Buzz" Besadny, Former Secretary
1980-1992

George E. Meyer, Former Secretary
1993-2001

Darrell Bazzell, Former Secretary
2001-2003

Scott Hassett, Former Secretary
2003-2007

Matt Frank, Former Secretary
2007-2011

Cc: Wisconsin Legislature
Natural Resources Board
DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp
DOA Secretary Scott Neitzel