

Natural Resources Development Association: Support of Amendments to AB 956

Posted on Friday, Mar 9, 2018

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To: Members of the Wisconsin State Senate

Date: March 6, 2018

RE: Support of Amendments to AB 956

Legislators,

The Natural Resource Development Association strongly urges the members of the Wisconsin State Senate to put an end to the continued obstructionist behavior by extreme environmentalist groups bent on stopping progress for their own political gain. We ask that you pay special attention to the current permit approved by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for the Meteor Timber Project that has also been approved by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

As an association, we humbly ask that as the state's deliberative body, you look directly at the facts at hand and not the misleading falsehoods put forth by those who would rather see 300 acres of land clear cut than come to the preferred agreement. The agreement we reference involves vast wetlands mitigation that has been championed unanimously by town representatives and by a super-majority of the elected officials in the counties involved.

Here is a prime example of being able to maintain local control over a project,

infuse the economy, and bring about amazing environmental dividends.

Please see the facts below and understand that by sitting idly by we will do nothing but put this land in danger of a complete clear cut — and provide nothing for the local community, nor the environment in the long term.

In a proceeding that began in the summer of 2015, Meteor Timber entered into the permitting process to develop nearly 16 acres of high-quality wetland for processing purposes located on private property that would bring more than \$70 million dollars of investment into the towns of Knapp and Grant located in Jackson and Monroe Counties. This project will bring nearly 300 immediate construction jobs to the area, and infuse the long-term economy with more than 100 full-time, family-supporting jobs for generations to come.

Meteor Timber, acting as a good corporate citizen, has worked tirelessly for over 2.5 years with local citizens, local elected officials, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the US Army Corps of Engineers to create a mitigation plan that is a win for the environment and the local economies.

They not only received their initial permit from the Department of Natural Resources, but have also received their permit from the United States Army Corps of Engineers. With a plan in place that will mitigate more than 630 acres of land and ensure the growth of White Pine and Red Maples for future Wisconsinites to enjoy, Meteor has been relentlessly attacked by detractors who refuse to acknowledge the facts and benefits of this project.

Clean Wisconsin, Midwest Environmental Advocates and others that thwart environmental and economic progress have shown that this particular contested case proceeding is nothing more than political theater to push forth an agenda. They have used disgruntled former Department of Natural Resources, Mr. Cain and Ms. Trochlell, employees in an attempt to discredit a permitting process that has been used thousands of times effectively in the Badger State.

For example, Mr. Cain has explicitly stated under oath at the contested case

hearing that he has not even read the amended permit, nor was he a mitigation expert before the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy.

Of the three expert witnesses that testified on behalf of MEA and Clean Wisconsin, only one, Patricia Trochlell, had actually been to the property—for a period of a few hours in 2016. She has testified that the likelihood of Red Maple and White Pine wetland that she and the Department requested be developed on the 58 acres of cranberry beds is very low. As we have shared previously, attached are photographs taken from the site that unmistakably prove that both species will grow on the site. In fact, the Red Maple grows in the cranberry beds despite the landowner's best efforts to kill the trees for the betterment of his cranberry operations. A second witness testified that he had not even read the application and didn't have an opinion on the mitigation plan.

Clean Wisconsin and Midwest Environmental Advocates continuously talk about the conditions contained in the first permit issued to Meteor Timber. What they fail to disclose is that while under oath Ms. Trochlell acknowledged many of the conditions that they publicly decry were ones that she personally had a hand in drafting while she was employed by the DNR, and was paid by the State of Wisconsin to develop. They also completely ignore the fact that the Department went through a formal amendment process to re-issue the permit in October, and that amended permit addresses all conditions contained in the first permit issued by the Agency. The first permit has been rendered moot by the amended permit, which receives no mention by the press or Clean Wisconsin and Midwest Environmental Advocates. **That is correct—their whole case criticizes the permit conditions that their lead witness was paid by the taxpayers to help draft, while effectively conceding that the version the Department amended—without Ms. Trochlell—meets the requirements of the law.**

In 2017 alone, the timber company that manages Meteor Timber, Timberland Investment Resources, has planted approximately 7 million trees across their footprint. Over the last four years in Wisconsin more than 400,000 trees have been planted with no survival issues by the timber company. In addition, all of Timberland Investment Resources properties are certified sustainable under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative. Meteor Timber continues to manage any and all of its natural resource projects in a sustainable and responsible manner and maintains great stewardship of their community. All 56,000 acres managed by Timberland

Investment Resources is currently open to the public for hunting and fishing. The company also has miles of snowmobile and ATV trails located upon its property open to the public for no charge.

The sad fact of the matter is that both Mr. Cain and Ms. Trochlell are pushing a vocal narrative against the current administration for the passage of Act 10 and other reforms that have streamlined the permit process and not the actual project at hand.

To be perfectly blunt, the amendments to AB 956 must be passed by this body to ensure that this land can, and will, be developed correctly. The amendments to this bill do absolutely nothing to the mitigation plan. They hold the strong environmental standards that Wisconsinites expect in place, and ensure that not a single shovel goes into the ground until all expectations for future obligations to the land are met by the permit holder.

Meteor Timber, in good faith and in a clear desire to continue to be a vibrant part of the community, has also offered to work with Clean Wisconsin and Midwest Environmental Associates on a number of increased mitigation efforts. Meteor has offered an additional 450 off-site acres for protection of wetlands and a commitment enhance this property for a Karner Blue Butterfly habitat. Those offers of settlement have gone nowhere.

Clean Wisconsin and The Midwest Environmental Advocates are more interested in pushing a false narrative than saving this land for future use. Please take a moment to listen to the local voices involved in this project, and the great benefits it will provide to the community and Wisconsin as a whole.

Distressed landowner Marty Alexander, a 20-year veteran of the U.S. Army, is a 67-year-old family man whose life-long dream was to own a cranberry marsh. A bank currently holds a \$326,000 note against his property that is currently due. Mr. Alexander has three choices: 1. Lose the land and allow it to become the property of the bank, 2. Clear cut the timber and sell it to cover the costs of his owed obligations, 3. Work with Meteor Timber to mitigate the land, build the project, keep his home, and help provide hundreds of local jobs that will revitalize his community.

Mr. Alexander stated in the contested case that he realizes that some may not like the project, but most of them have never worked in a cranberry bog, and have never been a farmer. He feels that this plan is not only the best way to help his family, but his community, and the future of the pristine land he has cultivated for his entire life.

Scott Goetzka, the chair of the Town of Knapp, made impassioned remarks in support of the Meteor project. The Town of Knapp is where the project would be located and Meteor has stepped well beyond its permitted obligations to ensure that a proper relationship with the local community not only begins, but flourishes for generations.

Mr. Goetzka's testimony included the following comments: Meteor agreed, at its own cost to not use the shortest path to the dry plant for the potential project and to stay off the town road in order to lessen the impact on the town by potential operations. This means that at their own additional cost, Meteor agreed to pay for the town road that will be used and picked up all of the town's legal fees, permitting fees, and design costs related to the roads in use and those that will need to be build or updated. This local agreement also includes Meteor agreeing to set backs, even though under our ordinances they did not legally have to.

Meteor also agreed to limit blasting and let the town have input on the reclamation plan, again something the company was not required to do. Also, after reclamation is complete, Meteor agreed to turn the mine over to the town for a recreational property and work towards building a lake similar to the Lake Wazee reclamation project in Jackson County.

Lastly, Meteor Timber, showcasing its commitment to the local community and the life-sustaining jobs it will create, had agreed to pay \$100,000 a year to the Town of Knapp. To put this in perspective, that payment would allow the town to completely eliminate its town tax and allow for continued rebuilding of local roads. Once again, this project has unanimous support of the town officials.

Current Department of Natural Resource staff approved, have defended, and worked diligently with Meteor Timber to ensure that the permitting process was

followed and a proper mitigation plan was put in place. Department of Natural Resource Staff also testified that there was absolutely no pressure placed upon them to approve the plan, that this project and the permit that was approved was a good plan that met all the requirements under the law.

Brad Johnson, a 25-year veteran of the Department and leader in the organization with regards to large metallic mining project in northern Wisconsin, has duties including stormwater management in six counties in western Wisconsin, with additional responsibility for all water permitting for industrial sand mining projects. This includes mines, transload facilities, and processing facilities in those six counties in central Wisconsin.

He has been working in the stormwater and wastewater permitting and monitoring of these facilities for nearly 18 years. He has handled all water permits for the under his purview since 2015.

He testified that not only did Meteor work with him diligently on the permit process, but that they came back numerous times to make sure that they would be providing the best possible outcome for the local community and environment. In fact, as part of the project Meteor will eliminate Old Town Road on the site, which is a historic 1950's-era road fill of approximately 1.5 acres that clearly bisects a wetland complex. Removing this road and restoring the area will eliminate the fragmentation of the wetland on either side and allow for better wetland mitigation and land reclamation.

Per his expert testimony after being directly involved with the permitting process of this project, Mr. Johnson highlighted that Meteor has also committed as part of the overall project to perform a stream restoration on Rudd Creek through the Alexander site. This was once a native fishery that had been destroyed over time. In the past, the creek had been ditched, straightened, and dredged, and had virtually been eliminated as a fishery. Once this project is allowed to proceed, Meteor will restore approximately 1,900 lineal feet of the creek, including the addition of meanders, floodplain storage, habitat structures, and Meteor will monitor the stream to evaluate improvements to the fishery and aquatic insect community.

Meteor has also proposed to put the remaining acreage under easement will provide additional environmental benefit. The easement will prevent cutting of trees, require invasive species monitoring and maintenance, and make sure the White Pine and Red Maple swamp community remains intact. In addition, the company will place a conservation easement on a property containing 180 acres they own approximately half a mile to the west of the site, which again will not be harvested for timber and will remain in perpetuity as a White Pine and Red Maple forest system. The additional 180-acre property being conserved is of equal environmental quality to the 16 acres being impacted by the Meteor project.

Mr. Johnson, a current Department of Natural Resources employee with intimate knowledge of this project, and having visited the site on multiple occasions directly contradicts the comments made by former disgruntled Department staff and showcases that with due diligence and a working relationship with the community and the company, a good permit can be made and a positive project can be created.

Once again, as we have seen in the past, a vocal minority that has no local connection to a project is utilizing a process to gum up the works against a permit that will not only create wetland growth opportunity, but help fund a community far into the future. Please take the time to support the amendments to AB 956 and stop this obstructionist behavior. The project which effectively creates a forty-to -one mitigation plan ratio was reviewed intensively by the Department of Natural Resources for 23 months before the initial permit was issued, subsequently the Department also reviewed thousands of pages of information to reach their proper conclusion. This project met the legal requirements for a permit to be issued, and should proceed. We implore the Wisconsin State Senate take into account that if this project does not go forward due to posturing by environmental extremists with no actual connection to the land, it will be lost. It will be clear cut. We will lose jobs, we will lose opportunity, and we will lose for Wisconsin's future.

Thank you for your time and attention in this matter. We look forward to seeing your support for this smart and necessary legislation.

Meteor Timber Project Facts At-a-Glance:

- On top of DNR Permit requirements which include Meteor Timber creating or preserving more than 630 acres of land for wetland restoration, the company has independently offered Clean Wisconsin and Midwest Environment Advocates more than 450 additional offsite acres to be placed into a conservation easement in perpetuity or environmental enhancement. This would bring the total amount of acres created or preserved to more than 1,000.
- The project in total will impact 16 acres of private land, that if not responsibly developed will be clear cut by the owner to ensure financial viability. In addition to the 16 acres for the project the owner would clear cut another 285 acres of wetlands if the project is not approved.
- The Township of Knapp in Jackson County and the Township of Grant in Monroe County have both voted unanimously in support of the project.
- Meteor Timber has also committed to naturalizing and reintroducing native-trout to a local creek on the mitigation site.
- Meteor Timber has pledged thousands of dollars to create a habitat for the Karner Blue Butterfly, an endangered species.
- All settlement offers sent by Meteor Timber have not been responded to by Midwest Environmental Advocates or Clean Wisconsin.
- This project will include nearly 300 immediate construction jobs that will help the local economy flourish.
- Once this project is up and running it will bring more than 100 long term, family supporting jobs to the community.
- Overall this project would be a \$70-million-dollar investment by Meteor Timber into the local community.

Sincerely,

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About Natural Resource Development Association

The Natural Resource Development Association supports policies that lead to proper, necessary, and conscientious resource development and conservation. By engaging community leaders, laborers, manufacturers, and job creators in the legislative and decision-making process, the association will help create an open atmosphere for resources development that is both environmentally sound and economically beneficial for Wisconsin. For more information, please visit DevelopOurResources.org.