

ROUGH DRAFT

(Copy to Gov. Knowles)

Mr. W. R. Kellett, Chairman  
Temporary Reorganization Committee  
B-130 WS State Office Building  
Madison, Wisconsin

Attention: Mr. Wayne F. McGown

Dear Mr. Kellett:

After reading articles in the newspapers about the latest plans for reorganization of state government and the Wisconsin Conservation Commission on which I served for over a decade, I asked the Conservation Department for a copy of the advance bill draft, LRB-11.

I am writing to you now because I have just finished reading this proposal for a second time, and I feel it urgent to let you know my reaction. However, my concern will largely deal with the natural resources aspects of the bill in the interest of saving time and energy for both of us.

When I was Chairman of the Conservation Commission, there were efforts to reorganize the agency and these moves have continued -- supported by a minority of disgruntled individuals who would like to gain control of this program so vital to Wisconsin's future. Since I retired, these attempts to change things have increased and they frequently take the form of bills to set up a three-man paid commission.

I believe the last time this proposal was beaten back was in the 1963 Legislature when conservationists throughout the state rose up to support the Conservation Commission as established by the Conservation Act of 1927.

Many of us are proud of that legislation which created the present Conservation Commission and Department -- and rightly so. It has been emulated by more than a score of states and has been flexible enough to serve Wisconsin well under changing conditions for almost 40 years. The past record of this agency is one of which all of us can be proud and at the present time the Conservation Department is rated as one of the five top natural resources agencies in the country and a leader in many fields. We certainly do not intend to sit idly by and "celebrate" the 40th Anniversary of the Conservation Commission by letting it become simply an ineffective "advisory council" to three full-time paid commissioners. There is no foundation in fact for such a change and the proposal therefore isn't warranted.

Two years ago I agreed to help the State Historical Society's Natural Resources History Project secure background on formation of the present Conservation Commission and its program. Because the philosophy behind this organizational

structure and the care with which it was done is reflected in this taped interview, I am enclosing a copy for your information. At least, it will help reduce the length of this letter, for I believe anyone attempting to revise the present Conservation Commission structure in order to improve it first had better study the historical background. There it will be found that we once had three full-time paid commissioners and it was a failure so far as that experience was concerned.

Although I could go on for hours to give you my feelings about the changes proposed in LRB-11, I think it may suffice for me to say that the basic concept here seems to be completely wrong. Instead of splitting the Conservation Department into pieces with Conservation Wardens going one place, educational services another and natural areas preservation elsewhere, these functions should be left where they are and others added to the Conservation Commission. Change the name to "Natural Resources Commission" if you wish and even reduce or increase the number of nonpaid commissioners if deemed necessary, but follow the lead of such forward-looking states as New York and Michigan where this already has been done in forming their "Governor's Cabinet" organization. Certainly all of the agencies

mentioned in this proposed bill for transfer could be consolidated into a single commission of the present form dealing with the total natural resources field.

I shall look forward to hearing from you, and you may be sure of my continued interest in this proposal.

Sincerely,

Wm. J. P. Aberg