

Midwest Environmental  
ADVOCATES

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**COALITION PETITIONS EPA AND OBTAINS RESTRICTIONS ON FACTORY FARM POLLUTION.**

Madison, Wisconsin — As the spring thaws began this year, Midwest Environmental Advocates filed a petition with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on behalf of a coalition of seven family farm and environmental organizations, including Wisconsin's Environmental Decade, WISPIRG, Sierra Club — John Muir Chapter, Family Farm Defenders, Wisconsin Rural Development Center, River Alliance of Wisconsin, and Wisconsin Citizen Action. Together, these groups represent over 100,000 Wisconsin residents who are concerned about protecting small farms and the environment.

The coalition challenged all of the permits the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) proposed to issue to factory farms in the state. They called on the EPA in an effort to change systemic problems with the WDNR's issuance of permits to factory farms, problems that have persisted for well over a decade. They claimed that the proposed permits failed to protect water resources and violated the federal Clean Water Act in four ways:

- 1) The permits failed to prohibit discharges of pollutants from the facilities.
- 2) The permits failed to include limits necessary to protect water quality standards.
- 3) The permits used compliance schedules, giving some facilities four years before they needed to stop manure from running off into lakes, rivers, and wetlands.
- 4) The permits failed to require sufficient monitoring, reporting, and certification requirements to ensure that factory farms are not endangering water resources and public health.

In response to this petition, the EPA recommended changes to the WDNR's statewide permitting program, and the WDNR complied by letter dated May 24, 2000, in which the agency submitted draft permit language to the EPA. In a little over one month, the coalition achieved many of the changes they sought. Most notably, the WDNR has strengthened the prohibitions against waste entering lakes, rivers, wetlands, and drinking water, by including the effluent limit required by federal law. After 26 years as a valid federal regulation, the WDNR has finally included it in its permits for factory farms, said Melissa K. Scanlan, Legal Director of Midwest Environmental Advocates. The agency has also promised to require monitoring and reporting, a vast improvement over the challenged permits that required no monitoring and reporting of polluted runoff.

These changes show that advocacy produces environmental benefits for the entire state, said Dave Zaber of Wisconsin's Environmental Decade.

Although we are pleased with the result, we are not confident that the agency will deliver on its promises. We will continue to monitor the implementation of these changes and step in to enforce the law where necessary, said Scanlan.

According to Caryl Terrell, Legislative Coordinator of the Sierra Club — John Muir Chapter, The DNR's changes still leave major gaps that fail to adequately protect our water resources. We need a legislative solution to this problem.