

Legislative news briefs

Wisconsin Assembly Bill 600 passes, moves to Senate

Wetland protection at stake

Assembly Bill 600, relating to Wisconsin's navigable waters and wetlands, passed the Assembly in February and was sent to the Senate as its companion Senate Bill 459. It repeals and amends current laws protecting Wisconsin's water resources. GLIFWC's Voigt Intertribal Task Force considered the bill and unequivocally opposes its passage. The Task Force is concerned in particular about the bill's potential impacts on wild rice.

The legislation makes it easier to destroy shallow vegetation, including wild rice, by allowing private development to dredge up to 30 cubic yards of lake bed from an inland lake or 100 yards from one of the Great Lakes.

Along with other potentially detrimental provisions, it also complicates the process of obtaining an "Areas of Significant Natural Resource Interest" designation, which is likely to limit protection for important ecosystems.

More generally, the Task Force opposes efforts to privatize public resources for the benefit of a few and to the detriment of not only tribes with treaty protected rights, but also other state citizens.

Gawiin to Assembly LRB-2890/1

Tribes stand in solidarity over potential mound desecration

Gisinaa (cold weather) was an understatement the morning of January 12, 2016. Entering the city of Madison, Wisconsin, the sound of dewe'igan (drum) could be felt, a constant and steady heartbeat. Buses full of Native and non Native supporters filed up the narrow streets towards the capitol. This city, built on the remains of indigenous ancestry, heard from citizens concerned about a bill that would allow for further desecration of Native mounds.

The bill is better known as AB620, and it seeks to degrade culturally significant areas for corporate and monetary gain. The bill would make it possible for landowners with mounds located on their property to obtain a permit to excavate and explore the mounds. Once the site owner has proven that there are no remains within the structure, the effigy could be leveled and destroyed.

Mounds built by Native American people have served multiple purposes throughout history. Mounds do not always contain human remains; however this doesn't render effigy mounds insignificant. The shapes of the mounds often resemble clan symbols, humans or animals. Every mound serves a purpose and tells a story.

The University of Wisconsin, Madison and the surrounding city is laden with both burial mounds and effigy mounds. Approximately 40 mounds exist on the UW Madison campus alone, with several flattened in the construction of university buildings. District 2 Representative David Greendeer of the Ho Chunk Nation Legislature left the audience with these powerful words. "You may not be able to see them from where we stand, but before these buildings, there were mounds here. These mounds and those spirits that protect them have brought us here together as one people. Let the world see us... let's save our mounds."