

# Midwest Environmental ADVOCATES

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## **2009-2011 Proposed Budget Inadequate to Protect State's Natural Resources and Public Health**

Contact: Karen M. Schapiro, Executive Director, Midwest Environmental Advocates  
(608) 251-5047 ext 3 or (414) 507-7049

Madison, WI – Today, Midwest Environmental Advocates (MEA), Wisconsin's first and only non-profit environmental law center, submitted comments to the Legislature's Joint Committee on Finance on specific items in the proposed 2009-2011 Proposed Budget Bill that threaten the impact and influence of the Department of Natural Resources here in Wisconsin. Proposed cuts to the DNR's budget will mean a net base reduction of 85.5 full-time employees, on top of 300 already-vacant positions. MEA's comment urged the Joint Committee on Finance to revise the budget to maintain or increase DNR staffing levels so that DNR will be able to continue its mission to protect the environment and the public health and welfare of the citizens of Wisconsin.

MEA, in its mission to promote clean, open government, surveys the DNR's implementation of the Clean Water Act by reviewing the DNR's implementation of the Wisconsin Pollution Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) program, a program that was delegated to the DNR's authority by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Since 2007, MEA has reviewed nearly 500 water pollution discharge permits and has observed that the DNR is not conforming to Clean Water Act requirements, including, among others, their responsibility to adequately limit discharges of nutrients (e.g., phosphorous and nitrogen), determine the "reasonable potential" of a discharge to violate a water quality standard, and to keep clean waters clean in accordance with federally-mandated "antidegradation" standards.

"Despite the agency's best intentions, DNR is incapable of implementing its responsibilities with insufficient resources and staff," says Karen Schapiro, MEA's Executive Director. "The consequences of further staff reduction at DNR put Wisconsin's lakes, rivers and streams at great risk. The budget cut-backs also put DNR at risk of having citizens petition the EPA to de-delegate the authority of DNR to implement the Clean Water Act. If the DNR is unable to properly implement and enforce the law, the only option may be to call upon the EPA to step in and take over the program in Wisconsin."

Comments submitted today urged the Joint Committee on Finance to consider the repercussions that reducing DNR funding, programs and staff would have on the future of the state of Wisconsin. Comment letter is attached.

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