

Resolution to Prevent and Mitigate Nitrates and Bacteria in Groundwater

Whereas, nitrates in groundwater at levels above State and Federal Safe Drinking Water Standards can cause methemoglobinemia or “blue baby” disease and some studies have shown that long term exposure to high nitrate levels in drinking water is a risk factor for several types of cancer; and

Whereas, fecal bacteria in groundwater at levels above State and Federal Safe Drinking Water Standards can make individuals severely sick and are potentially fatal to individuals with weakened immune systems; and

Whereas, the groundwater in many portions of Portage County (Central Wisconsin) has for decades been tested in excess of nitrate standards, largely caused by fertilizer application on highly permeable sandy soils; and

Whereas, up to 60 percent of sampled wells in Kewaunee County (East Central Wisconsin) contain fecal bacteria and/or nitrates in excess of standards, largely caused by excessive spreading and disposal of manure and to some extent human septic waste; and

Whereas, 42 percent of wells tested in Lafayette, Grant and Iowa Counties (Southwest Wisconsin) tested in excess of fecal bacteria/nitrates standards, and while further studies of the causes are planned, it is anticipated that the causes are animal waste and fertilizer application; and

Whereas, 30 percent of wells tested in the Towns of Holland and Onalaska in LaCrosse County (Western Wisconsin) have tested in excess of nitrate standards, and while further studies of the causes need to be undertaken, it is anticipated that the causes are animal waste, fertilizer application and septic tanks; and

Whereas, a statewide study estimates that 90 percent of nitrate contamination in groundwater is agriculturally based, with 9 percent traced to septic systems and 1 percent coming from other sources; and

Whereas, Governor Evers has declared 2019 to be the Year of Groundwater in Wisconsin and has proposed \$70 million dollars to be included in the 2019-2021 state budget to be dedicated to prevention of groundwater contamination and restoration of contaminated wells in the state; and

Whereas, Assembly Speaker Robin Vos has created a bipartisan Water Quality Task Force of State Representatives and Senators and tasked them with making detailed recommendations on assessing and improving the quality of surface and groundwater in Wisconsin.

Now therefore be it resolved that, the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation at its Annual Meeting in Wisconsin Rapids, on April 12 and 13, 2019 recognizes and applauds the leadership undertaken by Governor Evers and Speaker Vos to address the very serious contamination of Wisconsin's groundwater and surface waters; and

Now therefore be it further resolved that, the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation requests that the Governor, the Legislature, the Department of Natural Resources and the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection expedite the study, assessment and implementation of regulations, best practices and education to reduce and eliminate nitrate, bacteria and other contamination of Wisconsin's valuable ground and surface waters.

Submitted by the WWF Environment Committee
Dr. Tom Johnston, Chairman