

NEWS RELEASE

Sierra Club

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Sierra Club and Izaak Walton League Join Together to Clean Up Rush River Watershed

Baldwin, WI—Today, Sierra Club's John Muir Chapter and Izaak Walton League of America joined together to clean up the Rush River by ensuring that the Jon De Farm, Inc. mega-dairy no longer spills manure and animal feed runoff into the Rush River. The groups sent Jon De Farm Inc. a letter of intent to sue, which gives the animal factory 60 days to demonstrate that no future discharges will occur or face a lawsuit in federal court. In the past five years, the animal factory has violated federal environmental and public health protections over twelve times by discharging untreated animal waste directly into the Rush River and in some cases failing to report those discharges to the DNR.

"Wisconsin residents from across the state visit the Rush River because it is a highly valuable trout fishery," said John Shafer, a local farmer, school teacher, and president of the Western Wisconsin Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America. "We hope that Jon De Farm, Inc. will finally be forced to protect the Rush River for everyone who goes fishing, birding, and picnicking there."

According to the letter of intent to sue, Jon De Farm, Inc. violated the Clean Water Act and failed to report pollution spills to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The lawsuit announcement comes on the heels of a report issued by the Sierra Club documenting a pattern of environmental violations by America's largest animal factories that resulted in criminal charges and fines.

"I fish in the Rush River, and my family has lived on or near the Rush River for more than 150 years," said Harold Fosmo, member of the Western Wisconsin Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America. "I've seen Jon De Farm spill manure and runoff into the Rush River, and I can no longer watch my river be destroyed by animal feces and livestock feed. It's unfortunate that we're forced to use a lawsuit, but this beautiful river deserves to be kept clean."

The Sierra Club and Izaak Walton League letter stated that a history of poor management practices and mechanical failures at Jon De Farm made clear that future spills were inevitable.

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“We believe that Jon De Farm’s facility was not designed to meet federal law. As a result of this failure and other management problems, the Rush River and all those who depend on it have suffered,” said Caryl Terrell, Director of Wisconsin’s John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club.

“Without significant changes made by Jon De Farm, it is only a matter of time before there is another spill,” said Andrew Hanson, attorney with Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc. “This is yet another example of how industrialized agriculture can threaten our public waters.”

Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc., a nonprofit environmental law center, and Garvey & Stoddard, S.C. are providing legal representation to the community-based groups.

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