



Larry Bonde, Chair  
22514 Rockville Road  
Kiel, WI 53042  
(608) 235-5825

Al Shook, Vice-Chair  
W339 S2576 Hwy C  
Oconomowoc, WI 53066  
(262) 968-2598

Dale Maas, Secretary  
Lee Fahrney, Public Relations  
Joe Weiss, Historian

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DATE: May 25, 2016  
TO: Natural Resources Board  
FROM: Larry Bonde, Chair  
SUBJECT: Congress Matters: 2016 Conservation Congress Advisory Question Summary and Annual Convention Report

It is my great pleasure to come before this Board today as the newly elected Chair of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress and to have this opportunity to review the business conducted by the Congress at our annual meeting. I would like to thank Chair Hilgenberg for his presentation at our convention, and the attendance of Board members Preston Cole, Greg Kazmierski, and Gary Zimmer at our meeting. It was a privilege to have you at our convention engaging with our delegates. Your involvement and attendance in Congress events speaks volumes to your commitment to the role of this organization as an advisory body to the Natural Resources Board.

The Wisconsin Conservation Congress convened for its 82<sup>nd</sup> annual convention on May 12, 13, and 14, 2016, in Manitowoc. Our statewide delegation voted on the proposed DNR rule changes, DNR and NRB advisory questions, and each of the proposed Congress advisory questions from the 2016 spring hearing questionnaire (Attachment 1).

### **WCC Advisory Questions**

There were 33 Congress advisory proposals presented for public comment at this year's Spring Hearings. Twenty-five of these proposals were recommended for advancement to the Department, Natural Resources Board, and Legislature for consideration as possible future rule changes or legislation and one was returned to the Fur Harvest Committee for further review. Of the seven proposals that were not supported by the delegation for advancement, four were also not supported by either the public vote or the county vote. However, the Congress also rejected three questions that passed by both the popular vote and the county vote. Those included question 14 regarding eliminating the "artificial-only" restriction from the regular season trout regulation, question 16 pertaining to allowing individuals to apply for bear preference points up to six years at a time, and question 39 regarding allowing unfilled spring turkey permits to be used in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> time periods.

Included in the recommendations advanced to the Department, Board, and Legislature for further consideration are the requests to exempt fish and wildlife rules from Act 21, allow CDACs to extend the archery season to January 31 in the Southern Farmland Zone, allow hunting and fishing on DNR lands at Strawberry Creek, create an alternate bag limits for Wisconsin's trout fisheries, and make it illegal for those who receive compensation for fishing activities to store live gamefish beyond the day of catch.

### **Congress Business**

This is the fourth year we have had the Youth Conservation Congress and we now have 26 students involved as youth delegates and 10 of them were able to attend the convention and participate in the discussion and breakout sessions arranged specifically for them.

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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.

We handed our years of service certificates and pins to those delegates who have served the congress for 15, 20, 25, 30 and over 35 years. Impressively, we have 17 delegates that individually have 35 or more years of service to the Congress. Additionally, we acknowledged the work of those active or former delegates who have passed away during the last year. This year we recognized nine individuals through memorial resolutions.

### **Awards**

Again this year the Congress recognized a number of DNR employees and citizens for their outstanding service. Mike Zeckmeister, wildlife supervisor, received the wildlife award for his commitment to working cooperatively with citizens and achievements in expanding recreational opportunities. Fisheries biologist Max Wolter received our fisheries award for his excellent work with the panfish program and dedication to quality fisheries management. Jesse Ashton (Polk County) was recognized for his outstanding law enforcement efforts, his work to partner with the community in protecting Wisconsin's resources, and his dedication to involving kids in outdoor activities. Mike Neal (Door County) was awarded the Waterfowl Officer of the Year by the WCC Migratory Committee for his leadership within his community and commitment to waterfowl education. Doug Burrows from Eau Claire County received the WCC's David A. Ladd Delegate of the Year Award and the WCC also inducted the Congress' iconic member from Winnebago County, Dick Koerner into the Wisconsin Conservation Congress Hall of Fame. Dick has served the Congress for 50 years.

Rounding out our awards, the 2015 Statewide Conservation Organization of the Year Award went to the Wisconsin Trappers Association. There were two Outstanding Local Organizations awarded—the Apostle Islands Sportfisherman's Association and the Outagamie Conservation Club, and the 2015 Educator of the Year was awarded to Jim Heffner from Oneida County.

### **DNR Rule Change Proposals**

The full delegation reviewed and registered their support for questions 5, 7, and 8 of the wildlife advisory questions and 9 and 10 from fisheries. However, questions 1-4 relating to the overnight placement of stands/blinds on DNR lands north of Hwy 64 and "hunting hours" verses "shooting hours," which were proposed rule changes, were **not** supported by the WCC. I understand that the Department is not presenting or advancing the results of their Spring Hearing questions at this meeting, but will be sharing those results in June. The DNR is aware of our position and should either of the two proposed rule changes be advanced, the WCC will present the Board with a more robust summary of the discussion and rationale for our opposition at that time.

The Congress did take a position in support of both of the NRB's advisory questions relating to establishing consistent season end dates for fall turkey, pheasant, partridge, fisher trapping and archery deer and eliminating the exceptions that allow the harvest of antlerless deer in buck-only units with a zero quota.

### **Officer Elections**

As part of the changes made to our Code of Procedures, our delegation voted to merge districts 11 and 12, so the WCC will now have just 11 districts and 22 councilors. To help clarify some confusion between the Executive Committee and the Executive Council, the full delegation also voted to change the name from the Executive Council to the District Leadership Council. So on Friday, May 13 the delegates from our now eleven districts elected their 2016-17 District Leadership Councilors. I would like to thank each of the councilors from 2015-16 that will not be returning this year as councilors and also congratulate those that have been elected or reelected. I have included a list of this year's District Leadership Council with this memo for your information (Attachment 2).

As recommended by the strategic plan and implemented for the first year in 2013, our Executive Committee now includes five members. The Public Relations and Outreach Coordinator position will continue to be held by Lee Fahrney (Iowa County), Joe Weiss (Washburn County) will continue as historian, and Dale Maas (Dodge County) was re-elected as the secretary. Al Shook (Waukesha County) was elected to the vice-chair seat and I was honored to be elected to serve as Chair for the Conservation Congress. I would like to personally thank former Chair Rob Bohmann for his leadership and his friendship over the past five years. He was recognized by this Board last month for his work as Chair, and I will continue to call on him for advice and guidance as I get settled in my new role.

In closing, I want to reiterate our appreciation for the support of this Board and we look forward to working closely with you this year on important natural resource management issues.