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In 2011 at the annual Spring Hearings, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress asked the public if they would support legislation that would require lands purchased as state parks to be open to hunting and trapping. The public vote supported these questions (3,710 yea, 872 nay, approved in 72 counties for hunting and 3,488 yea, 1,078 nay, approved in 71 counties, rejected in one for trapping).

In April, legislation was enacted that opened state parks to hunting and trapping opportunities (and fishing where applicable) while enabling the department to prohibit these activities to protect park visitors or unique natural resources. The department's proposal was presented to the Forestry, Parks, and Recreation Committee by Dan Schuller at their November 3 meeting in Stevens Point. The committee unanimously supported the department's proposal to implement this legislation and increase opportunities for hunting and trapping on state park lands. The Executive Committee met via conference call on December 3, and adopted the Forestry, Parks, and Recreation Committee's position of support as the official Congress position.

The Congress feels the department has done a thorough job of looking at state parks and trails individually and identifying areas that would not be conducive to these activities. In addition, the proposal to wait and open these lands after the peak use period for non-consumptive user groups has passed, indicates the department is cognizant of the needs of various users and has been very deliberate in their attempt to coordinate the use of state parks/trails lands across a broad spectrum of activities. The Congress would like to commend the department staff statewide for their combined effort to identify appropriate areas to increase hunting, fishing, and trapping opportunities.

In closing I feel it is important to point out some specific facts pertinent to this discussion. First, it should be noted that this is not something that is brand new. For years there has been some hunting in a number of Wisconsin state park areas and this has occurred significant impact on non-hunting users. The department has successfully managed public areas for multiple uses, often with non-consumptive users not even realizing hunting is occurring. Secondly, there have been concerns raised by neighboring landowners who are not supportive of hunting on state lands adjacent to theirs. However, it should be pointed out that if the state land were in private ownership, that owner would have every right to hunt or trap on his or her land without any input from neighbors. The requirements regarding discharging of a firearm within 100 yards of a dwelling devoted to human occupancy remain applicable. And finally, please note that the number of persons supporting these proposals at the 2011 Spring Hearings was well over 1,000 more than the total number of comments the department received in opposition.

Rob Bohmann, Chair
Wisconsin Conservation Congress

As established by Wisconsin State Statutes, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress is officially recognized as the only natural resources advisory body in the state where citizens elect delegates to represent their interests on natural resources issues on a local and statewide level to the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources. Their mission is to represent the citizens of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's greatest asset, our abundant natural resources, for present and future generations to enjoy.