

STATEMENT OF HOWARD A. TANNER
Former Director, Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposal to divide the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources into two agencies, one concerned with fish, game and parks, the other with enforcement of air, water and waste laws. Based on the Michigan experience, this proposal should be rejected because it will undermine protection of fish and game habitat, while exposing the public to increased health risks.

I speak from the experience of having served as director of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources from 1975-1983. Like the Wisconsin DNR, the Michigan DNR, beginning in the 1920s as a conservation agency, enjoyed a nationwide reputation for excellence in management and protection of the outdoors. This reputation was strengthened in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Republican Governor William G. Milliken consolidated environmental concerns in the Michigan DNR.

The integration of environmental and conservation concerns enabled fisheries biologists to communicate freely with water quality managers; it enabled conservation officers to help police the new environmental laws. Under consolidated management, our fish and wildlife populations thrived and our air and water became cleaner. Despite the controversy inherent in cleaning up decades of pollution and contaminated sites, the Michigan DNR won a deserved reputation for environmental leadership before it was divided again in 1995.

The 1995 split has had three principal effects:

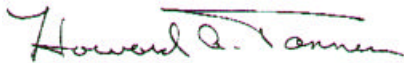
- It has cut off clear communication between the scientists who manage habitat and the managers of air and water quality, reducing the voice of fish and wildlife specialists in pollution policies and permits that will affect that habitat.
- It has divided the public and reduced opportunities for concerned citizens to participate in decision-making, while well-connected industrial special interests have had their way with environmental policy. In short, the public is being deliberately shut out of the process.
- It has produced two bureaucracies that collectively have sold public lands to the highest bidder, neglected our parks and has failed to adequately enforce everything from pollution discharge permits to oil and gas leases.
- It has cost taxpayers millions of dollars in increased and unnecessary overhead expenses due to duplicative bureaucracy at the upper management level and increased equipment and rental costs.

Since the split, public contempt for the new Department of Environmental Quality has increased every year. The DEQ has found itself challenged by the U.S. EPA on its wetlands and air quality enforcement. The DNR, too, has suffered from an erosion of public confidence; many of its decisions appear to be based on politics, not sound biology.

Rather than waste time and money dividing the Wisconsin DNR, I urge lawmakers to provide greater financial support to the agency and to affirm their support for vigorous enforcement. A single agency uniting conservation and environmental functions is appropriate to reflect the web of life itself.

Thank you for affording me the opportunity to convey my thoughts on this important topic. I regret that time did not permit me the opportunity to appear before you in person.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Howard A. Tanner". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Howard A. Tanner
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