**DNR takes double hit**

By WisPolitics.com

Running the DNR is never an easy task.

The Department of Natural Resources touches just about every

Wisconsinite in regulating or managing issues affecting the

environment, hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, state parks, state

forests etc etc etc

Staff are used to dealing with the political winds, but recent events

are buffeting the agency.

First, the GOP-run Senate’s fired four members of the policy-making

Natural Resources Board. That is followed quickly by Secretary Adam

Payne’s sudden resignation.

Payne, on the job less than a year, writes in his resignation letter

he needs to spend more time with his ailing parents and his

grandchildren.

After that news breaks, Payne tells WisPolitics the family matters he

cited for his departure have been weighing on him for more than a

month. He said he’s been thinking about his and his wife’s parents —

all of whom are in their 80s — for about eight weeks and wondering,

“Am I going to regret not spending time with my parents while I still

could?” Payne adds his wife, a registered nurse, put in her notice

eight weeks ago to spend more time caring for their parents, and

sleeping in a hotel three nights a week and being on the road every

weekend has been “brutal.”

Some wonder if there's more to the story. Insiders are also

sympathetic. They also wonder who would want to take the job next

under such politically divisive circumstances.

The Republican Senate nixed eight executive branch appointees, more

than the chamber had rejected in the previous four decades.

It left some wondering whether Senate Republicans had finished sending

their messages to Democrat Gov. Tony Evers or if there could be more

rejections to come.

For someone appointed to a board, that might not be much of a concern

other than the sting of being shot down in public. But for cabinet

secretaries, such a move can impact their livelihood. Many agency

leaders are plucked from good paying jobs. Some ask, would you feel

comfortable giving up that security to be at the whim of the Senate

GOP caucus?

Senate Natural Resources Committee Chair Rob Cowles told WisPolitics

he had expected Payne to win the backing of his committee and the full

Senate, despite what he called a “dustup” over PFAS.

Still, beyond disagreements between the Evers administration and GOP

senators over that bill, the Natural Resources Board has signed off on

a new wolf policy that does away with a numeric population goal and

instead focuses on adapting to changing populations.

The move came as GOP lawmakers have advanced legislation that would

require the DNR to set a numeric goal — an issue particularly

sensitive for northern Wisconsin lawmakers. Evers quickly appointed

four new members to the board after his previous picks were rejected,

and insiders expect the overall policy approach of the agency to

remain largely unchanged so long as he’s the governor.

They also note such abrupt changes can be a hit to staff morale at an

agency. The agency handles big problems, and it’s going to take time

for the next secretary to get up to speed.

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