



# Van H. Wanggaard

## Wisconsin State Senator

### Testimony on Assembly Bill 911 and Senate Bill 817

Thank you Mr. Chairman and members for this hearing today on AB 911 and SB 817. This legislation is important for the economic development and quality of life for the 3 counties, and 14 communities that make up the 267 square miles of the Southeastern Wisconsin Fox River Commission.

SEWFRC has existed since 1997, and is run entirely by volunteers – there are no state employees involved. In the last 20 years, the commission has received and transferred \$1.6 million in grants and funds into various projects in southeastern Wisconsin. Currently, the commission is funding eight projects, primarily focused on shoreline restoration at a total of \$185,000.

Prior to the last budget, SEWFRC has relied on a biennial appropriation of \$200,000 SEG funds, from the fuel transfer tax of \$200,000. Unfortunately, the last budget eliminated that funding. Before you ask, no I don't know why this was funding was eliminated.

What I can tell you is that the elimination has come at a bad time, Last year saw record flooding in the watershed. This bill will provide \$100,000 funding per year from the conservation fund so that SEWFRC goals and projects can continue.

At a time when property values are dramatically increasing in our area, it is critical that we maintain the Fox River Watershed in an ecologically responsible manner for the enjoyment of all. Thank you for in advance for your consideration and support.

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# CHUCK WICHGERS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 83<sup>rd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

February 28, 2018

Chairman Cowles, Vice-Chairman Petrowski, and fellow committee members,

Thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 911, and for allowing me the opportunity to testify on its behalf.

In 1997, the Wisconsin legislature created SEWFRC, the Southeastern Wisconsin Fox River Commission. SEWFRC carries out a number of projects to improve the water quality, scenery, economy, and ecology of the Fox River System. Projects enhance or protect the recreational use of the navigable waters of the Fox River System. SEWFRC acts as a liaison for Federal, State, local agencies, and other organizations.

Originally, state statutes defined SEWFRC jurisdiction to cover 36.5 miles north of the city limits of Waukesha down to Waterford Dam and the watershed to include 156 square miles. In 2016, state statutes defining of SEWFRC increased jurisdictional coverage to a 63.5 mile stretch north of the city limits of Waukesha to Wisconsin-Illinois border and watershed that includes 267 square miles—a 71% increase in size. There are 14 of cities, towns, villages, and within this area which are directly impacted by the Fox River System, and have members who serve on the commission.

Since its inception, SEWFRC has received and transferred \$1,675,000 grant and funds, \$30,000 County funds and \$6,554.32 non-grant funds into beneficial completed projects. The Commission is presently working on funding \$185,160 on eight active projects. A major portion of these funds are allocated to shoreline restoration projects.

Although it is a state commission run solely by volunteers, SEWFRC has received zero funding in the last budget. It has relied on a biennial earmark from segregated conservation funds from a fuel tax transfer of approximately \$200,000 to help complete ongoing projects and assist of funding of new projects.

SEWFRC's work sits at the confluence of local economies and responsible ecology.

Economically, the Fox River's impact is immeasurable. Thousands, if not tens of thousands of people visit its shores every year to enjoy its beauty. It flows through the Vernon Wildlife Area, 4,655 acres of pristine wilderness where people come for recreation. Cities, towns and villages have placed parks at its edge. Homes located near the river are in demand, adding to the property tax base and—most importantly—value to homeowners.

This particular legislation would provide funding of \$100,000 each fiscal year from the conservation fund for the SEWFRC. This minimal investment allows the commission to continue its fine work in making grants and supporting its mission.

Thank you for your consideration.