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EDUCATION NETWORK**

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To: Assembly Committee on Natural Resources
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Environment

Re: Opposition to Special Session SB 24/AB 24

The League of Women Voters believes government must welcome and encourage the informed and active participation of the citizens it serves. League members are particularly concerned that Special Session SB 24/AB 24 may impact agency and public review of large and complex projects, such as mining. The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin opposes any new legislation that weakens environmental protections or reduces opportunities for citizen comment or legal redress.

The changes this bill proposes, when taken as a whole, significantly reduce public access to information and the public's ability to provide input into proposed projects. For Chapter 30 permits, this bill:

- Shortens public notice and comment periods
- Allows the comment period to begin before all information about a project is collected by the Department of Natural Resources
- Establishes presumptive approval if the DNR does not approve or deny a permit application within a certain timeline
- Gives the DNR the ability to deny a public hearing if it finds that there is not "significant public interest" in a project
- Gives the DNR authority to issue general permits instead of individual permits
- Eliminates most newspaper notices and puts them in an undetermined location on the department's "internet Web site."

Having publicly-available information about projects affecting our environment and providing meaningful public input into those projects is a central tenet of environmental law. This bill would remove both elements from DNR's regulation over dredging, filling, and building structures in Wisconsin's waterways.

In Wisconsin, our abundant water is one of our most valuable natural resources. The DNR is responsible for ensuring that these waters are held in public trust. This bill would remove important legal protections and processes which ensure that the DNR is able to openly, transparently, and properly administer the Chapter 30 program.

The League of Women Voters opposes changes to the information-gathering powers of the DNR, the notice and comment requirements, authority for issuing general permits, and the presumptive approvals.

We urge you to reject this bill. Thank you.