

NEWS RELEASE

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Earth Week Brings Call for K-12 Environmental Education

Area conservation leaders call on DPI to re-establish position

State Sen. Kevin Shibilski, (D-Stevens Point) announced today a legislative proposal reinstating the environmental education specialist position cut from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in 1994. Shibilski was joined by other environmental leaders including representatives from the Wisconsin Environmental Education Board and the Wisconsin Association for Environmental Education to announce the proposal at the Schmeckle Reserve in Stevens Point.

“The last year has been a big winner for the environment in Wisconsin,” said Shibilski. “But Earth Week reminds us of the vital need to provide comprehensive environmental education in the class room—our children will carry the torch of Wisconsin’s conservation leadership into the 21st century.”

Under the proposal, the position of Environmental Education Consultant (EEC) in the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) would be recreated after being eliminated in 1994. The legislation will also insure that the DPI collects information on the environmental literacy of Wisconsin’s students as already legislatively required.

“It’s so important that Wisconsin incorporate environmental literacy into the already mandated state assessments of K-12 students, said Rick Wilke, Distinguished Professor of Environmental Education at UW-Stevens Point. “The DPI environmental education position will play a key role in accomplishing this---it is a modest proposal, but it’s a new call to action for environmental education in Wisconsin.”

Wisconsin currently requires school districts to develop, implement and evaluate environmental education curriculum plans. It was the first state in the nation to require training in environmental education as a condition of teacher certification.

However, recent studies and surveys indicate that nearly a quarter of the teachers surveyed this year said their school district does not have an environmental education plan and another 18 percent were unsure.

“That’s unacceptable in a state with such a rich environmental heritage,” Shibilski said. “We can do better, Wisconsin school districts want to do better and reinstating this position will help make sure that we do, indeed, improve upon our efforts.”