

# Wisconsin Wetlands Association: Applauds passage of Flood Demonstration Projects Bill

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The State Assembly unanimously passed legislation providing funding toward the design and construction of up to three demonstration projects showcasing natural flood mitigation strategies in Ashland County. The Wisconsin Wetlands Association (WWA) supports this effort because healthy upper watershed wetlands and streams can store and slow the flow of water, thereby minimizing damage to downstream infrastructure like roads, bridges, and culverts.

*“Healthy upper watershed wetlands can be solutions to the state’s growing water management problems,” said WWA Executive Director Tracy Hames. “In fact, we can’t solve our water problems without them and these demonstration projects will provide valuable examples of restoration strategies and techniques.”*

Senate Bill 252 provides \$150,000 to Ashland County toward the design and construction of demonstration projects. The bill also requires the DNR to issue a report to the Legislature and Department of Emergency Management summarizing the results of the demonstration projects.

Ashland County is expected to be the first county in the state to include wetland and floodplain restoration strategies into their hazard mitigation plans as a part of a complementary project, *Rebuilding Natural Infrastructure in Ashland County*. This project is the first FEMA-supported project focused on natural flood management in the State of Wisconsin. Wisconsin communities who are interested in restoring

wetlands to reduce flood risks and damages will be able to learn from the methods Ashland County collaborators are pioneering to engage stakeholders, assess the condition of the hydrologic landscape, identify restoration strategies, and measure results.

*“Communities are looking to expand their toolbox and include restoration of healthy watershed conditions in their flood mitigation strategies,” said Hames. “By passing SB 252, the state is helping provide the on-the-ground examples and data to support these communities.”*

In 2017, WWA received a grant from the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program[i] to assess the condition of wetlands upstream of flood damaged roads and culverts in the Marengo Watershed within the Lake Superior Basin in Ashland County. While Northern Wisconsin is not typically perceived to lack wetlands, WWA found that erosion was draining wetlands and disconnecting floodplains upstream from each damaged site in the focus area, amplifying flooding downstream. A case study summary of these findings is available online.[ii]

Senate Bill 252 was authored by Representatives Steineke and B. Meyers and Senators Petrowski and Bewley. The bipartisan proposal also had the support of many co-sponsors from both houses and both parties. The bill will now head to Governor Evers’ desk for his consideration.