



## Memorandum

**To:** Michael Best Clients

**From:** Michael Best

**Date:** September 16, 2025

**Subject:** Meet the Cabinet with DNR Secretary Karen Hyun

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### About Secretary Hyun (*Verbatim from DNR website*):

Karen Hyun, Ph. D has extensive experience working on natural resources, stewardship and conservation issues. Hyun has most recently served as the chief of staff of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) since 2021. She also has more than a decade of experience in policy and environmental work.

Hyun began her career in 2009, staffing the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Natural Resources. In 2012, Hyun served as a senior policy advisor for the U.S. Department of Commerce Office of the Secretary and also the chief of staff position for the Department's Office of the Deputy Secretary in 2013.

Hyun then became the senior advisor for NOAA in June 2014 before becoming the deputy assistant secretary for fish, wildlife, and parks at the Department of the Interior in 2015. Additionally, she led and coordinated initiatives focused on coastal resilience, Gulf of Mexico restoration, marine conservation and coastal stewardship at the National Audubon Society, serving as the director of water and coastal policy before becoming the vice president of coastal conservation in 2018.

Hyun earned both bachelor's and master's degrees in Earth Systems from Stanford University in California and a doctorate in Marine Affairs from the University of Rhode Island. Hyun lives with her husband and children in Madison.

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The "Meet the Cabinet" event, moderated by Adam Barr of Michael Best Strategies, served as a platform for clients and guests to engage directly with members of Governor Tony Evers' leadership team. The featured special guest was Secretary Karen Hyun of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), who shared insights into the importance of partnership and addressed challenges they continue to face.

Secretary Hyun opened the event by expressing appreciation for the opportunity to engage with colleagues and stakeholders. She acknowledged Deputy Secretary Steven Little for his leadership and support during her transition into the role. Secretary Hyun emphasized her commitment to ensuring clean air, clean water, and equitable access to outdoor recreation for all Wisconsinites.



Secretary Hyun discussed the department's reliance on federal partnerships, noting that approximately 30% of DNR's budget comes from federal sources. She highlighted the importance of cooperative federalism, where federal agencies provide scientific guidance and funding while the DNR implements environmental protections at the state level. She also addressed structural funding challenges, including outdated license fee structures for fish and wildlife programs and the lack of direct state funding for park maintenance. Park entry fees are reinvested locally, but the department lacks the flexibility to use those funds efficiently for basic infrastructure needs.

In response to audience questions, Hyun acknowledged the growing interest in artificial intelligence and its potential to streamline permitting processes. While current state policy limits AI deployment, she noted that other states are using AI to pre-screen permit applications, allowing staff to focus on substantive environmental evaluations. She expressed interest in exploring similar tools to improve efficiency and free up resources for core mission work.

Secretary Hyun also emphasized the importance of partnerships with local government, particularly county health departments and land and water conservation staff, in addressing issues like nutrient runoff and contaminated water. She highlighted the work of DNR's Office of Business Support and Sustainability, which collaborates with industry and agriculture to promote best practices and develop strategies for nutrient reduction and land stewardship.

On administrative rulemaking, Secretary Hyun explained that following recent judicial decisions, the Governor directed agencies to finalize rules that were ready for publication. The DNR submitted five rules, including updates to drinking water, groundwater, and wildlife standards. Additional rules are in development.

When asked about her motivation for taking the role, Secretary Hyun shared that she moved to Wisconsin to help support her husband's family and raise their children with the great opportunities Wisconsin has to offer. She expressed deep appreciation for the state's natural resources and the opportunity to serve in a role that aligns with her lifelong commitment to conservation and climate policy.