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PURGING DNR'S WEBSITE DOESN'T CHANGE CLIMATE FACTS

By Stephen R. Carpenter, John E. Kutzbach, John J. Magnuson, Monica G. Turner, Jonathan A. Patz, Stanley A. Temple and Donald M. Waller

In late December, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources altered and removed information on its website concerning climate change, its impacts, and ways to mitigate and adapt to those impacts (<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/greatlakes/climatechange.html>).

Before the change, the introductory statement read: *"Earth's climate is changing. Human activities that increase heat-trapping ('greenhouse') gases are the main cause."*

Afterwards, it read: *"As it has done throughout the centuries, the earth is going through a change. The reasons for this change at this particular time in the earth's long history are being debated and researched by academic entities outside the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources."*

The original wording accurately reflected our knowledge about climate change and its causes, emphasizing the need for the Wisconsin DNR to focus on climate change impacts to protect and manage Wisconsin's

natural resources. The revised statement fails to mention either human-caused climate change or science, but manages to imply that changes in climate are natural, mysterious, and driven by causes that still stir debate among climate scientists. In fact, the revised version is simply incorrect. We know that climates are getting warmer, often wetter, and with more extreme events such as heat waves, droughts, and floods. Greenhouse gases created by burning fossil fuels are driving these dramatic and accelerating changes in climate. The consensus on this is clear among climate scientists, within the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, and on websites of environmental agencies in surrounding states.

As a public agency, the Wisconsin DNR is responsible for managing our state's natural resources and protecting the health and welfare of its citizens, forests, waters, and wildlife. Rapid changes in climate are threatening public health, safety, and natural resources. Failing to accurately inform the public about these threats and the opportunities to reduce them, violates the trust we place in our public institutions. Even more disturbing, the Wisconsin DNR is repudiating its own long-standing tradition of applying the best available science in the public interest.

The DNR has a distinguished tradition of working with colleagues at the state's universities and the broader scientific community; for example, their recent WICCI (Wisconsin Initiative on Climate Change Impacts) collaboration in research and assessment (<http://www.wicci.wisc.edu/>). These partnerships must continue if we are to develop tools and

approaches to protect and manage our natural resources while major changes in climate are occurring.

Wisconsin's natural resources are being affected by climate change, and these impacts are increasing:

- Warmer conditions, especially in winter, are dramatically reducing the duration of ice cover, giving ice fishers less time to fish.
- Deer hunters are finding less snow on the ground during the gun season.
- Many brook trout streams are threatened by a warming climate.
- In lakes, dominance by the cool water walleye is shifting to dominance by the warm water largemouth bass.
- Several popular game species, like the ruffed grouse, are shifting their ranges northward and becoming less abundant.
- Increases in extreme rain events are fueling runoff from farm fields into downstream waterways and lakes, reducing water quality.
- High temperatures worsen health-damaging smog (ozone). The hot summer of 2012 produced very high ozone levels, worsening asthma and harming crops.
- Some key forest trees are declining in a warming Wisconsin, and the season for timber harvesting is getting shorter.

- Several tree species are threatened as warming allows more pest insects and diseases to move north.

The Wisconsin DNR has a responsibility to accurately inform the public about the challenges presented by climate change. Ignoring facts and this responsibility, hobbles the state agency entrusted to manage natural resources and protect the public. It also portrays the Wisconsin state government as anti-science. We ask that the DNR strengthen its relationship with the University and university scientists. A strong partnership can only lead to better service to our state by both institutions.

Aldo Leopold's 130th birthday is Wednesday, Jan. 11. As one of Wisconsin's preeminent conservationists he was adamant that natural resource management must be guided by science and ethics, saying "The hope of the future lies not in curbing the influence of human occupancy – it is already too late for that – but in creating a better understanding of the extent of that influence and a new ethic for its governance."

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