



Office of the County Executive

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For Immediate Release:

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Washington County Urges Regulatory Reform to Protect Lake Homeowners Facing Restrictive State Floodplain Rules



WEST BEND, WI – In response to mounting concerns from Druid Lake property owners, Washington County is taking a strong stance against Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) regulations that could drastically impact the future of dozens of homes and families in the Town of Erin. County Executive Josh Schoemann and County Board Chair Jeff Schleif held a resolution signing yesterday with property owners.

Recently released floodplain maps from the Wisconsin DNR have reclassified parts of the Druid Lake shoreline into **"flood storage" zones**—a designation not governed by FEMA nor one that is used in many neighboring states. The designation subjects property owners to state-level regulations that are **significantly more punitive than federal standards**, ultimately making it difficult or impossible to rebuild, repair, or improve their homes.

“These are real families,” said County Executive Josh Schoemann. “The DNR’s standards ignore modern solutions and threaten to eliminate an entire Druid Lake community.”

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Under current Wisconsin law, many homes on Druid Lake are considered "nonconforming structures." Any improvements or repairs exceeding 50% of the property's equalized assessed value—even spread over decades—require the home to be brought up to modern floodplain standards. In flood storage zones, that essentially means **no fill can be added, and structures cannot be raised on piers, pylons, or other modern methods**, rendering upgrades or reconstruction impossible for most lot sizes.

During a public meeting with residents, Schoemann and County staff heard firsthand accounts of homeowners who endured severe flooding in 2008, only to now be told that rebuilding or repairing their homes in the future may be prohibited or financially untenable.

Schoemann said, "We're formally calling on our state to sit at the table and have a conversation. The DNR's professionals are more than equipped to develop solutions for the people of Wisconsin but need to be empowered to do so."

Many residents expressed confusion, frustration, and a sense of powerlessness, raising concerns about insurance requirements, property value declines, and the long-term implications of the DNR's policy. Mary Lee Rieley, a long-time Druid Lake resident, shared: "Our hope is that the DNR will consider very carefully what they can do that would allow us other options besides the compensatory storage so that if a disaster should occur, we would be able to rebuild."

County Action & Resolution

Washington County prepared a **resolution calling for the State of Wisconsin to:**

- Amend the Wisconsin Administrative Code to allow use of **helical piers, pylons**, and other modern engineering solutions in flood storage zones.
- Align Wisconsin's **Substantial Improvement and Substantial Damage** rules with **FEMA standards**, which base thresholds on market value rather than assessed value over time.
- Launch a broader **review of state floodplain regulations**, ensuring personal property rights and community sustainability are balanced with environmental needs.

The County will send the resolution to Governor Tony Evers, the Wisconsin Counties Association, and state legislators.

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