

☐☐Lautenschlager surpasses Doyle in actions for environment offenses☐☐  
Green Bay Press Gazette, posted 2-2-04  
By Peter Rebhahn

State Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager initiated 20 more legal actions against alleged violators of the state's environmental laws in her first year in office than her predecessor, Gov. Jim Doyle, in his last year in the office.

According to data supplied by the attorney general's office, Lautenschlager initiated 92 cases in 2003 — 27 percent more than the 72 cases Doyle began in 2002, the last of his 12 years as attorney general.

Officials from the Justice Department and the state Department of Natural Resources downplayed the numbers and said the uptick in enforcement actions doesn't necessarily signal a change in enforcement attitudes.

"We can only enforce cases based on referrals," said Tom Dawson, assistant attorney general. "Even Jim Doyle had to get referrals from DNR to prosecute."

Dawson is director of the state Department of Justice's Environmental Protection Unit, which handles environmental enforcement actions.

Dawson said nearly all of the Justice Department's environmental enforcement actions originate in referrals from the DNR, and he praised that agency's recent performance.

Madison attorney Scott Hassett replaced Darrell Bazzell as DNR secretary on Jan. 6, 2003.

Hassett appointed long-time DNR employee Jack Sullivan acting administrator of the agency's Science and Enforcement Division in February 2003.

"I didn't put a directive out that we need to make more cases," Sullivan said.

The DNR's enforcement arm has more than 200 employees, but most are fish and game wardens, Sullivan said.

Each of the DNR's five regions has just two or three environmental enforcement officers.

Andrew Hanson, an attorney for Madison-based Midwest Environmental Advocates, said Lautenschlager's stepped-up enforcement hasn't gone

unnoticed in the environmental community.

“She is sending stronger enforcement signals to the public and to the Doyle administration,” Hanson said.

Hanson’s group was sharply critical of environmental enforcement under former Gov. Tommy Thompson, whose time in office overlapped with Doyle’s tenure as attorney general.

Sullivan said his division has followed Hassett’s direction for a “strong, fair and reasonable” enforcement program.

“And that’s what we think we run today,” Sullivan said.

Dawson said citizens can expect continued vigorous enforcement.

“If you break the rules, you’re going to be held to account,” Dawson said. “We certainly don’t want to signal that this is a place where you can get away with violating the law, and I don’t think those complying with the law would want that message sent either.”