

Sen. Cowles: Senate Committee passes amended wetland reform bill

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Senator Robert Cowles ~ [\(920\) 660-0615](tel:(920)660-0615)

MADISON– Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay) released the following statement after 2017 Senate Bill 600, authored by Senator Roger Roth (R-Appleton) and Representative Jim Steineke (R-Kaukauna) and amended by Senators Roth and Cowles, was recommended for passage by the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Energy:

“Since Senate Bill 600’s referral in early December, my staff and I have been working diligently with the bill’s authors to address concerns that have been raised by several stakeholders. While this legislation underwent several iterations, the Senate Substitute Amendment constitutes the greatest balance between conservation and community growth. This conciliation represents a step forward in wetlands regulations for everyone, and the creation of the Wisconsin Wetlands Study Council will help to provide future recommendations on wetland regulations from industry, local government, and conservation experts for years to come.

“I want to thank Senator Roth, Representative Steineke, their staff members, stakeholders, and the citizens who have contacted their legislators to share their concerns and support for the legislation. We are pleased to have worked with various groups to add additional measures to the Senate Substitute Amendment that better protects our natural resources while addressing the ongoing issues that have slowed economic growth.”

Senate Substitute 1 to 2017 Senate Bill 600 limits the scope of the bill. In urban areas, the disturbance to a nonfederal wetland may not impact more than one acre, and mitigation is required after 10,000 square feet. In rural areas, an exemption

from permitting only applies if the discharge is for an agricultural structure, and the disturbance may be up to three acres with mitigation required after one and one-half acres. The Substitute Amendment includes conditions in both urban and rural areas that could preempt the exemption, including rare and high-quality wetland types and adjacency to trout streams.

The substitute amendment also addresses exemptions for artificial wetlands, extending the lifespan of a delineation, and establishing qualified third person delineations. Finally, Senate Substitute 1 takes portions of 2017 Senate Bill 702 to establish a grant program for nonprofits to perform wetland mitigations on certain state-owned lands and creates a Wetlands Study Council to address future concerns or problems with the law, administrative rules, or implementation of those laws or rules regarding wetlands.