I am writing this letter to add my voice to the discussion about how the ever increasing number of high-capacity wells in Waushara County is drying up our lakes and streams. To the list of myths being perpetrated by agriculture, I would like to add a couple more.

I will also comment on the recent decision by the Legislature through the joint finance committee to prevent the DNR from considering the impact of multiple wells in the area when evaluating applications for new irrigation wells. This action has dealt a severe blow to the protection of ground and surface waters in the county. Unless something is done to reverse the decision there is no way to prevent more lakes and streams from drying up.

I brought property on Huron Lake in 1983. At that time the water came right up to a patio on our beach. It stayed in that vicinity until about the mid to late 1990's. Since that time it has been declining steadily and as of the end of last year, I had an additional seventy feet of beach between the water and the patio.

MYTH: "Forest and Grasslands release more water through evapotranspiration, the process by which water is drawn out of the ground by root systems and released to the atmosphere by the foliage, than does cropland."

This statement was made during one of the joint meetings between agriculture, affected lake property owners, and other environmental groups. I asked the person making the statement, "Why, then, if this is true, are water levels falling instead of rising, since a lot of forest land and tree lines have been converted to irrigated cropland?" The response was, "I don't know."

MYTH: Groundwater levels and lake/stream levels are not related.

For the last few years, I have been taking lake level measurements for the USGS. A couple of years ago they installed a transponder in an abandoned point well at my beach. This device measures groundwater level. A plot of these values shows that there is a near perfect relationship. Recent information, also from DNR records, shows that within Waushara County, agricultural irrigation accounts for 87 percent of all water usage. In our area it is probably more like 99 percent since there is nothing except private wells and agriculture drawing water. They

are responsible for about 13.3 billion of the 15.2 billion gallons pumped in the county.

As of last year, one large grower in the area had submitted applications for more than 40 new irrigation wells. The WPVGA did admit during the first meeting that irrigation was having a detrimental effect on lake levels, but there has never been any follow through. They finally withdrew from the meetings with mumbled calls for more studies of things already studied to death.

In his recent rebuttal letter, Mr. Knutson extolled the virtues of irrigation and it's benefits to agriculture. Certainly we all need food and appreciate the need for productive agriculture, but at what cost to everything else? Will they be permitted to continue level forestland, remove tree lines to turn the rest of the Central sands into irrigated cropland with no regard for the lakes and streams?

In a recent move, the joint finance committee has given the DNR a "get out of jail free card" with respect to considering multiple wells in the vicinity of a water body when evaluating the effects of said wells on groundwater. They resort to a middle of the night vote, essentially giving agriculture Carte Blanche to irrigate to their heart's content. This is clearly a political rather than a scientific position. Much of the information we get about the number of wells and the amount pumped comes from the DNR. The people in the field who record and tabulate this information know what is happening and have been helpful in providing it to us. The difference is that to them, this is not a political issue, but for others it appears that it is.

The DNR should be outraged. They should be demanding the repeal of this decision so they can carry out their responsibility to protect the waters. It is their charter to protect the lakes and streams to ensure healthy water levels. Now along comes the legislature and tells them that not only do they not have to consider multiple wells in their reviews, but essentially blocks them from doing so. Without the DNR, who speaks for the waters?

Within five miles of Huron Lake, there were 185 irrigation wells in 2011. This is the rough limit of the extent of influence of individual wells. These pumped nearly six million gallons of water during that year alone. According to DNR logic, denying that there is a cumulative effect, all these wells must be responsible for the same couple of inches. Are we to believe that many wells added together have no more effect than that first well? Does anybody, including the DNR, really believe that?

What do we have to do to stop the destruction of this finite resource known as groundwater? We depend on those in positions of authority to ensure that water is shared equitably and not handed over to one group of users to the neglect of everyone else. Instead of heaving a collective sigh of relief at this decision, the DNR should demand that their authority be restored, and then start using it.

/s/Cris van Houten, Resident and lake property owner, Huron Lake, Waushara County