



March 10, 2021

The Honorable Chairman Gutwein
Chair, Environmental Affairs Committee
State of Indiana House of Representatives

Re: Senate Bill 389

Representative Gutwein,

At our March 4th 2021 meeting, the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) voted to take a position on Senate Bill 389. Our 32-member commission consists of Mayors, County Commissioners, County Surveyors, County Health Officers, County Conservation Districts, farmers, biologists, engineers, municipal professionals and rural and urban landowners from six counties. While we are all located in the northern part of the state, our broad makeup represents a microcosm of the State of Indiana, and while our members are from different walks of life, there was consensus that Senate Bill 389, as it is currently written, is a bad idea for Hoosiers.

In response to historic flooding in 2018, HB 1089 was signed into law to give our Commission the authority to address drainage and flooding issues in our region. We have studied our basin extensively and have found a direct connection between these problems and wetlands loss. Some of our member communities continue to experience flooding problems and significant property damage. We are struggling to find places to store and filter the water we have now as a result of wetland loss. The efforts of our communities to mitigate flood hazards, protect public health and maintain drainage water infrastructure would be canceled out by additional wetland loss.

During our March 4 discussion, several of our members described that while the bill is controversial, it stems from frustration with the way wetlands regulations are implemented and a need for simplification. Wetland regulations can be burdensome and confusing, sometimes slowing down projects or adding additional costs. We've also heard stories of individuals that have been unfairly treated or fined because of a confusing technicality. The process is complicated by multi-agency involvement. Several of our members would like the process to be streamlined, with only one agency being involved, but everyone agreed that we don't want any of our remaining wetlands to lose the protection provided by our state wetland regulations.

We ask that you strongly consider the SJRBC's makeup and views in the context of broader state stakeholder interests. We encourage you to vote against Senate Bill 389, but seek appropriate measures, through summer study committee or other means, to address inefficiencies with the implementation of our existing wetland regulations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daragh Deegan", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Daragh Deegan
Chairman
St. Joseph River Basin Commission