

Scott Krug now telling state to deny permits for confined animal feeding operations in his district

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By Jessica VanEgeren | The Cap Times



Rep. Scott Krug, R-Town of Rome

Election year politics, high levels of E. coli bacteria in two Wood County lakes and a proposal for a new large scale dairy are turning an Assembly race in central Wisconsin into a heated debate on the correlation between agriculture, water quality and tourism.

Rep. Scott Krug, R-Nekoosa, is seeking a third term in office against Dana Duncan, a lawyer from Port Edwards.

Duncan opposes a proposal for Golden Sands Dairy, a confined animal feeding operation, or CAFO. Krug had been supportive of the project until recently.

In mid-August, Krug said he was planning to sue Madison-based writer Michael Leon for libel after Leon's Aug. 17 post in which he includes Krug in a list of "cynical, corrupt politicians" who are providing political cover for polluters.

On Aug. 21, Krug issued a statement urging the state Department of Natural Resources to deny the high capacity well permits for the Golden Sands Dairy.

Krug cited the recently reported high levels of E. coli bacterium in Nepco Lake and Lake Wazeecha as his reason. Both lakes were found to have levels close to 30 times the level of safety, which could translate to fewer tourism dollars for the area while the lakes are closed.

"While I appreciate the openness of the Wysocki family to negotiate on certain aspects of their project (Golden Sands Dairy), it no longer appears this project is feasible in any form in an area that is so vulnerable for contamination," said Krug in the statement. "I ask the DNR to look into the E. coli outbreak and deny the high capacity well permits."

The DNR is considering 10 permit applications for the project that include the installation of 39 high capacity wells, two to serve the production site of the dairy operation and the other 37 wells for irrigation over roughly 6,460 acres of cropland.

As part of the permitting process, the DNR will specifically evaluate impacts to Ten Mile and Seven Mile Creeks, along with impacts to private wells and other water resources in the area, as a result of the of the

proposed water withdrawal related to the dairy. The dairy will be required to demonstrate that the proposed water withdrawals will not result in significant adverse impacts to these resources.

The public has until the end of September to comment on the permits.

“Our area has a long, proud tradition of agriculture and we definitely need to do whatever we can do to bring job growth to the area,” Krug said. “But those considerations should not supersede the concerns associated with property value loss and decreased revenue from tourism.”

He said the fate of the Golden Sands CAFO has become the most contentious issue of the campaign. Duncan said voters have no reason to believe Krug will not change his mind again if reelected in November.

When asked why he changed his stance on the CAFO project, Krug instead said he has “always had concerns over water quality issues.”

“Growing up around the lakes, water quality is something everyone here has concerns with,” Krug said in an email last week. “My wife, kids and I enjoy our time swimming, fishing and boating in our lakes and so do thousands of tourists from all over the country. Our local economy depends on tourism now more than ever.”

He said in the email he has worked tirelessly to find common ground on water issues this past legislative session and “have made some progress.”

“At some point, though, a decision has to be made on big projects,” Krug said.

Duncan said he is not against agriculture but he is against CAFO’s, which he said are no different to him than “sweat shops or child labor.”

Duncan is opposed to the Golden Sands CAFO because of its size and proximity to residential areas. Most of the ground water that is produced for Wisconsin Rapids, Grand Rapids, Saratoga, northern Adams County and portions of Portage County come out of the Central Sands water basin.

The 39 high capacity wells for Golden Sands Dairy would be located in drawing water from this same basin.

“It is located in a very precarious situation in terms of ground water,” Duncan said. “This is a high volume, high impact farm that greatly increases the risk of water contamination, limits the ability of animals to remain healthy and endangers the food supply these animals are providing.”

Like Krug, Duncan cites the need for clean water to maintain the growth of tourism in the area. According to Krug, the economic impact of tourism in Wisconsin increased 18 percent to \$17.5 billion from 2011. They both agree the Wisconsin Rapids area, where Golden Sands Dairy would be located, is benefiting from that growth.

“Our lifeblood is going to be tourism,” Duncan said. “I want this area protected for overall economic development and our health. It’s beautiful. I don’t want to see it end.”