

Wisconsin Council of Trout Unlimited: WITU opposes proposed wetlands bill

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CONTACT: Council Advocacy Co-Chair Matt Krueger
(608) 852-3020

Wisconsin legislators have recently introduced legislation that seeks to significantly roll back statewide wetlands protections, which could potentially harm coldwater habitat and trout streams around the state. The Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited is opposed to this legislation, which is currently being circulated for co-sponsorship in the Legislature.

LRBs 4410/1 and 4115/1, authored by Senator Roth and Representatives Steineke and Stafsholt, seek to remove protections for “non-federal” wetlands—which make up an estimated 20% of Wisconsin’s total wetland acreage—or approximately one million acres. Non-federal wetlands lack a permanent surface water connection to waterbodies like lakes and rivers that are protected by the Clean Water Act. However, these wetlands provide a host of other benefits, such as critical supply of groundwater to coldwater streams, particularly in headwaters sections, as well as protection against flooding, erosion, and nutrient pollution. These wetlands also provide habitat for diverse plant, animal, and bird species.

If this legislation moves forward, development of these wetlands could occur without a permit or DNR oversight, provided the developer pays into a mitigation fund to create artificial wetlands elsewhere.

Our members value the recreational opportunities that the woods and waters of Wisconsin offer. We also recognize the economic impacts that trout fishing in particular, and angling in general, provide to our state. A 2013 study by the American Sportfishing Association (the “ASA”) found that Wisconsin was the 3rd

highest ranked state in the number of non-resident anglers. We know the fishing's good here, and apparently so does the rest of the country. According to the ASA report, angling results in over \$1.4 BILLION of retail sales each year in our state. All told, recreational angling creates over \$2.2 BILLION in annual economic impact for Wisconsin's economy.

The Wisconsin State Council of Trout Unlimited recognizes that wetlands, even if "isolated" or "ephemeral" (other terms for non-federal wetlands) have a vital connection to trout streams. For this reason, the Council joins fellow sporting organizations in opposing this legislation.