

Midwest Environmental ADVOCATES

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Right to Farm Law Should Not Be Used to Protect Bad Actors

Madison – Today, the special interest group Wisconsin Farm Bureau Federation announced its attempt to obstruct the protection of our public waters by intervening in a court action to stop a large cranberry grower's pollution of Lac Courte Oreilles Lake in Sawyer County.

The Attorney General initiated the lawsuit under the Public Trust Doctrine because the State of Wisconsin is responsible for protecting public waterways and the public's right to use them for hunting, fishing, and recreation. The lawsuit alleges that a large cranberry grower's discharges of phosphorus and pesticides are polluting Musky Bay, in the southern portion of Lac Courte Oreilles Lake.

Data collected by independent agencies, including the Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, shows high levels of phosphorus immediately downstream of the cranberry grower's discharges.

"In attacking the Attorney General's attempts to protect our public waters, the Farm Bureau ignores the Public Trust Doctrine and the Wisconsin State Constitution," said Melissa Scanlan, Executive Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc. and a published author on Wisconsin's Public Trust Doctrine.

"As farmers, we may have a right to farm, but not a right to pollute," said Gloria Helstad, a family farmer and pork producer in Jackson County. "We all have a responsibility to leave this earth a better place for future generations," her husband, Mike Helstad, added.

"If this is the kind of cranberry grower that is protected by the Right to Farm law, our public waters are in big trouble and the Farm Bureau has undermined its own claims that, as an organization, it cares about environmental protection," said Andrew Hanson, Staff Attorney at Midwest Environmental Advocates, Inc.

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