

News

River protection gets thumbs up at hearing

By CLAIRE DUQUETTE

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A proposal to add segments of 40 Wisconsin rivers to the state listing of outstanding or exceptional resource waters met with no opposition Wednesday night at a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources public hearing.

The proposal came after a coalition of 44 statewide environmental groups petitioned the DNR to add 100 rivers or river segments to the list of waters receiving special protection in the state. The DNR whittled that list down to 40, and received approval from the DNR Board to begin the public hearing process to potentially adopt the listings.

Only two rivers in Ashland and Bayfield counties, the Totogatic and the Chippewa River, are included in the proposal.

DNR officials present at the Northern Great Lakes Visitor Center meeting explained that the designations are designed to protect rivers that provide outstanding water quality, habitat, recreational opportunities or fisheries from point source pollution in the form of untreated or insufficiently treated effluents from wastewater plants or industry entering the rivers.

In addition activities such as installing piers, boat rams or culverts would require special permits along rivers with special designations.

Ashland County Forester Chris Hoffman of Butternut asked how silviculture would be affected by the designation.

Robert Masnado, chief of the DNR Water Quality Standards Section of the Bureau of Watershed Management, responded that as long as the foresters are using best management practices, they will be fine, but did note that there was a possibility that temporary gravel fords used to get equipment across rivers may need a special permit.

Several speakers said they hoped for more added protections.

Ken Bro, director of sustainability at Northland College, urged the DNR to include as protected a quarter mile radius of Lake Superior at the mouth of the Amnicon River in Douglas County as recommended by the Lake Superior advocacy organizations.

Tracy Ledder of the Bad River Watershed Association voiced the group's support for the protections, but said she thought more rivers in the northernmost counties could have been included, and was disappointed they didn't make the recommended list because the DNR lacked enough data to include them.

Masnado said that in the near future volunteer organizations such as the Bad River Watershed Association may be able to provide data to the DNR for use in its decision making.

Others speaking in favor of the proposal included representatives from the Coolidge Lake Conservation Club in Price County, the South Fork Flambeau Association and the Friends of the Jump River.

Matt Hudson of Ashland told the DNR he felt he spoke ♦the hearts and minds of many in the Chequamegon Bay♦ when he said preserving the state♦s most important waterways sent a message about how seriously the people living in the bay area feel about sustainability.

What's next

The Department of Natural Resources is accepting public comment on the Outstanding and Exceptional Resource Water recommendations through Jan. 31. Comments may be sent to: Laura Bub, 101 S. Webster St., P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707-7921 or via e-mail at Laura.Bub@dnr.state.wi.us.

More information can be found at <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/water/wm/wqs/orwerw>

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