

# Wisconsin's Green Fire: Voices for Conservation

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Wetland Protection is Critical for Wisconsin's Wildlife and Clean Water**

The Wisconsin legislature is considering bills that would change the way the state regulates wetlands. Wisconsin's Green Fire (WGF), an organization of natural resources professionals, evaluated legislative proposals to reduce state regulatory oversight of wetlands that are not protected under the federal Clean Water Act. Currently, only wetlands connected to lakes and streams – navigable waterways – have state and federal oversight. In 2001, the Wisconsin legislature passed provisions that enabled the state to oversee activities in “isolated” wetlands not protected under federal law.

AB547 and SB600 propose to remove protections for isolated wetlands, which account for about one fifth of Wisconsin's remaining wetlands. They include marshes, swamps, and spring time pools that provide high quality habitats for wildlife like waterfowl, furbearers, and amphibians. Isolated wetlands can also help to feed cold clean water to headwater streams for trout and other fish, and they filter pollutants to keep waters clean. They also help protect against flooding which reduces flood damage costs for communities. These wetlands support outdoor recreation and tourism in Wisconsin, a \$20 billion dollar industry for the state. Examples of high quality isolated wetlands are provided in the WGF analysis available at [www.wigreenfire.org/our-work/](http://www.wigreenfire.org/our-work/).

If enacted into law, AB547 and SB600 would allow developers and landowners to fill isolated wetlands without obtaining a permit from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The bill's proponents argue that the wetland regulatory program is inflexible and burdensome for developers. In fact, in 2015 the DNR granted permits for most applications to fill wetlands: over 85% for wetlands larger than 10,000 square feet (about a quarter acre) and over 90% for smaller projects. Currently, in order to obtain a permit to fill wetlands, developers must first evaluate alternatives and look at ways to minimize detrimental impacts. Permits to fill wetlands are granted when there is no practical alternative for a project. Where very high quality wetlands may be lost, permits to fill them may be modified or denied.

(more)

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Wisconsin's Green Fire recognizes that there is room for greater regulatory flexibility for "artificial wetlands". Sometimes when a project is initiated, but put on hold, disturbed areas can develop wetland characteristics. A second set of bills (AB388 and SB320), are being considered by the legislature to allow flexibility for "artificial wetlands" without removing protections for all isolated wetlands, including high quality habitats.

Wisconsin's Green Fire is a nonpartisan and independent organization formed in 2017. Members have extensive experience in natural resource management, environmental law and policy, scientific research, and education. Members have backgrounds in government, non-governmental organizations, universities and colleges and the private sector. WGF formed to help government officials, nonprofit organizations, media, decision makers and citizens get the scientific information they need to address local and regional conservation issues. For more information visit [wigreenfire.org](http://wigreenfire.org) or contact us at [info@wigreenfire.org](mailto:info@wigreenfire.org).

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