

Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters: Conservationists urge strong manure pollution rules

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As drinking water is inundated with manure, NR 151 is a chance to help families

MADISON – The Department of Natural Resources held a hearing today in Green Bay and Madison on new manure pollution rules. Wisconsin League of Conservation urged the DNR to strengthen these rules, known as Administrative Rule NR 151, to protect Wisconsin families from contaminated drinking water.

Seth Hoffmeister, Northeast Organizer, presented this testimony to the DNR:

Good afternoon. I am Seth Hoffmeister, Northeast Organizer for Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters. Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to encouraging decision makers to champion conservation policies that effectively protect Wisconsin's public health and natural resources. Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the proposed changes to Administrative Rule NR 151.

Wisconsin's groundwater is our most precious natural resource, providing drinking water for two-thirds of Wisconsinites. But, large scale factory farms producing massive quantities of manure have polluted our groundwater and made many families' water unsafe to drink. It is a growing problem all over the state, but is particularly acute in northeast Wisconsin. Fully one-third of rural Kewaunee County families have wells contaminated with bacteria and pathogens from liquid manure sprayed on fields and held in giant lagoons that leak and break.

It's so bad that, in Algoma, many people must go to a local school to get clean water that's safe for drinking and washing, because their wells are contaminated. It is unacceptable that in 2017, in Wisconsin, families are hauling water from miles away just to meet their basic needs.

While we applaud the DNR's work to begin updating NR 151 to reduce groundwater contamination, this situation should never have been allowed to get to this point before we finally acted.

Changes proposed in Administrative Rule NR 151 are an opportunity to help the people of northeast Wisconsin, and beyond, by finally implementing a stronger package of rules to address our groundwater contamination problem.

Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters commends these draft rules for requiring that farms control the rate at which they apply manure on vulnerable areas. We also applaud the creation of larger manure application boundaries around private wells and other contamination points, like sinkholes and fissures. These two recommendations are critical for protecting our water and must not be weakened.

In addition to these changes already in the proposed rule, we ask that NR 151 be strengthened to prohibit manure application on soil less than three feet deep over bedrock. Keeping manure off shallow soils is one of the most important strategies for keeping pollution from getting into our groundwater.

We are disappointed that the proposed rules only apply to areas in the Silurian bedrock on the eastern side of Wisconsin. We understand that the geologic data necessary to implement this rule has not been mapped as extensively in other areas of the state, but we cannot allow another region-wide drinking water crisis to develop in areas with karst topography. Therefore, we are calling on the DNR to map and collect geologic and water quality data in southwest Wisconsin to prevent a crisis similar to what's happening in Kewaunee County. We realize that will not happen in this rule, but it must be a priority of the DNR to work with partners in the Southwest region to begin the data collection and mapping that will allow this rule to eventually apply there as well.

The ongoing water contamination in Wisconsin from livestock manure is a public health crisis that has gone on for far too long. We applaud the DNR for beginning to address this issue in the most sensitive areas of our state and we look forward to working with you to ensure that strong rules are adopted and implemented and, eventually, expanded to include other regions of Wisconsin.



Thank you for your time and service.