

Sen. Cowles: Bill to lower phosphorus levels, strengthen economy finally passes EPA hurdle

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MADISON - Facing impending deadlines that will force municipal water utilities and Wisconsin job creators to spend billions of dollars on costly filtration upgrades, Sen. Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) and Rep. Amy Loudenbeck (R-Clinton) today lauded the final approval of the State of Wisconsin's Phosphorus Multi-Discharger Variance (MDV). This newly approved reform measure will offer a vastly more cost-effective and resource protective means of reducing the phosphorus in our waters while lowering costs to water utility ratepayers and potentially saving thousands of Wisconsin manufacturing and food production jobs.

"I'm incredibly pleased that we were able to move this much-needed legislation. However, I am still disappointed by the amount of time it took the EPA to review and approve our creative approach to reduce phosphorus. The MDV will potentially save Wisconsin's water ratepayers and businesses billions of dollars while at the same time removing more phosphorus from our waters than is possible under the current system," Cowles said.

This innovative Wisconsin provision will offer a new fee-based compliance option in order for water utilities and manufacturers to meet the strict phosphorus discharge standards. This leaves existing phosphorus standards intact and does not repeal or suspend the existing water quality standards.

"A point-source discharger, such as a municipal wastewater treatment plant or a

papermaker, that is eligible for the MDV does not receive a free pass or a proverbial get-out-of-jail-free card,” said Loudenbeck. “Those point-sources, in exchange for reducing their phosphorus discharges over a longer compliance schedule, will pay \$50 per pound to counties to complete water quality improvement projects within the watershed the source is located.”

“Wisconsin waterways are significant economic drivers and support our nearly \$20 billion tourism industry. The MDV utilizes the flexibility provided to increase funding for nonpoint source pollution. This will result in a more direct approach on phosphorus pollution and increase the protection of our lakes and rivers,” stated Cowles.

The new option will allow water utilities, manufacturers and food processors to assist in reducing non-point phosphorus discharges, which constitutes a majority of the phosphorus in our waters.

“The multi-discharger variance is truly a win-win, and will result in Wisconsin’s water quality being improved. These improvements to water quality will occur as point-sources reduce their phosphorus discharges incrementally, and counties receive funding, that would be otherwise unavailable, to complete projects to reduce phosphorus runoff from non-point locations like golf courses and agriculture producers,” stated Loudenbeck.

Cowles concluded that “it was extremely encouraging to see the collaborative efforts of a myriad of stakeholders throughout this process. It is unfortunate that we acted in Wisconsin in 2014 and had to wait almost three years for an approval from the EPA. I would like to continue to push EPA to allow more Wisconsin businesses and utilities to utilize this unique approach in the future.”