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1000 Friends of Wisconsin Goes to Court to Stop Highway Project *Highway 23 Expansion Called "Pork Barrel Politics at Its Worst"*

1000 Friends of Wisconsin is asking a federal court to halt the expansion of Wisconsin State Highway 23 from Plymouth to Fond du Lac because the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (DOT) failed adequately to consider far less costly options to turning the rural road into a four lane expressway. The land use organization also claims that the DOT failed to consider the indirect and cumulative impacts that construction would have on environmental resources near the project, including wetlands, farmlands and historical sites.

According to the complaint filed on Monday at the U.S. Eastern District Court in Milwaukee, construction of this project would convert 423 acres of land (including 245 acres of cropland) and 43 acres of wetland to highway right of way; affect 71 acres of upland or woodland habitat; displace 24 residences, 16 farms, and five other businesses; sever an additional seven farms; encroach on floodplains; and affect several threatened and endangered species.

The complaint also claims that the DOT failed to hold an adequate public hearing on the project that would have allowed the public to air their views on the project, its impacts, and alternatives to widening the road

"The plan to spend \$140 million to turn this rural road into a 4 lane highway in eastern Wisconsin has never made any sense. The project is a result of an earmark to the state budget back in 1999 and represents pork barrel politics at its worst," said Steve Hiniker, Executive Director of 1000 Friends of Wisconsin. "The project would destroy wetlands and convert hundreds of acres of farmlands for a project that is completely unjustified."

The plan to turn the rural road into a four lane expressway was authorized as an earmark to the 1999 state budget. While the state DOT had not studied or recommended the project for construction, the area lawmakers claimed the project could be completed for \$39 million. Earlier this year the DOT estimated the project would actually cost \$140 million.

"The legislative sponsors of this project underestimated costs by \$100 million. Then, after the project was approved as an earmark to the state budget, the DOT had to come up with the justifications for the project. In the process, they cut out public debate, ignored environmental impacts and passed over cheaper ways of dealing with potential problems along the highway," added Hiniker.

“At a time when everyone in the state is being asked to cut back on spending, it doesn’t make sense to pour millions of taxpayer dollars into a project that isn’t needed,” concluded Hiniker.

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