

# Tips on Being an Advocate for Conservation in Wisconsin

**Best Times to Contact:** Session calendar controls much of what you can do as an advocate

**Budget Items:** Legislators are actually in the senate, voting on issues: Mid January - Early May

**Non-budget Items:** Legislators are in the senate, voting on issues: Mid September - Early November

**Timeline of Budget Process** (18 month process)

1. **State Agency Budget Requests-** Take place Winter of 2011 - summer, 2012. Gather materials.
2. **Governors Executive Budget**
3. **Joint Finance Budget** - This is critical stage of the Budget Process. The Joint Finance Committee holds: State Agency Briefings (where you can learn specifics from each agency presenting their portion), Public Hearings (This is the only time in this process for direct advocacy), and Executive Sessions. This is a powerful committee because they go through the entire budget and vote on it line by line.
4. **Assembly/Senate Budgets** – May-June 2013. No opportunities for public input via public hearings.
5. **Conference Committee** – Only forms if there are strong, differing versions of the budget in the Assembly and the Senate.
6. **Governor's Signature/ Vetoes** – The governor is very powerful in this stage. He/she can cross out any line-item in the budget, but cannot write any in.

**Timeline of Legislative (Non-budget) Process:**

1. **Bill drafted**
2. **Co-sponsors sign on-** If one party introduces a bill, they usually need significant opposite party co-sponsors for the bill to go anywhere.
3. **Bill introduced**
4. **Committee assignment-** Leadership decides what committee the bill goes to. (ex. Public health, Natural resources) Committee leaders need to be a part of your advocacy outreach. Even if your representative is not a committee leader, a bill you may be interested in still goes through the committee leaders.

Find out which committees a specific bill is assigned to (It isn't always obvious). Also find where in the legislative process a bill of your interest is by subject, author, or bill and sign up to be notified of updates. All of these resources are available at: [www.legis.state.wi.us](http://www.legis.state.wi.us)

Committee chairpersons (of specific interest) as of 2013:

Senate:     Agriculture, Forestry & Higher Education- Moulton  
              Joint Finance – Alberta Darling  
              Natural Resources & Environment – Fitzgerald

Assembly:  Agriculture – Nerison  
              Joint Finance – Nygren  
              Forestry Committee & Natural Resources Committee– Ott

For full membership list, go to [www.legis.state.wi.us](http://www.legis.state.wi.us) and select assembly or senate. Choose committees.

5. **Public hearing then executive session**
6. **Vote in Full Senate/Assembly**
7. **Governor signs (or vetoes)**

**Best Ways to Contact:** It is to your extreme advantage to keep an ongoing conversation with your legislator, and their staff. It is also important to keep in contact with the heads of committees that are in your interest.

Listed in order of effectiveness are following ways to keep in touch with a legislator:

1. Meeting one-on-one
2. Personalized letter
3. Phone call
4. Personalized email
5. Participating in a call-in campaign
6. Form letter generated by an organization
7. Form email, and Form fax
8. Form postcard
9. Signing a petition

Other less common forms of communication are highly effective: testifying at a public hearing, attending a town hall meeting, and submitting letters-to-the-editor and editorials.

**Communication Tips:**

1. **Your message**, specifically a story or personal experience (while knowing what data there is to know) is more compelling to a legislator than a message from a lobbyist full of facts and figures. Relay how the decision will impact you and those you work with.
2. **Always be clear and concise**
3. **Adjust your message/presentation** based on who you are talking to: For example, if they are talking about job creation, focus on the economic impact of aquatic invasive species on lakes.
4. **Do not assume** they know more than you do, or even as much as you do on an issue: This is a common mistake.
5. **Make clear what you want** and ask for it. Don't dance around the subject; they need you to say what you want them to do, and they want to hear from you.
6. **Follow up** with a letter thanking them for their time, and add any information they may have requested.
7. **Timing is everything** when determining what types of advocacy and communication you will be able to achieve. Know the process and the times for advocacy during that process.
8. **Join coalitions:** you aren't the only person that feels a certain way.
9. **Invite legislators** and staff to meet in the district. Help them see, firsthand, what you are talking about.
10. **Have an advocacy plan;** you will accomplish more this way.
11. **Keep an ongoing relationship** with your legislator and his/her staff. You will learn about what they represent and can then share your message more clearly through them this way. They then will learn about what you represent, and you could then eventually become a source of trusted information.

**Some great websites to follow for legislative news:**

[www.wispolitics.com](http://www.wispolitics.com)

[www.thewheelerreport.com](http://www.thewheelerreport.com)

Wisconsin Lakes has great resources for working with the media, from crafting you message, to working with the news media. Go to [www.wisconsinlakes.org](http://www.wisconsinlakes.org) for additional info on these topics.

This handout was generated from information learned at a Wisconsin Lakes Lake Advocacy Workshop, presented by John Keckhaver, Government Relations & Analysis, LLC and Lobbyist for Wisconsin Lakes.



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