

**STATE OF WISCONSIN**  
**DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**  
**AGENCY PRIMER:**  
**“WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW”**

**JANUARY 2023**



**INSTITUTE FOR  
REFORMING GOVERNMENT**



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## FROM THE DESK OF CJ SZAFIR

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Freedom and Opportunity. Those are ideals that bind us together as a state. Unfortunately, the size and scope of state government too often gets in the way of individuals and families being able to achieve their full potential as they build their share of the American Dream.

We can do better, and we must do better. We all should ask,– “Is the mission of state government, — of each and every agency, bureau, and division —, aligned with the vision that everyday Wisconsinites have for Wisconsin? Is state government set up to help citizens succeed, or is it a roadblock to success? We need a conservative vision for state government, indeed for each and every agency.

Last spring, with support from our donors and Board of Directors, the Institute for Reforming Government started an ambitious project to help answer those questions about the biggest state agencies to help answer those questions because we believe the best way to enhance liberty is to improve transparency. This project was the work of eight experts in Wisconsin state government, including three senior-level cabinet officials, a budget director, and subject matter experts. In addition, our team had regular meetings with former top officials in state government as well as business leaders and other experts outside of government. We looked at past revenue and spending trends. The findings are not surprising.

State agencies are massive. They spend record amounts of taxpayer dollars year over year. They too often get in the way of individual success and are set up as enforcement agents instead of partners in creating a better Wisconsin. They need reform. We need leaders to bring forward conservative visions to the agencies.

In these briefings, we shine light onto state agencies to help all citizens diagnose what is broken. Later, based on these and discussions with people all over Wisconsin, we'll offer government reform ideas and detailed budget analysis to help chart a new course for Wisconsin, - one where each and every individual in our state has the freedom and opportunity to succeed.

Sincerely,

**CJ Szafir**

*President*

Institute for Reforming Government



## “Light and liberty go together”

Thomas Jefferson, In a letter to Tench Coxe, 1795

This document prepared by the Institute for Reforming Government (IRG) is intended to inform policy makers and the public of the full scope of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Our partners at the IRG Action Fund will release conservative, free market, and liberty minded policy reforms in a separate document.

For the general public, the executive branch of Wisconsin state government can be a mystery. There are countless agencies with billions of tax dollars flowing through them. Although some may have an understanding of an agency because of their daily work or real world experience, few people in Wisconsin have a handle on the entirety of the executive branch. Each agency has its own mission, functions, and programs. Some agencies generate their own revenue, some rely on state tax dollars and many of them take some sort of federal funding. Each agency has unique powers and authorities. The goal of this briefing document is to pull back the veil and show Wisconsinites how their government taxes, spends, and regulates.

Over the course of months, a team of policy experts at IRG pored over all of the information on Wisconsin's biggest agencies. In this briefing document, you will see agency functions, budget trends, a list of past appointees, and policy concerns. These items create a basis for understanding the scope and history of each agency in an effort to inform policy makers in Madison as they carry out their work in the coming legislative session.

The Department of Natural Resources is one of the largest state regulatory agencies with vast oversight affecting Wisconsin industry and recreation. The department regulates Wisconsin's waterways, surface, and groundwater monitoring, oversees environmental remediation processes and issues permits. Its reach is wide and touches almost all aspects of life in Wisconsin.



Like many other state agencies, the Department of Natural Resources has a long history that dates back to a time when its functions were organized under multiple smaller agencies. In 1874, Wisconsin enacted its first conservation laws by creating the Board of Fish Commissioners. Over the following decades, Wisconsin would add more oversight over fish, game, and forestry. In 1907, Wisconsin created the State Park Board and gave it the authority to acquire and manage state land for recreational use. By 1915, the state moved to consolidate all of these functions into what would be called the Department of Conservation. Much like the Department of Conservation, the Department of Resource Management originated from the consolidation of several smaller agencies that had overseen air and water regulations.

In 1967, the executive branch was reorganized. As a result, the Department of Conservation was combined with the Department of Resource Management to form the Department of Natural Resources. The Department was directed by a board until 1995 Act 27 made the Secretary a gubernatorial appointment with the advice and consent of the Senate.

Today, the Department regulates air, land, water, forests, wildlife, fish, and plants. It is responsible for both federal and state regulations in these areas. In 2015, Governor Walker's administration instituted a realignment of the divisions and services within DNR to address the needs and expectations of hunters, citizens, and business. By updating technology, cross-training staff, and merging divisions, the Department became more customer service focused and cut response times. DNR shifted many of its customer facing services to an app where residents can now buy any number of common licenses.

# AGENCY DESCRIPTION, MISSION, & FUNCTION

*Information in this section was pulled directly from public sources on the Department of Administration and Department of Agriculture, Trade and*

## **Agency Description**

The Legislature created the department in 1967 by combining closely related conservation functions and combined them with newly emerging environmental protection programs. The department is administered by a secretary who is appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. The Natural Resources Board establishes policy for the department and consists of seven citizen members who are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate. The department is organized with a headquarters office in Madison, five regional offices and over 165 other field stations and offices. The central office staff assists the secretary in directing the regions, which carry out the field operations of the department. Over 70 percent of the department's personnel operate from field stations outside of Madison. The department coordinates the preservation, protection and regulation of the natural environment for the benefit of the people of this state and its visitors. Included in its objectives are water and air quality maintenance; water supply regulations; solid and hazardous waste management; fish and wildlife management; forest management and protection; providing parks and recreation opportunities; lake management; wetland, shoreland and floodplain protection; and law enforcement. The department also coordinates federal, state and local aid programs of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other federal agencies; and administers federal funds available for outdoor recreation, thereby taking a lead role in planning state outdoor recreation facilities. It administers state aid programs for local outdoor recreation and pollution abatement.

## **Mission**

The mission of the department is to protect and enhance our natural resources (air, land, water, wildlife, fish, forests and the ecosystems that sustain all life); provide a healthy, sustainable environment and a full range of outdoor opportunities; ensure the right of all people to use and enjoy these resources in their work and leisure; work with people to understand each other's views and to carry out the public will; and, in this partnership, consider the future and generations to follow.



## Function

The functions of the Department of Natural Resources are operationalized through its six divisions. The purpose and function of each of these is listed below:

### Environmental Management

The Division of Environmental Management is charged with the regulation of air, land, water and public health. The division operates six programs within this context; Air management, Drinking Water and Groundwater, Office of Great Waters, Remediation and Redevelopment, Waste and Materials Management, and Water Quality. Generally, this division handles the environmental regulations that require compliance by Wisconsin businesses and residents. Common topics are PFAS, air quality, recycling, waterway contamination, and water quality more generally.

### External Services

This division serves as the point of contact for the department's large group of stakeholders that include businesses, local governments and the general public. The division operates a number of programs including Community Financial Assistance, Customer and Outreach Services, Environmental Analysis and Sustainability, Watershed Management, and Waterways.

### Fish, Wildlife and Parks

The Division of Fish, Wildlife and Parks is responsible for the protection, management, and conservation of Wisconsin's lands, plants, fisheries and parks. The Division maintains the state's fish populations, operates state parks, and works to ensure access to the state's lakes and rivers, southern forests, and natural areas. This is done through six programs; Parks and Recreation management, Wildlife Management, Natural Heritage Conservation, Fisheries Management, Office of Applied Sciences and the Office of Business Services.

### Forestry

Wisconsin's forests are an important economic driver in the state as they supply many of the various wood and paper industries across the state. The head of the Forestry Division works out of DNR's Rhinelander Office and has oversight over Wisconsin's 17 million acres of forest land which covers nearly half the state. The division's work is done through these various programs: Forest Health, Products and Protection, Prescribed Fire, Privately Owned Forest Land, Public Lands, Reforestation, and Urban Forests.

### **Public Safety and Resource Protection**

The Department's Conservation Warden Service is housed within this division. DNR Wardens are sworn officers with law enforcement authority. The division operates several programs, including; the Investigative Team, Environmental Enforcement Unit, Off-Road Vehicles, Boating, and Hunter Safety. This division also works with Homeland Security and Emergency Management.

### **Internal Services**

The Division of Internal Services is responsible for the administrative functions of the Department including facilities, human resources, fleet management, finance, and IT.





# AGENCY BUDGET TRENDS

The state budget process begins in September of every even year when each agency sends its budget requests to the Department of Administration. The Governor then has several months to put together the executive budget proposal that is forwarded to the Legislature. The Legislature, through the work of the Joint Finance Committee, then holds hearings and votes on the budget through the spring and summer of the odd year. This culminates with the signing of the budget document that summer. While technically due by July 1 of the budget year, often budget debates will drag into the Summer and sometimes the Fall. However, the government does not shut down in Wisconsin as it does at the federal level when there is a budget impasse - it simply continues on the current spending plan until a new budget is adopted.

The budget for the Department of Natural Resources has remained relatively stable over the past three budget sessions. Note, the majority of the department's staff positions are funded from federal and segregated revenue. Recently, the agency has taken on climate change as a major new initiative.

## Agency Budget Trend

Fund	2017 ACT 59	2019 ACT 9	2021 ACT 58
GPR	\$218,947,900	\$215,722,100	\$197,526,000
FED	\$162,635,000	\$172,082,100	\$176,360,300
PR	\$63,028,400	\$66,994,200.	\$68,400,600
SEG	\$651,453,200	\$668,781,000	\$680,794,400
TOTAL	\$1,096,064,500	\$1,123,579,400	\$1,123,081,300

## FTE Position Summary

Fund	2017 ACT 59	2019 ACT 9	2021 ACT 58
GPR	223.5	223.52	222.52
FED	466.84	482.84	488.84
PR	242.89	245.89	241.89
SEG	1,566.35	1,569.35	1,557.68
TOTAL	2,499.60	2,521.60	2,510.93



# AGENCY LEADERSHIP

As the head of a cabinet agency, the Secretary is appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate and serves at the pleasure of the Governor. The Secretary of each agency then must appoint the other members of their team to help them carry out the duties and responsibilities of the agency. Descriptions of each appointed position are listed below:

## **Secretary**

Appointed by the Governor, the Secretary leads and represents the agency. The position is responsible for directing and managing the agency to execute the Governor's agenda while ensuring the efficient operation of the agency per state statute. The position is also responsible for reporting on the agency's matters to the Governor and Legislature.

## **Deputy Secretary**

The Deputy Secretary serves at the pleasure of the Secretary and is primarily responsible for assisting the Secretary with carrying out the mission of the agency including but not limited to, personnel management, day-to-day operations, and external affairs.

## **Assistant Deputy Secretary**

The Assistant Deputy Secretary also serves at the pleasure of the Secretary and is responsible for assisting both the Secretary and Deputy Secretary. Responsibilities may include but are not limited to day-to-day operations and external affairs aligned with the agency's mission.

## **Chief Legal Counsel**

The Chief Legal Counsel serves at the pleasure of the Secretary and provides legal counsel and support involving the agency's affairs.

## **Legislative Liaison**

The Legislative Liaison is primarily responsible for facilitating and managing relationships with the Legislature and external stakeholders to provide information as needed and requested. The position also helps develop the agency's legislative agenda to align with the Governor's priorities, current industry standards and respond to stakeholder concerns.

## **Communications Director**

The Communications Director supports the Secretary's Office in strategic communications and responds to media inquiries. The position may also speak on behalf of the Secretary and represent the agency in the media.

## Division Administrator

Division Administrators, appointed by the Secretary, are responsible for providing leadership, personnel management and guidance on day-to-day operations for their assigned division. These positions typically report to the Deputy Secretary, communicating activities and providing advice to ensure the division is in line with the agency's mission.

These appointments may change during the 4-year term of a governor. Listed here are the teams serving under Gov. Evers in mid-2022, as well as the team that served at the end of Gov. Walker's final term.

## Agency Leadership

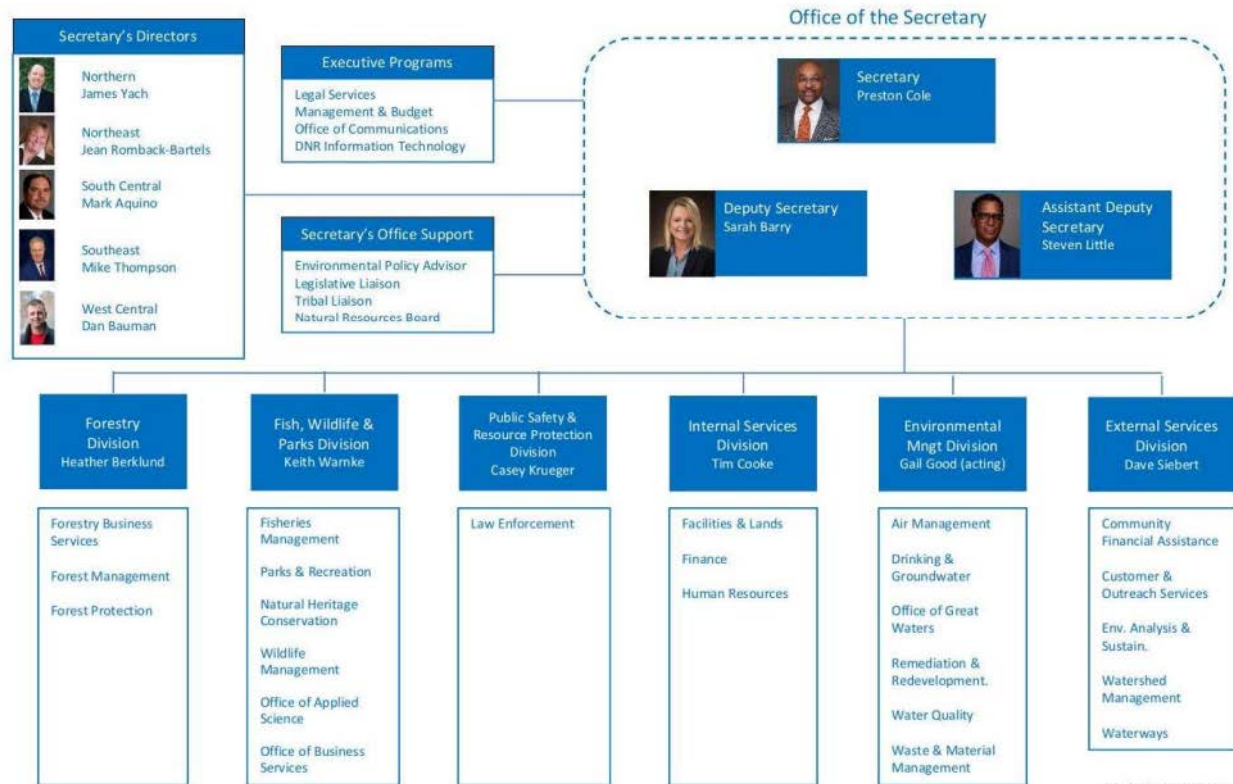
POSITION	EVERS	WALKER
SECRETARY	Preston Cole	Dan Meyer
DEPUTY SECRETARY	Sarah Barry	Ed Eberle
ASSISTANT DEPUTY SECRETARY	Steve Little	Pat Stevens
CHIEF LEGAL COUNSEL	Cheryl Heilman	Jake Curtis
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR	Sarah Hoye	Jim Dick
LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR	Vacant	Luke Fuller
DIVISION ADMINISTRATORS		
ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT	Gail Good	Pat Stevens
External Services Division	Dave Siebert	Mark Aquino
FISH, WILDLIFE & PARKS DIVISION	Keith Warnke	Sanjay Olson
FORESTRY DIVISION	Heather Berklund	Fred Souba
INTERNAL SERVICES DIVISION	Tim Cooke	Doug Haag
PUBLIC SAFETY RESOURCE DIVISION	Casey Krueger	Todd Schaller



# ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



## DNR Organizational Chart



Last Updated: May 2022

# ATTACHED COUNCILS, TASK FORCES, & COMMITTEES

Like most agencies, the Department of Natural Resources has Boards, Commissions and Councils that are charged with various responsibilities. In general, these groups either give advice to the Secretary, division programs or are part of the regulatory process itself.

## **Wisconsin Natural Resources Board**

The Natural Resources Board is a 7-member board that sets policy for the Department of Natural Resources. All rule proposals, land acquisitions, and budget requests need to be approved by the board before they can be implemented

## **Snowmobile Recreational Council**

The Snowmobile Council represents those engaged in snowmobile recreation across the state by weighing in on legislation and policy matters impacting trails and snowmobiling.

## **Sporting Heritage Council**

Created in 2011, the council's focus is to provide advice on hunting, trapping, and fishing issues to the Natural Resources Board.

## **Off-Road Vehicle Council**

This council's interests center around all-terrain vehicles and educating the Department of Transportation, DNR and legislature.

## **Off-Highway Motorcycle Council**

The Off-Highway Motorcycle Council is focused on trails and access for operating off-highway motorcycles.

## **Non-Motorized Recreation and Transportation Trails Council**

This council is interested in preserving recreation areas and trails free of noise and motorized vehicles.

## **Natural Areas Preservation Council**

The council seeks to inform, educate and assist with purchases of natural areas within the state.





**Council on Forestry**

The council is the main resource and authority on all areas and facets related to forestry industry in Wisconsin and works closely with DNR's Division of Forestry and legislature.

**Wetlands Study Council**

The council's focus is preserving, restoring and creating wetlands in Wisconsin through wetland mitigation credits, financing purchases of land and policy development through the legislature.

**State Trails Council**

Members of the State Trails Council are interested in the management and expansion of trail systems throughout Wisconsin.

**Small Business Environmental Council**

The council's members of the State Trails Council represent interests of small businesses and assess the effectiveness of programs aiding small businesses for compliance with the federal Clean Air Act.

**Council on Recycling**

The council is involved with all facets of solid waste recycling programs at the state and local level of government.

**Fire Department Advisory Council**

This council focuses on creating partnerships and effective communication between rural communities and the state's forest fire management program to provide the best protection.

**Urban Forestry Council**

The council promotes the creation and maintenance of forests in urban areas of the state. They also recognize individuals and organizations that are dedicated to urban forests.

**Invasive Species Council**

The Invasive Species Council is focused on controlling the spread of invasive species by offering assistance through department programs and offering grants.

**Lake Michigan Commercial Fishing Board**

The board oversees the review of commercial fishing license applications and the setting of limits on the number of catches allowed in Lake Michigan.

**Lake Superior Commercial Fishing Board**

The board oversees the review of commercial fishing license applications and the setting of limits on the number of catches allowed in Lake Superior.

**Groundwater Coordinating Council**

The Groundwater Coordinating Council works to coordinate the efforts of multiple agencies with regard to groundwater programs and regulation.

**Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board**

The board issues permits to ensure that activities and structures that conform with preserving the scenic beauty of the riverway.

**Wisconsin Waterways Commission**

The commission works to promote recreational boating and approves funding to develop boating facilities with local governments.

**Conservation Congress**

The Conservation Congress is composed of citizens elected from 11 districts around Wisconsin weighing in on matters related to natural resources, providing recommendations to the Natural Resources Board.



# MAJOR PAST INITIATIVES (2011-Present)

Most major policy initiatives happen during the budget process. The Governor, and sometimes the Legislature, will propose a major reduction or increase in spending for any number of programs. The major initiatives for the Department of Natural Resources are listed below:

## Major Past Initiatives

INITIATIVE	GOVERNOR	ENACTED	NOTES
Stewardship Bonding for Dam Safety Program	Walker	Yes	
Repeal and recreate administrative rule pertaining to runoff management	Walker	No	JFC Deleted
Convert recycling and renewable energy fund to a economic development fund	Walker	Yes	
"Wisconsin Walleye Initiative"	Walker	Yes	
Walleye fish hatchery capacity expansion	Walker	Yes	
Private Fish Farm Stocking Capacity Study	Walker	Yes	
Deer Management Initiatives	Walker	Yes	
Sporting Heritage Grant	Walker	Yes	
Outreach to potential young hunters	Walker	Yes	
Elk Reintroduction from Outside Wisconsin	Walker	Yes	Modified by JFC

Veteran Hunting and Fishing Licenses	Walker	Yes	
Wolf Hunting at Night	Walker	Yes	
Timber Sale Requirements	Walker	No	JFC/Legislature deleted
Sand Mine Monitoring	Walker	Yes	
Create Office of Business Support and Sustainability	Walker	Yes	
Targeted runoff management bonding	Walker	Yes	
Move Division of Forestry from the City of Madison to northern WI	Walker	Yes	
Wetland Mitigation Escrow Accounts	Walker	Yes	
Convert Natural Resources Board to Advisory Council (2015-17 budget)	Walker	No	JFC/Legislature: Delete provision as a non-fiscal policy item.
Parks Funding and Fee Increase	Walker	Yes	Modified by JFC
Good Neighbor Authority Forest Management	Walker	Yes	
Shoreland zoning ordinances, and shoreland zoning standards	Walker	Yes	
Department Reorganization of DNR	Walker	Yes	
Eliminate Natural Resources Magazine	Walker	No	JFC reduced staff, but kept magazine
Move department's HR functions to DOA	Walker	Yes	



Eliminate Deer and Wild Turkey Carcass Tags	Walker	Yes	
Sunset Forestry Mill Tax	Walker	Yes	Modified by JFC
Park Fee Increases	Walker	Yes	Modified by JFC
Transferring DNR CAFO regulatory activities to DATCP	Walker	No	JFC/Legislature: Delete provision as a non-fiscal policy item.
Automatic Renewal for hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses	Evers	Yes	
PFAS Model Study	Evers	Yes	Modified by JFC
Transfer Abandoned Tank Removal to DATCP	Evers	No	Deleted by JFC, Maintain at DNR
Resident Hunting and Fishing Identification	Evers	No	Deleted by JFC
PFAS Action Plan Staffing	Evers	No	Deleted by JFC
Ban on Coal Tar-Based Sealants	Evers	No	Deleted by JFC
Increase Fees on CAFOs	Evers	No	Deleted by JFC





# STAKEHOLDERS

Every agency has a number of organizations, professions, and industries that are uniquely interested in the policy or regulatory decisions that could affect their membership or industry. The groups are commonly organized into trade associations and are represented by registered lobbyists that stay in touch with agency leadership. These lobbyists keep their membership informed on current policy debates and use their expertise to educate policy makers on the issues important to their industries. Below is a non-exhaustive list of stakeholders that are interested in the Department of Natural Resources.

STAKEHOLDER	TYPICAL ISSUES
Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce (WMC)	Taxation, labor relations, environment, business regulation, health care, energy, transportation, workforce
Wisconsin Farm Bureau	Issues affecting agriculture and business
Wisconsin Dairy Alliance (WDA)	Environmental regulations and other policy matters that impact the growth and expansion of the Wisconsin dairy industry
Wisconsin Potato & Vegetable Growers Assoc.	Issues affecting field crop production like fertilizer, water use
Wisconsin Pork Association	Agriculture, environment, taxation, regulation business
Wisconsin State Cranberry Growers Assoc.	Agriculture, environment, taxation
Wisconsin Cattlemen's Association	Legislation impacting production of food, animals or rural Wisconsin
Wisconsin Soybean Association	Legislation impacting biodiesel, alternative fuels, environment and agriculture
Wisconsin Corn Growers Association	Regulatory, tax, legal issues affecting corn production
Wisconsin Counties Association	Land use, public safety, agriculture
Wisconsin Towns Association	Agriculture, local government, land use
Wisconsin Sporting Alliance	Hunting, Fishing, Preservation of Wisconsin natural resources



3M Company	Business interest
Wisconsin Paper Council	Environment, conservation, forestry, taxation, air and water, land use, transportation
Wisconsin Railroad Association	Industrial & economic development
Assoc. WI Snowmobile Clubs, Inc.	Snowmobile operation, safety, permitting, registration, trail matters
WI County Forests Association	Forestry, wildlife, conservation, sustainable management of county forests
Wisconsin Realtors Association	Taxation, land use, zoning, real estate, licensing, housing development
Commercial Real Estate Development Association	Taxation, land use, zoning, real estate, licensing
Wisconsin Bear Hunters Association	Wolves, conservation, land acquisition, youth hunting, DNR regulations, baiting & enforcement
Wisconsin Builders Association	Construction regulations
Wisconsin Wildlife Federation	Hunting, fishing, trapping, access to public land & waters, dogs, conservation funding, land acquisition
Wisconsin Wetlands Association	Wetlands Conservation, natural resources policy and state budgets, administrative rules impacting wetlands
Hunter Nation	Hunting interests

# PAST EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Formal actions by the Governor are conveyed through executive order. These orders often direct state agencies to carry out the Governor's policy goals within their statutory authority. They can be used to create councils to explore public policy solutions, bring the state into compliance with federal requirements, direct agencies to take certain actions, and carry out powers granted to the Governor under Chapter 14 of the Wisconsin Statutes. Below is a list of executive orders that pertain to the Department of Natural Resources.

## Executive Orders

GOVERNOR	EO#	DATE	DESCRIPTION	STATUS
Evers	110	4/5/2021	Wildfire suppression support from National Guard & State Agencies	Completed
Evers	111	4/22/2021	Requires Wisconsin law enforcement agencies to implement policy revisions and training updates for their use of force policy and make the policy available to the public on the agency's internet site	Active
Evers	112	4/22/2021	Restoration of Forestland in Wisconsin - Related to Earth Day	Active
Evers	161	4/22/2022	Creation of Office of Environmental Justice	Active



# GOVERNMENT REFORM OPPORTUNITIES

Wisconsin government has grown too big and too expensive. This has precipitated issues across the whole of the executive branch that have become a barrier to the success of Wisconsin residents and businesses alike. The Institute for Reforming Government endeavors to shine light on these issues as prime opportunities for bold reform. Below you will find a non-exhaustive list of policy concerns that we have highlighted for the Department of Natural Resources.

## Department of Natural Resources Structure

When Wisconsin reorganized the executive branch in 1967, the state combined conservation and environmental regulation into a new agency, the Department of Natural Resources. More than 50 years later, this model has become antiquated and has contributed to an overly bureaucratic structure that has become a barrier to businesses and residents alike. A number of states have separate agencies for environmental regulation and conservation. Refocusing government on its core mission will better serve customers and realign programs with their intended purpose. 50 years ago Wisconsin's model was at the forefront nationally; however, most states have moved forward with a modernized approach.

## Hunting and Fishing

Hunting sales in Wisconsin dropped by 6 percent in the past two decades. Data from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources shows the state sold 50,414 fewer annual deer licenses from 1999 to 2017. While the proportion of hunters age 45 and up increased from 29 to 55 percent since the early '90s, the ratio of hunters age 16 to 44 shrunk from 71 to 45 percent (Outdoor Life, 10/15/2019). Add to that a 9 percent drop in deer harvested over the past five years, and one can understand why hunter confidence in bagging that all elusive buck is not high, especially in northern Wisconsin where predators like bears and wolves are thriving. A continual decline in hunting and fishing license holders will have negative impacts on conservation, as well as harm local communities that rely on the economic support. According to Hunting Works for Wisconsin, hunting alone supports over 34,000 jobs, generates \$1 billion in annual salaries and wages, pays \$228 million in state taxes annually, and has an overall annual economic impact of \$4 billion.

## **Agricultural Regulation**

Regulation of agricultural production and products are split between DNR and DATCP, leading to confusion among farmers and agriculture businesses seeking to operate or expand capacity in Wisconsin. Ambiguity and confusion in the regulatory environment only serves to hold back economic growth and innovation. Wisconsin needs to have clear lines that create certainty around the regulatory environment.

## **Mining**

Wisconsin companies with experience in extracting mineral deposits in midwestern states have identified locations in Wisconsin that hold promising economic development through extraction of strategic metals. These companies have good reason to believe precious materials such as copper and zinc that will be needed for future energy production and electric vehicle batteries are plentiful in Wisconsin. Wisconsin's regulatory process needs to promote economic development in the use of natural resources similar to Minnesota and Michigan. If the mining industry could be revitalized, these deposits would prove to be incredibly valuable in today's global marketplace. Wisconsin has an opportunity to be a world-leader in mining and mineral development and lessen the strain of America's reliance on foreign metals.

## **Office of Applied Science**

The number of staff at the Office of Research has fluctuated over time. Early in Governor Walker's administration, it was downsized in an effort to reign in an office that had grown too large. The office was detracting from the mission of the department and hampering its ability to be a customer service oriented regulatory agency. Anything that detracts from this mission needs to be scaled back and focus should be placed on helping businesses comply with regulations, timely permit approvals, and making the agency more customer friendly.

## **Forestry Division**

The 2017-2019 state budget moved the Forestry Division's headquarters to Rhinelander; however, a majority of the division's staff remain in Madison, Wisconsin. The goal of this move was to move regulators closer to the communities they regulate and foster better working relationships. Forestry is an integral part of the economy of northern Wisconsin and the state should look to support the industry.





### **Timely Permitting**

Businesses across the state experience frustration with the permitting process. Private industry is often left waiting for government approval while trying to keep projects on a predictable timeline. As businesses look to expand and grow Wisconsin's economy, the department's inability to process permit applications in a timely and predictable fashion has become yet another barrier to their success. Delayed permits can lead to cost overruns as the projects are pushed off their timelines because of bureaucratic mismanagement.

### **Natural Resources Board**

The current DNR was created through the 1967 merger of two Wisconsin state agencies: The Conservation Department and The Department of Resource Development. This merger was designed to reduce the number of agencies and streamline operations. The Conservation Department was governed by a board that appointed the secretary until Governor Thompson made it a cabinet agency with a gubernatorial-appointed secretary starting in 1995, but the Board remains a legacy of a bygone era of inefficient government; still wielding control over the direction of the department.

### **Customer Service**

For too long, Wisconsin's government has worked against regulated business and industries. In Wisconsin, these are the people that produce the food we eat, care for our children and provide all of the goods and services that we consume. When a business is looking to expand or a new child care center wants to open, state regulators should not be looking for every conceivable violation. Instead, regulators should be looking to help bring these entities into compliance. In other words, Wisconsin needs to shift its mindset. Regulators need to work alongside businesses, not against them.

### **Retaliation Protection**

Customers are reluctant to report abuses or overzealous field staff for fear of having their application, or future applications, delayed or denied. State regulators need to educate and work alongside businesses, not against them. Policymakers should look for ways to protect individuals that report abuse or poor customer service by department staff from any sort of retaliation.

# CONCLUSION

At the Institute for Reforming Government we know that the government isn't the way of the future - people are. And we believe that in order to empower people and ideas to flourish, our government needs to get out of the way.

This is nothing new for Wisconsinites- we have a long history as the standard bearer for government reform - we were the first state to implement unemployment insurance, Wisconsin Works (W-2), and we were on the cutting edge of major collective bargaining reform. But today the state we love is beginning to lag behind. Our executive branch has become bloated, slow, and expensive - a burden to the state's economy instead of a catalyst.

The solution to this problem isn't more government, it's less. What we need is a conservative vision for the state. This introductory document lays bare the issues and problems that are standing in the way for Wisconsin. In the coming months, IRG will be releasing a series of reforms that will cast a conservative vision for key executive branch agencies in the state.

Now is the time to renew our faith in the people of Wisconsin, not the government.

