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Governor Culver and some Iowa legislators say “yes” to new clean water rules

Monday’s Decision Caps Years of Work to Protect Iowa Waters

Iowa—After decades of meetings, letters, delays, and public hearings, clean water advocates gathered at the statehouse in Des Moines this morning to witness the final step in adopting clean water “anti-degradation” rules for Iowa. This morning, the Administrative Rules Review Committee (ARRC) of the Iowa Legislature heard testimony from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and the public. Senator Merlin Bartz (District 6) moved to object to the rules, but could not garner the six votes needed to stop them.

“It’s time we heard some good news about water pollution in Iowa,” said Brad Klein of the Environmental Law & Policy Center, in a press conference prior to the ARRC decision.

Advocates at the press conference said the rules will provide additional protections for Iowa’s few remaining high-quality waters, for example West Lake Okoboji and several trout streams in Northeast Iowa.

“Protecting lakes and streams from further degradation is important to our state’s natural heritage as well as our tourism and recreation industries. An estimated 11,479 jobs, \$242.9 million of income and \$424.9 million of gross state product are associated with the spending by visitors to Iowa lakes alone,” said Wally Taylor, legal counsel for the Sierra Club Iowa Chapter.

Taylor and others said the Iowa rules are long overdue and that they have worked for years to get Antidegradation Rules written and passed in Iowa.

With the passage of the federal Clean Water Act in 1972 states were required to enact Antidegradation rules to prevent the further pollution of lakes, rivers and streams in the nation by 1985. Iowa adopted rules but the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency informed Iowa that its rules violated federal law as early as 1997. Repeated delays in rewriting the rules led a coalition of environmental organizations – Iowa Environmental Council, Hawkeye Fly Fishing Association, the Iowa Chapter of the Sierra Club and the Environmental Law & Policy Center – to file a Petition for Rulemaking with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in 2007 requesting that the State act immediately to adopt antidegradation implementation rules. This action initiated a rule-making process that included several opportunities for public comment and a hearing before the Iowa Environmental Protection Commission, which approved the revised

rules in December of last year. Monday's meeting of the legislative Administrative Rules and Review Committee marked the final step in the decades-long process.

Advocates who testified at the hearing stressed that the rules will allow Iowa to grow sensibly and sustainably.

"These rules will stem the tide of declining water quality in Iowa, protect the outstanding jewels that remain, and serve as an economic engine for those communities with the foresight to protect and leverage the potential of these remarkable waters," said Shannan Garretson, water program legal analyst for the non-profit Iowa Environmental Council.

Jim Larew, with Governor Culver's office was at the hearing to express the Governor's support of the rules.

"Iowans care about water quality... Maybe now with these new rules Iowa can start reversing that trend [of declining water quality]," said Larew.

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