



November 10, 2021

To: Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism

RE: SB 677 and SB 678

Chair Ballweg and members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Tourism,

River Alliance of Wisconsin appreciates the author's efforts to move some of the Water Quality Task Force's initiatives forward. The people of Wisconsin have been waiting a long time for meaningful action to provide clean water. While SB 677 and SB 678 are steps forward, we have a few concerns with the proposed legislation.

River Alliance's approach is to address three important actions: provide people clean water now, utilize our current laws and rules to their fullest extent, and envision a better water management system that will actually provide clean water for people to drink and for our rivers, streams and lakes to be healthy. We have created the [Wisconsin Water Agenda](#) to set the principles and criteria for developing a better system to manage our waters. Using the Water Agenda as our evaluation tool, we cannot support these two bills as written.

SB 678 is a step in the right direction for providing access to clean water now for those with contaminated private wells. Expanding the well compensation program will allow more people access to this grant program that provides alternate water sources and well replacement. However, it will not do much if the income limit is not simultaneously changed and the funding amount is not increased. Even with the proposed changes this program will not reach all of the people who cannot afford to pay the expenses to provide clean water to their households.

Likewise, SB 677 is a step in the right direction. The Nitrate pilot program will provide farmers and universities with small grants to implement practices that reduce the use and runoff of Nitrate. The cover crop insurance program is a good tool to help farmers have an incentive to reduce runoff. However, neither program invests enough money to provide the incentives farmers need to make these changes across the state. The nitrate grants are capped at \$50,000 per project and the cover crop insurance program is only \$400,000 for the entire state. Much more needs to be invested to make meaningful changes to reduce the impact of Nitrate and other pollutants in our waters. If the legislature is serious about improving water quality in Wisconsin, they need to provide sufficient resources to these programs and also invest in long-term solutions.

The next step the legislature needs to take is to approve and implement NR 151. The DNR, scientists, agricultural groups and conservation groups- including River Alliance, worked together for years to create administrative rules to provide a process to reduce Nitrate pollution in targeted areas of the state that have known water quality challenges. This collaborative and science-based process is almost complete. The legislature should approve these rules if they are serious about reducing the impact of Nitrate on our waters.

Under the targeted performance standards proposed for NR 151, farmers that are following the science to implement best practices are rewarded. The rule is designed to not put additional restrictions on people who are taking active steps to reduce fall fertilizer application. If the legislature wanted to meaningfully support farmers, they would provide more funding for conservation practices to the farmers that want to make changes to improve water quality.

As Rep. Kitchens stated, "No single approach can solve our water pollution problems, but concerted efforts like these can make a noticeable difference for our state's agricultural producers, rural residents and those who use our waterways."

We agree with Rep. Kitchens. These bills are just the beginning and we need many approaches to make a difference on the water quality in the state. The people of Wisconsin have been waiting long enough for action on clean water. On Election Day in April 2021, Marquette County (73%), Portage County (77%) and Wood County (76%) voters approved referendums on the value of clean water to protect human health, the environment, and the diverse cultural and natural heritage of Wisconsin. The next steps need to be: providing sufficient funding to all farmers that want to reduce their impact on our water quality, approve NR 151 and increase the income limit and provide more funding for the well compensation program.

Thank you for considering our comments.



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