



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® OF WISCONSIN

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To: Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee

Re: Support SB 15, Independent DNR Secretary

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of SB 15, restoring the Independent Secretary for the Department of Natural Resources.

Since its founding, the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin has looked at many aspects of state government and has adopted a variety of positions aimed at promoting an open governmental system that is representative, accountable, responsive and capable of making decisions. The League carefully reviewed and endorsed the Kellett Commission comprehensive reorganization of state agencies in 1967.

This was the origin of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR). DNR was a combination of several existing departments and continued the principle of citizen leadership proposed in the 1920s by Aldo Leopold for the Conservation Department. The seven-citizen Natural Resources Board has served us well over the years. The Board insulates policy development and implementation from the political swings of elected officials. The Board promotes public understanding and participation in decision making and offsets pressure from outside groups with special financial interests in access to Wisconsin's land, air and water resources.

One of the most significant powers of the citizen board was the hiring and firing of the agency secretary. The Board selected only a few secretaries over a period of almost 30 years. Long tenure promoted consistency in resource conservation, stewardship and long-range planning. Nationally the Wisconsin DNR secretaries were recognized as professionals in natural resource management.

However in the 1995 budget, the Governor proposed several changes adopted as part of the State Budget that year. The secretary of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was made a cabinet appointment, and the Natural Resources Board was made advisory. The League believes that these changes weakened the citizen's ability to have input into department decisions.

The League of Women Voters urges you to support SB 15. This would end current law under which the Secretary of Natural Resources is nominated by the Governor and, with the advice and consent of the Senate, appointed to serve at the pleasure of the Governor. Under this bill, the Natural Resources Board appoints the Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources. The bill would take effect upon the inauguration of the Governor in January 2011.

We urge you to vote for SB 15 and recommend it to the full Senate for adoption. Thank you for considering the League's testimony in your deliberations.