

Rep. Duffy Statement
Natural Resources Legislative Hearing
H.R. 4049 – Ashland Breakwater Light Transfer Act

Good morning. Thank you Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva for holding this hearing today. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of H.R. 4049, the Ashland Breakwater Light Transfer Act, which will facilitate the transfer of a lighthouse in Ashland, Wisconsin from the Coast Guard to the National Park Service.

Next year will mark the 100th Anniversary of the Ashland Breakwater Light, a lighthouse that has stood strong on Lake Superior's shores, guiding ships through dark nights and storms and welcoming travelers back home. I was blessed to be able to raise my family, with my beautiful wife Rachel, in Ashland. Having spent years in the community, I know the importance of this light not only as a symbol of Ashland but as a major part of the local economy. The Ashland Light is listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 2007 and is an important part of Ashland area tourism, recreation, and education.

This historic site faces an uncertain future, however, with the Coast Guard looking to give up management. The Coast Guard announced its intent to give up ownership of the Ashland Light in May of 2012. No public or private entity aside from the National Park Service's Apostle Islands National Lakeshore has expressed credible interest in obtaining and maintaining the Ashland Light. In the absence of legislation, however, there is no guarantee it would be maintained as a historic property or that it would be available for public education or access.

H.R. 4049, the Ashland Breakwater Light Transfer Act, will allow the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore to maintain this lighthouse – alongside the other eight lights it already manages. It does this by simply adjusting the boundary of the Apostle Island National Lakeshore (APIS) to include the Ashland Light itself.

All of the other light stations within the boundaries of the Apostle Islands were transferred to the National Park Service from the Coast Guard in 1986. The Ashland Light was not included in the 1986 transfer, however, because it was not inside the park boundary, the USCG was actively maintaining it, and its future was not at issue at the time.

I have worked closely with National Park Service staff, as well as the local recreational community, to strike a balance that allows for the transfer of the lighthouse itself while preventing additional federal rules and regulations from affecting any recreation on the waters surrounding the Ashland Light. Additionally, the Coast Guard will maintain access to the Ashland Light to maintain it as an aid to navigation and the Army Corps of Engineers will still maintain the breakwater on which the light stands.

We know all too well that disagreements between agencies can often get in the way of the best interest of the community. For this reason, I specifically included language to ensure all the agencies involved –

the Park Service, the Coast Guard, and the Army Corps – cooperate in their operations to ensure that all of their needs surrounding the lighthouse are met.

This legislation is the result of close collaboration with the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore – particularly Superintendent Bob Krumenaker, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Wisconsin Historical Society, the Ashland Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development groups, the City and County of Ashland, and the local outdoor recreational community. And this legislation has received near unanimous, bipartisan support from the Wisconsin House delegation and Senator Baldwin and Senator Johnson have introduced companion legislation in the Senate.

Additionally, I want to pay special recognition to a group of students who are in Washington, D.C. today – all the way from Ashland Middle School on a school field trip. I'm really glad that the timing of their visit coincided with this hearing, and I'm glad they will be seeing the democratic process first-hand this week, especially on an issue that is important to them in their hometown.

Finally, I have several letters of support for H.R. 4049 that I would like to submit for the record.

I look forward to advancing Ashland Breakwater Light Transfer Act and helping to preserve this piece of history for generations to come. I urge the Committee to pass this legislation quickly and appreciate your support today.

I yield back the balance of my time.