

Wisconsin Legislature: Sortwell-Jacque DNR bill clears ports, maintains beaches

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Legislation requires agency to allow beneficial reuse of sand removed from our Great Lakes

MADISON, WI... Clear Great Lakes ports, operational supply chains, and cleaner beaches could result from DNR regulatory reform legislation passed by the State Assembly today in a voice vote.

State Rep. Shae Sortwell (R-Two Rivers) and State Sen. André Jacque (R-De Pere), co-authors of the measure, said these common sense adjustments ensure environmental protections remain in place, while saving money for local governments that otherwise face substantial costs to dispose of a still valuable and reusable material, allowing coastal communities to shore up and reclaim beach areas.

“After working on this legislation for one-and-a-half years, I am glad we can get it moving forward through the legislature,” Rep. Sortwell said. “The process has been difficult as we sought to find common ground with DNR on the issue. After several meetings, we were able to craft a product for all parties to be satisfied. Assembly Bill 99 will economically and environmentally benefit all of Wisconsin’s harbor municipalities, especially the City of Two Rivers.”

Sediment and sand accumulation is a naturally occurring process in our rivers and

harbors. To keep harbors safe for economic activity and recreational boating, they need to be dredged. Additionally, higher water levels across the Great Lakes continue to impact coastal communities and reduce the size of beaches.

“One best practice to promote coastal resiliency is “beach nourishment”- allowing replenished/recycled beach sand dredged from offshore to maintain the natural beach area and protective offshore sand bar system,” said Sen. Jacque, a member of the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus. “The US Army Corps of Engineers employs this practice, but when the DNR controls the process, it has proved to be practically unworkable.”

The bill ([Assembly Bill 99](#)):

- Facilitates disposal of material dredged from Lake Michigan or Lake Superior by requiring the DNR to, by rule, exempt facilities from various solid waste standards as they would pertain to disposal of dredged material
- Requires DNR to hold a public hearing in the county where a facility is located before approving a request to accept dredged materials that contain PCBs or heavy metals
- Exempts disposal of dredged materials from the various tipping fees

Rep. Sortwell and Sen. Jacque said this proposal originated with the City of Two Rivers; numerous local elected and appointed officials along the lakeshores have indicated their support as well. Similar legislation was enacted in Indiana in 2018 and championed by both parties, with unanimous bi-partisan support in both chambers.

The Wisconsin measure now moves to the State Senate.