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**Sierra Club—John Muir Chapter**

# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Sierra Club Decries Legislature Pitting Neighbor Against Neighbor**

Madison—The Legislature moved numerous bills forward today that pit neighbor against neighbor and allow corporations to rule above all. Hearings were held on: AB600, which attacks Wisconsin's history of water protection; SB464, which undermines local control; SB479, attacking Dane County's local control and right to zone, and more. All these bills undermine Wisconsin's history of local and control and water protection by removing the ability for governments to strike that balance between one property owner's rights and the other.

These bills are being cloaked in the guise of "property rights". The question they beg is: whose property rights? These bills remove the property rights of average citizens to live on their property, to drink their water, and to breathe their air—without asthma, respiratory illness, or any other problem caused by something a neighbor is doing next door. These bills sacrifice public rights for the rights of corporate interests such as frac sand mining and oil companies.

**Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter Director Bill Davis denounced AB600**, "Wisconsin's Constitution states that the waters of Wisconsin are held in trust for the public's benefit, not a private commodity; this is commonly referred to as the Public Trust Doctrine. This ensures that all living in Wisconsin have a right to enjoy and use Wisconsin's water. AB600 undermines the public trust doctrine, allowing property owners on Wisconsin lakes, including the Great Lakes to dredge material without any oversight and in most cases without even testing to make sure the dredged material is not contaminated, and the bill gives away public lake bed. The bill doesn't consider the rights of neighbors and the public to fish or enjoy your water that has just been disrupted, and possibly been made unsafe, by massive amounts of dredging."

**Elizabeth Ward, Conservation Programs Coordinator for the Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter criticized SB464**, "Wisconsin has more towns and local governments than most other states. That's because we have a long history of letting local governments strike a balance between one person's property rights and another person's property rights. SB464 takes away the ability for local governments to do this. By doing so, the bill provides more giveaways to major corporations, like frac-sand and oil pipeline companies, and removes the rights of landowners across Wisconsin to enjoy their land."

The Legislature is going a step further to usurp Dane County's local control, by allowing towns in Dane County to opt-out of zoning. **Dave Blouin, Chair of the Sierra Club—Four Lakes Group** (Dane and surrounding counties) explained, "This is another example of the state legislators attacking local control and making decisions that should be made at the local level. Right now this legislation is specific to Dane County, but when the next county does something a member of the legislature doesn't like, they could see a similar attack."

Other bills moving forward include: a bill to remove the nuclear moratorium, which requires a utility have a solution for the hazardous waste and that it is economically viable before building a nuclear plant. Wisconsin was one of the first and disease states to have a regulated electricity system—partially

to protect ratepayers from forcing us to foot the bill for a multi-billion dollar unsafe nuclear boondoggles is irresponsible and unfair.

In addition, there are bills moving forward to privatize municipal water systems and undermine Wisconsin's Managed Forest Law—created to properly manage and protect Wisconsin's logging legacy to ensure our we will continue to prosper from Wisconsin's forests in the future.

“One of Wisconsin's biggest legacies under attack today was our democracy. We appreciate the Legislature holding public hearings on these bills, but by having three hearings virtually at the same time, many voices will not be heard. These bills contain sweeping changes that affect every community in Wisconsin. Under the cloak of disarray, thousands of voices that should be heard will go unheard. Instead, these far-reaching, massive changes to Wisconsin's legacy will be made by a handful of legislators in Madison, not by the neighbors working together to come up with a solution,” concluded Ward.

“Where is the fire?” questioned Davis. “Changes of this magnitude deserve careful consideration yet many of these bills were just introduced a month ago and it appears the legislature is trying to ram them through the process before most people know what is going on. Does the Legislature no longer believe residents should be able to decide for themselves what developments should happen in their own communities? There is no reason to rush these bills. They should be given the consideration, scrutiny and transparency such fundamental changes require.”

[Full statements on each bill are available here.](#)

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*Founded in 1892 by John Muir, the Sierra Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Sierra Club's mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out those objectives. The Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter is made up of 15,000 members and supporters working to promote clean energy and protect water resources in Wisconsin.*