**How Evers’ budget tries to ‘bring back science’ to DNR**

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Fans of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources are hoping for better times under a new governor.

New Democratic Gov. Tony Evers has repeatedly said he wanted to “bring back science” to the state environmental agency.

He appointed a well-respected Natural Resources Board member, Preston Cole, to lead the agency.

And now comes Evers’ two-year budget plan.

Under the proposal, now going the Republican-controlled state Legislature, five more science positions and a new bureau would be added to the DNR.

The five positions would be charged with researching water and sources of contamination, while at least two would focus on synthetic chemicals known as PFAS that are present in things ranging from firefighting foam to food packaging.

Still, the plan doesn’t include another pledge Evers made on the campaign trail: allowing the Natural Resources Board to once again appoint the DNR secretary. Evers last September said the move would let an “independent” agency head “restore the DNR’s mission of serving the needs of all Wisconsin citizens, not just the big corporations.” But at the time he didn’t say he’d include it in his first budget.

The seven-member board is currently controlled by appointees from then-Gov. Scott Walker. One member — former state Rep. Fred Clark — was picked by Evers to replace Cole on the panel.

Evers spokeswoman Melissa Baldauff said at the beginning of March that Evers still supports giving the Natural Resources Board the power to appoint DNR’s leader.

“However, his first priority is restoring science to the DNR and beginning to fix the mess he inherited at that agency,” she said.

Evers’ plan would also create a new Bureau of Natural Resources Science with a director who reports directly to the agency secretary and serves as the “science advisor,” per the budget document.

In addition to the five science positions, Evers is looking to add five separate staff positions to oversee concentrated animal feeding operations, or CAFOs. And he wants to up the $345 annual permit fee that CAFO owners who hold a water pollutant discharge elimination system permit have to pay.

That fee would be increased to $660 annually beginning in the first year of the budget, according to a DNR spokesman.

The budget would also create a new permit issuance fee of $3,270 for the operation of a CAFO to be implemented in the first year of the biennium, per DNR. The language would also require CAFO operators to pay $3,270 every five years thereafter for permit reissuance.

Evers’ budget doesn’t include any provisions to increase state park fees or hunting and fishing fees. But it does propose allocating around $2.8 million over the biennium from the conservation fund for the state park system. The budget doesn’t note how much funding each park would receive.

The document also doesn’t include any funding to specifically combat chronic wasting disease, which then-Gov. Scott Walker sought to target by pushing for an emergency rule aiming to slow its spread.

The Joint Committee for Review of Administrative Rules ultimately voted last fall to block a portion of the rule that had placed prohibitions on the movement of deer carcasses from CWD-affected counties. JCRAR members last month officially introduced their legislation to codify the suspension.

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