

Midwest Environmental Advocates: Aquaculture bill raises concerns for environment, public trust

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Contact:

Stacy Geers, Staff Attorney- sgeers@midwestadvocates.org, (608) 251-5047 x 5
Stacy Harbaugh, Communications Director- sharbaugh@midwestadvocates.org,
(608) 251-5047 x 1

MADISON, WI –Midwest Environmental Advocates law center is raising concerns about how the proposed legislation relating to fish farming would negatively impact our state's waters and would be a giveaway of public resources to private industry. State Senators held a hearing on Senate Bill 95 relating to aquaculture last week.

“There is a difference between our state's natural fisheries and fish farming through aquaculture: private ownership,” said Staff Attorney Sarah Geers. “When our state's public waters are used by private corporations to sell fish for profit, it's our government's responsibility to ensure that protection of our water is a priority. Looking at the details, this bill, unfortunately, is a giveaway to local, special interests in Senator Tiffany's district.”

Senate Bill 95 is a revival of an attempt to pass a similar bill last year. While this year's version doesn't have some of the [2016 SB 493's](#) more concerning exemptions from our state wetland protection laws, remaining issues of concern with this bill include:

- allowing fish farms access to over 10,800 freshwater springs which could impact state trout fisheries as well as stream water temperature, quality and habitat,

- opening the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway to private fish farming under the laws that apply to agriculture, though agriculture rules weren't written to protect water quality impacts from fish farms,
- allowing the DNR to give fish eggs taken from waters of the state to aquaculture operations,
- exempting an existing fish farm in Langlade County – in Senator Tiffany's district – from laws that protect trout streams from drying up and prevent downstream waters from being degraded.

Midwest Environmental Advocates opposes this bill that would in essence privatize the use of navigable water that belongs to the public.