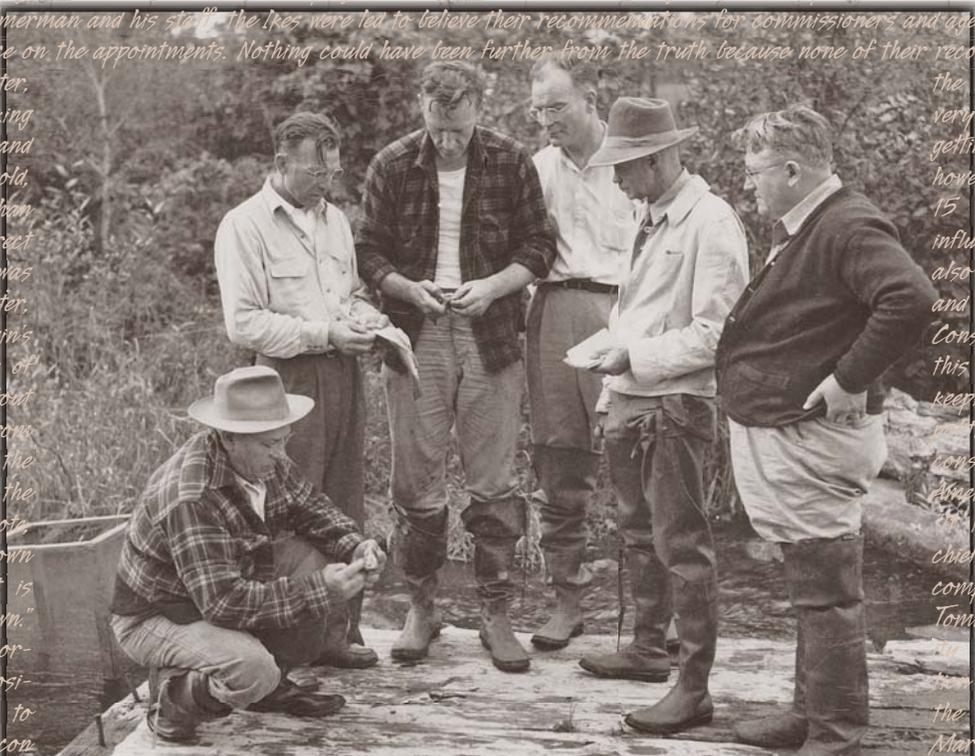


*It would be relatively easy to note just successful wildlife highlights that materialized during the first 80 years of the wildlife management profession, but that would present a very slanted picture of real world accomplishments.*

*Photo: Members of the Conservation Congress Trout Committee. Left to right: Ceylon Kohl, Royce R. Hix, Dr. William Bauer, Lyle Kingston, Earl H. Foster, and S.E. West. Eddy Creek, Sawyer County, 1948.*

Failures, while sometimes embarrassing, are important learning experiences that ultimately strengthened programs and the character of those who ran them. Most of the information in this chapter is presented in brief summary form. A few narratives like Turkey and Deer reintroductions are more detailed because the stories have never been told before, and I felt the individuals involved deserved special mention. It should be pointed out that the thoughts presented are those of the author's based upon archival and personal experiences over the past 35 years. Others undoubtedly would have different views—very understandable considering the subject and the thousands that had a hand in it. Agency Evolution The initiative, original thoughts and innovative ideas of Aldo Leopold began one of the most enduring conservation efforts ever initiated in Wisconsin. Izaak Walton League (Ikes) officers Frank Graess and William "Bill" Aberg contributed as well. Collectively, they drafted the 1927 legislation that created the Wisconsin Conservation Department. Using ideas obtained from Michigan and Pennsylvania, Wisconsin's Conservation Act of 1927 established the framework for a new state agency and its related policy body, the Wisconsin Conservation Commission. Not only did Leopold's thinking drive the effort, but it took attorney Aberg's touch to produce a sound law proposal. The Conservation Act was clearly a pivotal event in conservation history, but it also involved a failure that probably slowed agency progress and may well have permanently altered program direction. Leopold and the Ikes had a clear vision about who should serve on the new Conservation Commission. They carefully prepared a slate of 20 highly qualified candidates including Leopold. When they presented the list to Governor Zimmerman, Aberg urged the appointment of Leopold as director of the new Wisconsin Conservation Department (WCD). The Ikes had worked very hard to help Zimmerman get elected. It was a heated campaign, and Zimmerman used a strong conservation platform to attract votes. In private meetings with Zimmerman and his staff, the Ikes were led to believe their recommendations for commissioners and agency director would have great influence on the appointments. Nothing could have been further from the truth because none of their recommendations were implemented.

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acres wetland located in Dodge and Clark counties, in northeastern Wisconsin, and provided abundant fish and game for Wisconsin through most of the nineteenth century. Called "Brantley's Lake" by the Indians, its rich organic soils attracted early European settlers interested in draining the marsh in the late 1800s for agriculture. During the early 1900s, modern steam-driven equipment allowed farmers to expand marsh ditching and drainage. One man was instrumental in expanding the marsh and salvaging one of the largest windmill sawmills in the country. The man's name was Lewis Radtke, a

## Chapter 11

### Successes and Failures, 1927-2008

instrumental in saving this internationally important resource. Breaking on the local "Restore Horizon Lake" Radtke addressed numerous meetings around the state from 1900 to 1908. His efforts were successful in influencing the state and federal governments to purchase and repackage this vital natural resource. The success story of what became the 10,000-acre Horizon Marsh Wildlife Management Complex was also a success for Wisconsin and the nation. About two-thirds of the northern portion is the Horizon National Wildlife Refuge, which is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Its original purpose was waterfowl management but expanded to include multiple species and environmental education. The southern one-third is the Horizon Marsh Wildlife Area managed by the state. The project's traditional migrating waterfowl goose population and diverse wetland and upland wildlife nature trails, and educational facilities are state and national treasures. Removing predators from the environment had public support because they killed livestock and competed for wilderness wildlife for game. His popular idea was uniformly endorsed as soon as European settlement of America began. Establishing bounty payments in the Midwest started in 1787 and continued for more than 100 years, but it wasn't considered a success until early scientists and scholars backed the bounty idea with theories about how devastating predators could to on wild populations. Aldo Leopold had the same idea early in his career, but that changed when he began to see that predators had a vital role in controlling certain prairie species. He ultimately observed that predators were the important influence for keeping wild game wary of humans. A challenge to his theory came in 1908 when a wolf that his hunting party shot was the pivotal event in his life and forever changed his philosophy about



DNR FILE

It would be relatively easy to note just successful wildlife highlights that materialized during the first 80 years of the wildlife management profession, but that would present a very slanted picture of real world accomplishments. Failures, while sometimes embarrassing, are important learning experiences that ultimately strengthened programs and the character of those who ran them.

Most of the information in this chapter is presented in brief summary form. A few narratives like turkey and elk reintroductions are more detailed because the stories have never been told before, and I felt the individuals involved deserved special mention. It should be pointed out that the thoughts presented are those of the author's based upon archival and personal experiences over the past 35 years. Others undoubtedly would have different views—very understandable considering the subject and the thousands that had a hand in it.

## Agency Evolution

The initiative, original thoughts and innovative ideas of Aldo Leopold began one of the most enduring conservation efforts ever initiated in Wisconsin. Izaak Walton League (Ikes) officers Frank Graass and William "Bill" Aberg contributed as well. Collectively, they drafted the 1927 legislation that created the Wisconsin Conservation Department. Using ideas obtained from Michigan and Pennsylvania, Wisconsin's Conservation Act of 1927 established the framework for a new state agency and its related policy body, the Wisconsin Conservation Commission. No doubt Leopold's thinking drove the effort, but it took attorney Aberg's touch to produce a sound law proposal.

The Conservation Act was clearly a pivotal event in conservation history, but it also involved a failure that probably slowed agency progress and may well have permanently altered program direction. Leopold and the Ikes had a clear vision about who should serve on the new Conservation Commission. They carefully prepared a slate of 20 highly qualified candidates including Leopold. When they presented the list to Governor Zimmerman, Aberg urged the appointment of Leopold as director of the new Wisconsin Conservation Department (WCD).

The Ikes had worked very hard to help Zimmerman get elected. It was a heated campaign, and Zimmerman used a strong conservation platform to attract votes. In private meetings with Zimmerman and his staff, the Ikes were led to believe their recommendations for commissioners and agency director would have great influence on the appointments. Nothing could have been further from the truth because none of their recommendations were implemented.

Later, the Ikes received satisfaction by working very hard on the next election campaign and getting Zimmerman out of office. Leopold, however, would have to wait more than 15 years before he would have a direct influence on agency policy. Aberg was also appointed to the commission later, and both men ended up in Wisconsin's Conservation Hall of Fame.

The tragedy of this story relates to Leopold's idea about keeping the WCD director position free from political appointment. In addressing the conservation commission structure in the *American Game Policy* in 1930, he wrote, "It is vital that they appoint their own chief executive officer. If this vital point is compromised, the whole idea breaks down." The authority to appoint the DNR secretary position by the Natural Resources Board was changed in 1995.

### Horicon Marsh

The 15,000-acre wetland located in Dodge and Fond du Lac counties in east central Wisconsin had provided abundant fish and game for Native American Indians through most of the nineteenth century. Called "Cranberry Lake" by the Indians, its rich organic soils attracted early European settlers interested in draining the marsh in the late 1800s for agriculture. During the early 1900s, modern steam-driven equipment allowed farmers to expand marsh ditching and drainage. One man was instrumental in stopping that effort and saving one of the largest wildlife sanctuaries in the country. The man's name was Louis Radke—a conservation warden and sportsman whose foghorn voice and statewide campaign were instrumental in saving this internationally important resource.

Speaking on the topic "Restore Horicon Lake," Radke addressed numerous meetings around the state from 1923 to 1927, touting the huge potential fish and game benefits for saving a marsh that had been plundered by agriculture. His efforts were successful in influencing the state and federal governments to purchase and manage this vital natural resource.

The success story of what became the 30,000-acre Horicon Marsh wildlife management complex was also a highlight for Wisconsin and the nation. About two-thirds of the northern portion is the Horicon National Wildlife Refuge, which is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Its original purpose was redhead duck management but expanded to include multiple species and environmental education. The southern one-third is the Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area managed by the state. The project's traditional migrating Canada goose population and diverse wetland and upland wildlife, nature trails, and educational centers are state and national treasures.

### Bounties

Removing predators from the environment had public support because they killed livestock and competed too efficiently with hunters for game. This popular idea was uniformly endorsed as soon as European settlement of America began. Establishing bounty payments in the Midwest started in 1787 and continued for more than 150 years, but it wasn't considered a success story.

Early scientists and scholars backed the bounty idea with theories about how devastating predators could be on wild populations. Aldo Leopold had the same idea early in his professional career, but that changed when he began to see that predators had a vital role in controlling certain prolific species. He ultimately observed that predators were an important influence for keeping wild game wary (therefore, challenging to sportsmen).

Leopold's famous encounter with a wolf that his hunting party shot was the pivotal event in his life and forever changed his philosophy about predators:

*When our rifles were empty, the old wolf was down, and a pup was dragging a leg into impassable slide rocks. We reached the old wolf in time to watch the fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to her and the mountain.*

Leopold's influences through WCD contacts and the students he sent into its ranks coupled with national research on the value of predators eventually influenced the WCD to remove all bounties in 1957. Interestingly, the county share of the



DNR FILE

Louis "Curley" Radke, a native of Horicon, led the campaign to have Horicon Marsh acquired by the public and restored. He was inducted to the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame in 1993.



DNR FILE

## The Gamekeepers

bounty fund was continued (state bounties had been cost shared with the counties), and many counties still chose to bounty certain species. The state offered cost-sharing funds through a new Fish and Wildlife Management Grant Program in 1965 as an alternative to county bounties. Encouraged by wardens and game managers, most counties eventually chose to use their annual bounty allocation to attract the state matching grant for improving fish and wildlife habitat—a success story after all.

### Winter Feeding

Even though winter feeding is a popular activity among many landowners and hunters, conducting a statewide winter feeding program was a bad idea for the WCD for a number of reasons: costs, artificial concentration of wildlife, disease and predation exposure, negative impacts on hunting and natural movement of deer, poaching vulnerabilities, and instilling the false idea in the public's mind that vast numbers of critters were being saved from starvation.

At its peak in the 1930s, the WCD's winter feeding program maintained over 60,000 small game and deer feeding stations. Grain and concentrates used for deer feeding at times cost more than the entire law enforcement budget. The highest volume of deer feed placed in the woods by the WCD was 1,131 tons during the winter of 1950–51. The manpower wasted hauling food into the back woods can't be calculated, but it was thousands of hours and represented labor removed from the enforcement of fish and game laws.

As early as 1948, some WCD personnel spoke out against winter deer feeding. H.T.J. Cramer who headed up the Wisconsin Deer Committee spoke on the topic during a presentation at the North American Wildlife Conference, cautioning against feeding practices that would transform majestic wild deer into semi-domesticated animals. Fortunately, science took another look at the subject and debunked the popular myths associated with feeding wildlife. Over the years, research findings established the following:

- Disease transmission is magnified at feeding sites and can persist for years.
- Too many deer competing for easily available food induces stress, which impacts survival.
- Predators concentrate at feeding sites.
- The manner in which deer digest food makes winter feeding with agricultural crops ineffective.

Deer digest their food through a series of four stomachs that hold the bacteria needed to produce digestion. As the foods eaten by deer change throughout the season, so do the bacteria. Most northern deer eat the woody tips of trees and shrubs almost exclusively in the winter months, and the type of bacteria that builds up in their stomachs at this time is incapable of digesting agricultural foods like hay and corn. Ingested corn can lead to carbo-overload and produces acidosis that reduces the quantity of microorganisms in the deer's stomach, impairing digestion further and exacerbating starvation. Deer have actually starved to death with their bellies packed with alfalfa.

In the wild, feed thrown out by people does more harm than good, especially for deer. Any time you artificially concentrate animals in one spot for any length of time, you add stress to animals and an opportunity for defecations and body contact to spread disease. With the rise of chronic wasting disease in Wisconsin, prudence should guide people to avoid feeding deer. Other highly communicable diseases like bovine tuberculosis (already detected in Michigan and Minnesota) can affect deer, then travel into cows, and have a devastating impact on Wisconsin's economy.

Deer biologist Keith McCaffery has observed that the "repeated replacement of feed to one site distinguishes baiting and feeding from all natural foraging by deer. Even a small quantity of feed, repeatedly placed, is sufficient to habituate multiple family groups of deer to revisit a site, increasing risk of disease transmission. Bait-feed



All the early game feeding by the WCD was done by hand.

**B**ack-yard bird feeders are great for making people feel good about doing something for wildlife with side benefits of entertainment, banding opportunities, study, and improving bird identification skills. However, only a small fraction of bird populations use feeders, and those that do still get most of their ration from the wild. The negative feature is that unless feeders are regularly maintained throughout the winter and the sites routinely sanitized, they can have lethal effect on birds that use them. Predators will also find these feeders and have easy hunting success. Providing escape cover near feeders is essential.

sites become progressively contaminated with saliva, nasal droppings, urine, feces, and disease organisms.” The large body of scientific evidence accumulated nationally on the serious consequences of artificial feeding and baiting support discontinuing the practice in any form.

The well-documented effects of feeding elk in the Clam Lake area should also be an eye-opener for those skeptical about giving handouts to wildlife. Radio transmitters revealed how elk changed their winter living patterns and concentrated around artificial feeding sites. Elk drawn to river and lake front homes before ice conditions were adequate were killed by drowning. Automobiles killed elk concentrating near roadside feeding stations—food placed by well meaning people but with devastating results.

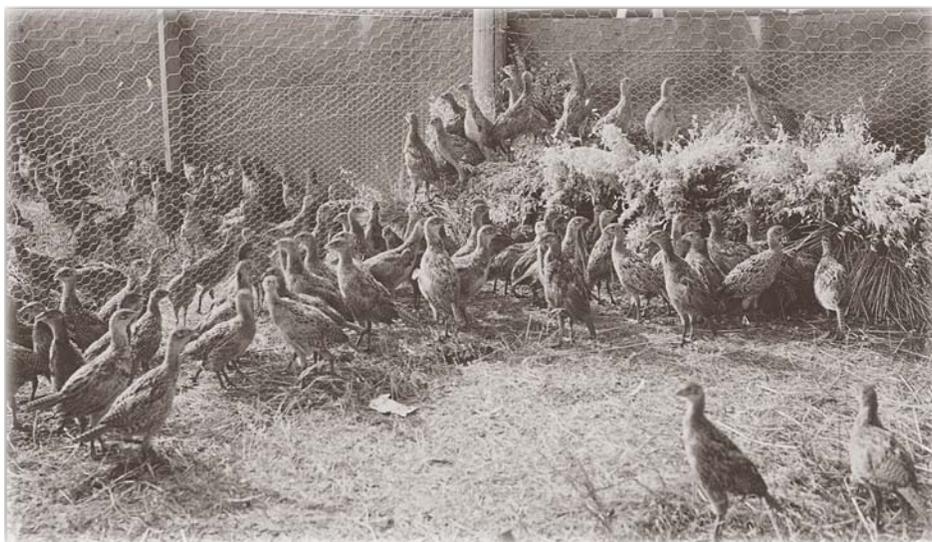
## Game Farm

Many biologists and professional wildlife experts would submit that artificial production of game by raising birds and mammals under wire can *never* be considered “successful wildlife management.” However, the story of the Poynette Experimental Game and Fur Farm is fascinating, involving a tremendous amount of success along with some failures.

I don’t think there can be any doubt that the Fish Lake and Poynette operations established the ring-necked pheasant as a viable, wild-living population in the state. That fact alone is a success story. As the hub for most game management programs in the 1930s and 1940s, the Poynette Game Farm was an important link in the historical development of the wildlife management profession. The national reputation that Wisconsin gained in the conservation world for pheasant-raising expertise, wildlife disease assessment, and cooperative club programs is also a success story. In the 1930s and 1940s, Wisconsin won the top prize at a national game breeder’s show in Chicago for all 13 years it participated. The associated wildlife exhibit established at the game farm continues to this day and provides public educational benefits for thousands of visitors.

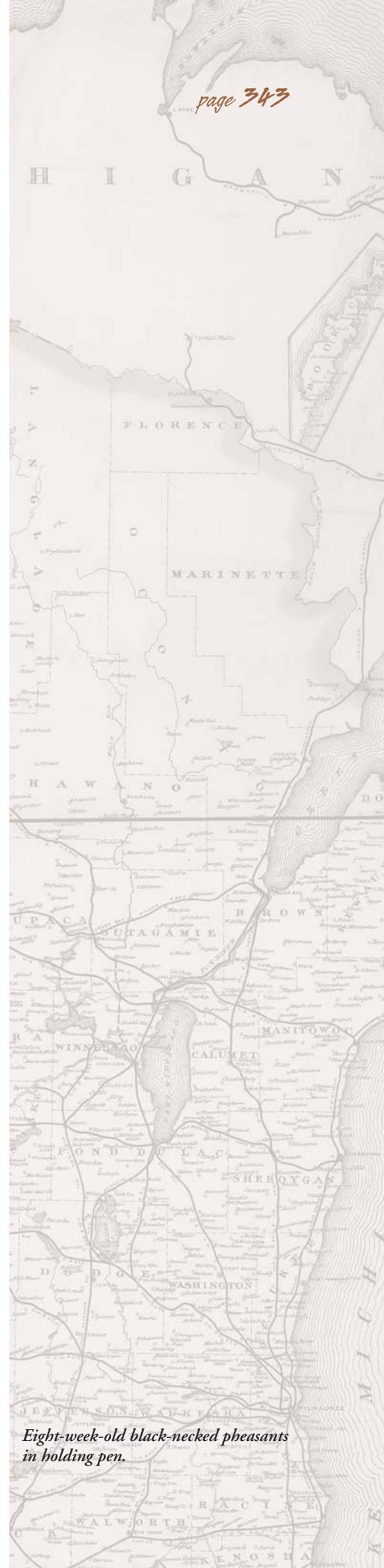
The game farm has experimented with over 30 varieties of pheasants and a variety of other wildlife that have benefited management over the years, but many efforts could be judged failures. Raccoon-, fox-, and mink-raising efforts of the 1930s and 1940s probably were not necessary and committed labor and expenses that could have been directed at other priorities. Why the department wasted its time experimenting with Karakul sheep from central Asia remains a mystery. Perhaps someone thought farmers might make money on its fur-like coat.

Most pheasant experiments ended in failure, but you have to admire the game farm staff’s thoroughness in examining alternatives for Wisconsin. Pheasant varieties included: Mongolian, English black-necked, Formosan, eastern Chinese ring-necked,



*Eight-week-old black-necked pheasants in holding pen.*

DNR FILE



## The Gamekeepers

English ring-necked, melanistic mutant, white English ring-necked, versicolor (or Japanese green), Reeves, Soemmering's and scintillating copper, Elliot's, golden and Amherst, Lady Amherst, silver, Nepal kaleege, white-crested kaleege, lined kaleege, Swinhoe's, eared pheasants (brown, blue and white), impeyan (Himalayan, Sclater's, and Chinese), tragopan (satyr, western, Blyth's, Temminck's, and Cabot's), cheer, and koklass.

Pennsylvania pheasants were released in southwestern Wisconsin in the 1970s because it was a unique species that roosted in trees and therefore could survive in wooded terrain. They disappeared within a few years but probably helped some great horned owls survive. Wild pheasants obtained from Iowa and the Jilin Province of China were used at the game farm for breeding in the 1990s and after 2000 and were successful in that a more wary pheasant progeny resulted, and a "flightier" bird was released in the fall.

Quail, chukar partridge, red-legged partridge, and Hungarian partridge propagation and release were continuous in the 1930s and 1940s but never had a positive impact on the wild population. Habitat deterioration during this time period probably didn't help either. Many attempts to raise ruffed grouse in captivity also ended in failure.

Game farm propagation of wild turkeys was certainly a failure and may have ended the opportunity to reestablish the bird on the landscape forever if wildlife managers hadn't tried wild birds from Missouri. Game farm stock proved to be a bad management strategy because the birds couldn't survive in the wild very well. The catastrophic decision to raise turkeys in pheasant pens at Poynette introduced blackhead disease to the Meadow Valley turkey flock. The disease decimated that population in 1957 and almost eliminated them completely.

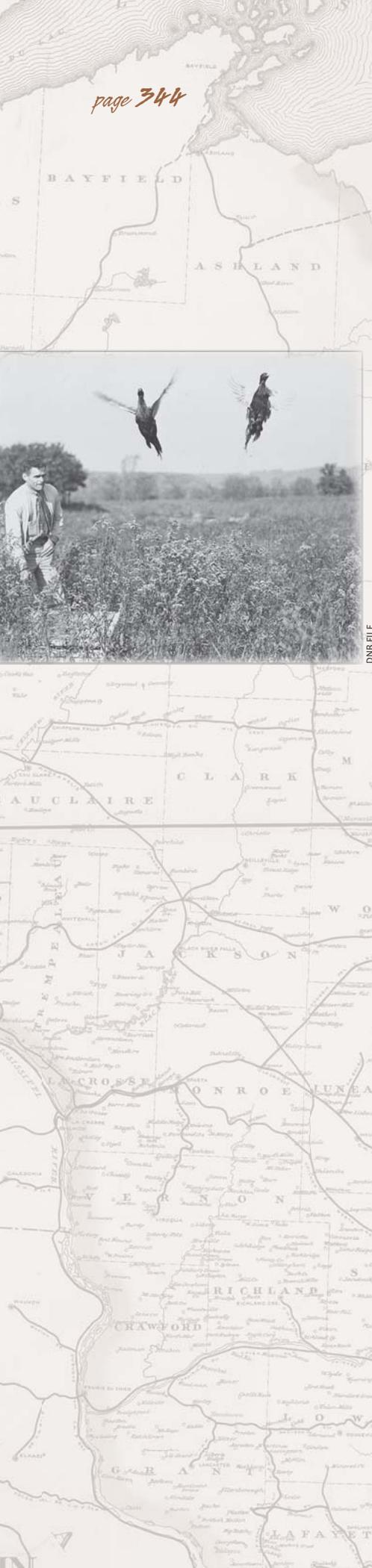
The success of the rooster pheasant stocking efforts can also be credited for the establishment of numerous (100 plus) small wildlife areas that provide benefits for a variety of natural resources including endangered and threatened species. Originally leased and purchased strictly for put-and-take pheasant hunting, these properties now provide core habitat for wildlife, natural area protection, critical wetland reserves, and rare species that probably would have disappeared under the plow or some housing development.

## Wildlife Funding Programs

The evolution of revenue methods to pay for wildlife-related programs involved many successes and failures. Establishing hunting and trapping license fees under a "user pays" mentality was a fair way to start but would have failed had not the Izaak Walton League and other sportsmen clubs forced the segregated fund concept into law and prevented raids by legislators intending to use the money elsewhere.

The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937 (Pittman-Robertson Act) produced success without measure for wildlife nationwide. It earmarked the existing 10% (later 11%) manufacturer's excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition for land acquisition, development, and research on a cost-sharing basis. This funding produced many success stories. Federal aid coordinators also deserve much credit for ensuring that funding was used properly and accounted for at all times:

- 1940-1946** – Walter Scott
- 1946-1948** – Irven Buss
- 1948-1952** – Cyril Kabat
- 1952-1955** – Wayne Truax
- 1956-1960** – Bud Jordahl
- 1960-1965** – John Keener
- 1966-1968** – Don Holl
- 1969-1977** – George Hartman
- 1978-2001** – Thomas Niebauer
- 2001-2010** – Gail Fry



The sportsmen's license created in 1937 with its donation option and the conservation patron license created in 1984 added to the revenue base.

The creation of the taxpayer check-off for supporting the endangered resources program in Wisconsin was genius. This law was passed in 1983 and allowed taxpayers receiving a refund from the state to designate all or a portion for the DNR's endangered resources program. It has generated substantial funding over the years and represents a regular funding source for the agency.

The state law initiated in 1994 that created license plate revenue for the endangered resources program support was another innovative way for generating much needed revenue for this vital program. While legislators were hesitant because the technique may encourage too many other good causes to do the same, they recognized endangered resources funding warranted the support. The beauty of this success story is that it represents a reliable, steady income flow to the program.

The failure of some funding program attempts is still having a suppressing effect on conservation programs today. When the WCD was created in 1927, the entire agency was funded by the sale of hunting, trapping, and fishing licenses. Even state parks were supported entirely with these dollars through the 1940s. The evolving principle was "sportsmen pay for conservation." As broader public benefits were produced by conservation programs, taxpayer dollars through General Purpose Revenues (GPR) began to pay for part of the department budget in the 1950s and 1960s. The Kellett reorganization in 1967 added significant environmental protection and more tax supported dollars to the DNR. Everyone's quality of life through clean air, water, and soil programs generated even more use of tax revenues. The shift in priorities, however, short-changed fish and wildlife programs in Wisconsin.

One of the principles that kept the Conservation Fund solvent and enabled the DNR to keep up with inflation without raising the price of licenses every year was the practice of building in a budget surplus every four years. The interest on the surplus enabled the DNR to limit their budget request to the Legislature to a modest "inflationary increase" every four years. Unfortunately, the surplus gave a false impression of the DNR's budget, and Tony Earl eliminated it during his tenure as secretary. The resultant loss of the budget surplus and its interest had suppressing impacts on DNR programs and created a long-term budget shortfall.

Numerous budget requests to the Legislature for more taxpayer support of fish and wildlife programs were also denied from the 1980s through modern times. While legislators recognize that natural resource-based recreation is big business in Wisconsin, generating an estimated *\$6.3 billion per year* in the state, high taxes and other state agency competition for funds have prevented a more equitable revenue distribution.

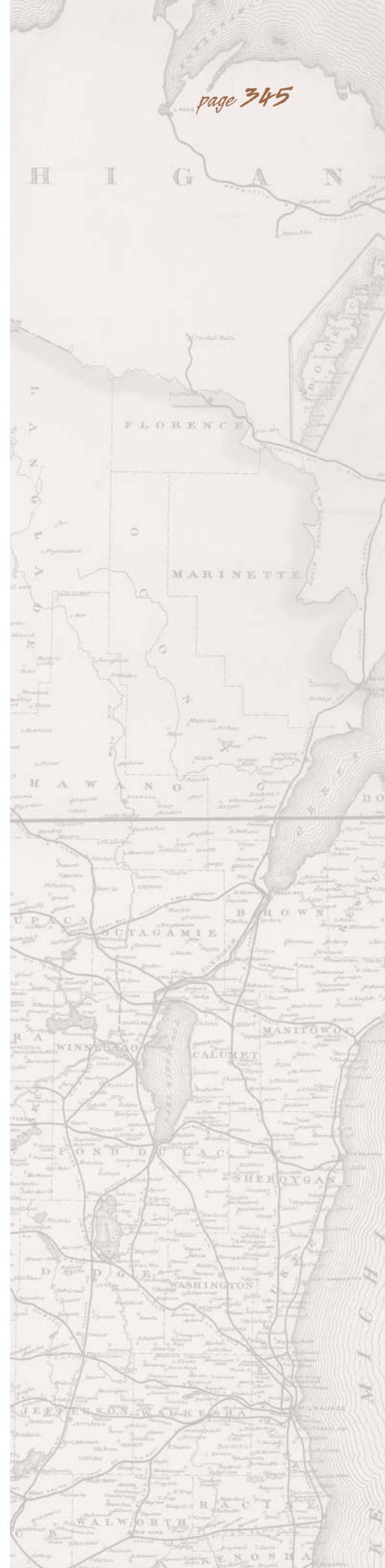
An alternative solution would be to establish an 1/8th of one percent sales tax similar to a long-standing program in the state of Missouri. A public opinion poll suggests that 62% of the Wisconsin public supports such funding.

## **Wildlife Research**

Using science to learn the facts before implementing regulations and land management practices makes sense, but it was not always done. Early in its history, resource managers used few facts and a lot of common sense to create programs because research was just getting underway. After Pittman-Robertson research projects began in the 1940s, the quantity and quality of the game manager's information base improved significantly as did its success with the resource. Listing all of the successes generated by wildlife research is not possible, but identifying several milestones will illustrate the productive growth of the program responsible for producing one of the most respected programs in the United States.

## **Deer Research**

The evolution of deer population assessment techniques was probably the single most important advance in wildlife management to occur in the century. The program build up from mandatory deer registration in 1953, party permits in 1957, deer



## The Gamekeepers



COURTESY OF K. MCCAFFERY



DNR FILE

Keith McCaffery (top) and Bill Creed became synonymous with Wisconsin deer.



COURTESY OF THE GAPPA FAMILY

Game manager Mike Gappa.

management unit creation in 1957, fawn-per-doe ratio observations in 1959, over-winter deer population goals in 1961, and the variable antlerless quota authority that created a nationally acclaimed program under Art Doll's leadership. The SAK formula adapted by Bill Creed in 1961 and implemented in 1962 is considered the "birth" of modern deer management in Wisconsin.

Keith McCaffery's arrival in deer research in 1963 was a critical complement to Bill Creed's contributions. McCaffery was an excellent communicator and added immeasurably to the deer program's success over the next 30 years. He often was the state's spokesman at national and international conventions, and his articulate presentations to the Conservation Congress swayed opinions to knowledgeable decisions. His research findings about the value of summer range in 1979 were invaluable to management.

*To date, no one has been able to discover a solution to a public mentality locked in tradition, emotion, and anti-DNR sentiment coupled with the adrenalin-driven pursuit of large antlers.*

Simultaneously, however, the department failed to keep the public informed and in tune with how reliable these techniques were. Mind you, biologists and wildlife managers repeatedly tried to inform the public. They tried with every educational strategy available including throwing over one million dollars into the campaign to produce the Deer 2000 plan but still failed. To date, no one has been able to discover a solution to a public mentality locked in tradition, emotion, and anti-DNR sentiment coupled with the pursuit of large antlers.

### Black Bear Research

The award-winning black bear research conducted by Bruce Kohn in the 1970s and the evolution of his population modeling system was a great success story. Without his innovations, Wisconsin was well on its way to ending bear hunting and relegating it to the nuisance animal classification. Kohn established a sound, biologically based system of bear population monitoring and management that continues today.

Others have also contributed significantly to expanding the knowledge about this special natural resource. George Knutson was the first to compile basic biological information about bruins in the 1950s. Game manager Mike Gappa initiated the first bear studies in Clark County in the 1980s and documented range expansion into central Wisconsin. Dr. Ray Anderson, Dr. Christine Thomas, and University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point students contributed survey data critical to monitoring efforts. Volunteer Maggie Heino has given over 25 years to bear research and has handled bears at over 500 den sites.

### Canada Goose Research

The 1962 discovery of the "giant Canada goose" (*Branta canadensis maxima*) by Dr. Harold Hansen at Rochester, Minnesota, is noteworthy. This race of Canada geese was thought to be extinct but was found thriving in Minnesota and, later, on the Rock Prairie Refuge in Walworth County, Wisconsin. As the population grew, the species was discovered to be very troublesome, making a mess on golf courses, boat marinas, and lawns. On the other hand, relocating problem geese to other areas did much to increase this threatened population. Ultimately, giant geese dominated the hunter's bag in the Mississippi Flyway (80% of the harvest), a tremendous success story.

Goose researchers in the Mississippi Flyway inventoried, studied, and recommended management strategies that produced a tremendous increase in populations of the "small goose" (*Branta canadensis interior*). Migratory Canada geese stopping in Wisconsin increased from a few thousand in the 1940s and early 1950s to over 200,000 by the 1970s. Researcher Dick Hunt, UW-Madison's Don Rusch and Scott Craven, and John Keener were major contributors to this program's early success.

### **Prairie Chicken Research**

Prairie chicken research was responsible for the species hanging on and thriving in central Wisconsin. It was the very first WCD research venture in 1928. The Hamerstrom era from 1949 through the 1970s established the base of understanding that enabled wildlife managers to continue the effort of management today. Subsequent research by Dr. Raymond Anderson (UW-Stevens Point) and, later, by Dr. John Toepfer (research consultant, Society of Tympanuchus Cupido Pinnatus) and Dr. David Drake (UW-Madison) contributed significantly to prairie chicken survival. Gene pool dilution concerns raised by research resulted in the recent experimental release of Minnesota stock in central Wisconsin to improve flock vitality and stimulate expansion that has been suppressed in recent years.

### **Ruffed Grouse Research**

Ruffed grouse research enabled the agency to set seasons and bag limits without negatively impacting the population. Research conducted by Robert Dorney in the 1950s, Jack Moulton in the 1960s, and John Kubisiak in the Sandhill and Meadow Valley wildlife areas in the 1970s and 1980s and the vast amount of data collected on the bird at the Stone Lake Experimental Area ensure that this species will be managed successfully.

### **Pheasant and Waterfowl Research**

Numerous research projects were successfully applied in Wisconsin from 1940 on that ultimately led to improved habitat management, production, and regulation of pheasant, duck, and goose populations. Predator impacts, nesting cover manipulation, wetland experiments, hunting influences, Flyway-wide evaluations, land acquisition, and numerous other studies have contributed heavily to the program's success.

Grassland restoration was one of the most successful stories that emerged from a combination of pheasant and waterfowl research. State wildlife areas, waterfowl production areas, and large ecosystem projects like the Glacial Lake Habitat Restoration Area ultimately were created and managed for ground nesting wildlife very dependent on this critical habitat component.

### **Furbearer Restorations**

Reintroductions of fishers and American martens were made possible because of careful research of animal habits and habitat. Bobcat and otter research findings were not only responsible for determining the population level and proper techniques for management but were vital for perpetuating recreational trapping after court challenges.

### **Outdoor Lab**

The Sandhill Wildlife Demonstration Area was a fortuitous purchase for the department because it created a 9,150-acre outdoor laboratory for research on deer, ruffed grouse, and hunting that could not have been accomplished anywhere else without the expenditure of huge amounts of dollars. The results of the intensive research on this special property will guide management for many years to come... just like Wallace Grange envisioned.

### **Public Lands**

The establishment of the public hunting grounds system in 1938 was a huge success story for the department. The explosive program growth throughout the 1940s and 1950s serves as testimony to the dedication of early game management pioneers. The later evolution of the "wildlife area" terminology marked the expansion of the land acquisition goal to include other natural resource and recreation objectives.

The original Outdoor Recreational Act Program (ORAP) came along in 1961 at a time when funding was desperately needed to continue agency-wide land acquisition. ORAP 200 and ORAP 2000 continued that funding support through 1989 when the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund was authorized. Into the new millennium, Stewardship funds are providing millions of dollars each year for land purchasing. Through 2005, the DNR had purchased over 1.3 million acres, and wildlife areas accounted for about 500,000 of this total.



DNR FILE

*Wildlife researcher John Kubisiak.*



DNR FILE

*Game manager Clavence "Bud" Smith supervised the Sandhill project in the 1960s.*





LEFT: S GILCHRIST, RIGHT: DNR FILE

The purchase of Horicon Marsh with a combined state and federal ownership of 30,000 acres started a good trend for the state to pursue large blocks of public land ownership. Without it, effective land management is very difficult or impossible. Large blocks of contiguous state-owned land minimizes habitat fragmentation, prevents in-holdings, and enables the use of fire, one of the cheapest and most effective tools in the land manager's toolbox.

Crex Meadows (27,000 acres), Mead (30,000 acres), and Glacial Lake Habitat Restoration (28,000 acres) state projects were large enough to warrant permanent staffing and enabled application of ecological principles not possible on smaller properties. Other large properties like Buena Vista (14,000 acres), Fish Lake (14,000 acres), Navarino (16,000 acres), and Tiffany (15,000 acres) didn't have permanent staffing on site, but the ownership blocks enabled effective management.

Unfortunately, most wildlife areas are less than 3,000 acres in size. While the land protected is important to wildlife and certain endangered and threatened plant communities, effective management is most difficult. These properties tend to attract housing developments on their borders because they provide attractive aesthetics and easy access to recreation. Along with it comes constant wildlife disturbance by people, cats, and dogs as well as more requests for agency service.

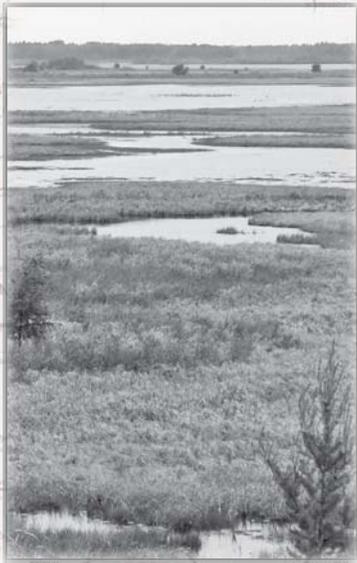
Funding for land management has not kept pace with the needs and has negatively impacted public lands management since the early 1990s. The lack of management critical for preventing advancing plant succession alone is devastating to wildlife habitat. Tree, shrub, and exotic invasions are destroying vital grasslands and converting diverse good habitat into monotypic bad habitat. Exotic invasive species such as honeysuckle, black buckthorn, and purple loosestrife are taking over many desirable habitats.

With agency priorities elsewhere and the wildlife management staff overbooked with CWD activities, increasing paperwork, law compliance, and other mandatory programs, the problem of deteriorating wildlife habitat within existing wildlife areas is getting worse each growing season.

### Governor Thompson Acquisitions

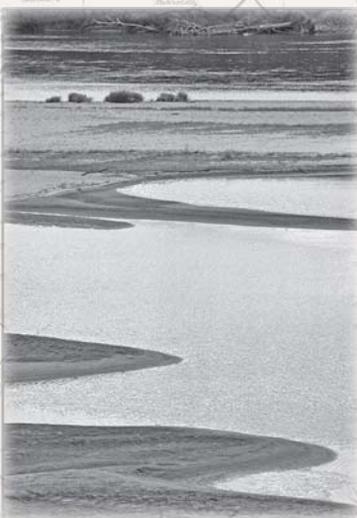
It seems ironic that at a time when land was cheap and most affordable for state land acquisition, new projects were relatively small. In recent years, a number of factors came together to dramatically change that conservative policy but at a time when land costs were very high. Even more interesting was the key role a conservative governor was to play in approving the largest number of "big tract" purchases in state history.

The Lower Wisconsin State Riverway, established in 1989, was the first of these large projects and was a tremendous success story. It had its beginnings in ten state wildlife areas containing about 22,000 acres that had been purchased with hunting and fishing dollars. Department planners redesigned the smaller wildlife areas into a single 77,000-acre federal scenic river area, but local landowners vehemently objected. Compromise legislation worked out by Senator Richard Kreul and Representative Spencer Black finally established a state project.



Crex Meadows.

S GILCHRIST



Lower Wisconsin State Riverway.

DNR FILE

Other large projects followed, many with the advance personal approval of Governor Tommy Thompson. Turtle-Flambeau Flowage (23,600 acres) and Glacial Habitat Restoration Area (28,400 acres) in 1990–91; Namekagon Barrens (9,312 acres) and Jim Falls (4,520 acres) wildlife areas in 1991–92; and Quincy Bluff and Wetlands State Natural Area (10,500 acres) and South Shore Lake Superior Fish and Wildlife Area (8,690 acres) in 1992–93 are examples. Governor Thompson approved other large purchases before he left office.

## Farm Programs

It's hard to imagine that farm programs would be a success story rather than a failure because of wildlife habitat lost to agriculture over the years. Wisconsin has lost much of its "real wild land" and over 50% of its wetlands in the last 150 years, and agricultural expansion was a major cause. However, agricultural aids were also created and repaired some of that damage.

The Soil Bank Program, created in 1956 and extending though 1969, was a boon to wildlife, especially for ground nesting species like pheasants and ducks and a large variety of small birds. Hundreds of thousands of acres were preserved in a relatively undisturbed state for long periods of time. The Feed Grain programs of the 1960s and 1970s also contributed. The Conservation Reserve Program did the same thing from the 1980s to date and has produced tremendous values for wildlife.

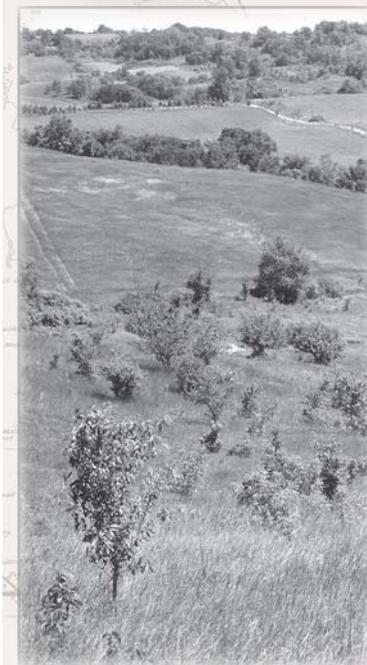
One of the biggest success stories resulting from federal programs is also the biggest secret in modern wildlife management. Not because it is a clandestine activity but because few people pay attention to programs that are based on boring paperwork and endless bureaucratic procedures. A position entitled "wetland habitat coordinator" (described in Chapter 7) was created on the Bureau of Wildlife Management staff in 1991 and is, indeed, quite a success story. The wetland habitat coordinator, Tim Grunewald, generated more money for wildlife habitat improvement than any other wildlife position in Wisconsin history. Grunewald crafted grant applications that attracted millions of federal dollars using the Wetland Reserve Program and North American Wetland Conservation Act sources that he matched with state Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funds to protect, enhance, and manage critical wildlife habitat.

## Wildlife Education

The topic of wildlife education was treated casually in the early days of conservation. The mandatory requirement to teach conservation in the schools created in 1935 and the hiring of the first WCD educator in 1936 were successes, but they faded over the years. The department greatly expanded their efforts from 1950 on with mass media material, movies, television programs, and the creation of the Poynette environmental education program. On October 1, 1972, the Poynette environmental education facility was dedicated to the legendary Harley MacKenzie and renamed the MacKenzie Environmental Education Center.

The wildlife management program made cursory attempts at public education in the 1950s through the 1970s using *Conservation Bulletin* articles, Poynette Game Farm exhibits, county fair displays, and "career day" presentations at high schools statewide. Some personnel extended themselves with regular sportsmen club presentations and slide programs at school programs, but efforts were sporadic and lacked direction.

I can be a little braggadocio about my own efforts on the bureau staff from 1976 to 1989. I greatly expanded the public informational handout inventory with updated information about wildlife, regulations, and public lands. In the category of field support, I was fortunate in hiring Sherry Wise, an LTE with writing expertise, to write a series of wildlife fact sheets on various wildlife species. The idea was to enable field personnel to answer public inquiries and school requests rapidly with uniform, factual information. Sherry later married and became Sherry Klosiewski. She was hired by the DNR as chief naturalist in the Parks Bureau. Those fact sheets she produced 20 years ago are still in use today.



DNR FILE



## The Gamekeepers

My most important contribution was obtaining the necessary approvals to introduce Project WILD as a DNR-sponsored program. While I became a trained facilitator and participated in numerous workshops training more facilitators statewide, Dr. Dennis Yockers and teacher/educator Dolly Zosel deserve most of the credit and high praise for introducing this national program in the most effective area—the school system. It taught students *how* to think about wildlife, not *what* to think.

In 1988, the Wildlife Management Bureau staff expanded to include, for the first time, a full-time wildlife educator, Dr. Mary K. Judd (now Dr. Mary Kay Salwey). Programs and materials created, published, and distributed under her leadership were very successful in expanding wildlife educational efforts statewide. She has been responsible for two program highlights, the “Wildlife and Your Land” series of publications for landowner advice and the Watchable Wildlife program, which offers special wildlife observation opportunities.

The hiring of full-time wildlife naturalists at the DNR area headquarters at Horicon (Bill Volkert) and at the Crex Meadows Wildlife Area (Jim Hoefler) was also an important part of this success story. These two positions have provided thousands of people essential educational programs over the last ten years and are expected to continue. This type of field effort was augmented by the creation of an outdoor skills center at the Sandhill Wildlife Area in 1991. Initiated and staffed by Dick Thiel, the Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center offers students basic training in hunting, fishing, camping, survival and a variety of related outdoor skills.

Bill Volkert’s contributions are especially noteworthy because of the huge volume of public educational efforts he was involved in since 1984. He amassed more than 3,000 presentations given to over 186,000 people. He produced about 1,500 news releases to the media and participated in some 150 public radio events. His extensive travels to the Canadian Arctic, Siberia, Mongolia, and all of the Central American countries along with trips to Venezuela, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, and Kenya added immeasurably to his teaching expertise.

Several others deserve special mention:

- Wildlife manager and longtime supervisor of the Mead Wildlife Area, Tom Meier, organized and coordinated a 150-member Friends of Mead/McMillan Association that was so successful that a \$1.8 million visitor education center was constructed in 2007 with almost no state funds involved. Partially because of great landowner support of the project and stimulated by annual landowner appreciation events orchestrated by Meier, donations covered most of the costs of the new facility. Volunteers add thousands of hours to the management, education, and interpretive programs.
- The unique live animal techniques used by wildlife technician Chris Cold at Ladysmith to teach wildlife management principles in northwestern Wisconsin schools have been extremely successful and have exposed more than 12,000 students to ecological concepts vital to understanding wildlife and its role in Wisconsin. Cold extends extra effort to demonstrate how regulatory measures balance recreational resource use.
- Few people know the story about Larry Vine and the hugely successful educational project he and his wife Sandy created. Larry had been a wildlife research technician since 1973 and had worked in the Horicon area since 1975. In 1984, he and Sandy organized a small group of volunteers to design and build a modern nature center at Horicon Marsh. Ultimately, a system of trails, a 30-foot observation tower, and the Marsh Haven Nature Center were developed. Its displays and exhibits have attracted visitors from all 50 states and 85 foreign countries. The facility is run entirely by volunteers and funded by donations.

The downside of the wildlife education story starts with deer. The agency has spent more time and money informing and educating the public about deer and its management than any other species or program in the department’s history. The Deer



**S**tanley Mead, president of Consolidated Paper Company, donated 22,000 acres of the original marsh and upland complex in his father's name—George W. Mead—to the Wisconsin Conservation Department in 1959. The family remained very active in providing financial support for its management culminating with Stanley Mead donating generously to the visitor center building fund. The visitor center was dedicated in his name.

2000 program publicity, materials, meeting logistics, and facility rentals cost over \$1.3 million to implement, yet the public is still resisting implementing that plan. In fact, many in the public sector still haven't embraced the routine shooting of antlerless deer as a population control measure.

More significantly, the downside of the wildlife education effort involves funding. Education staff in the DNR are among the first to be cut when budget cuts are made. The *Into the Outdoors* TV program was effective but was eliminated because of funding limits. The entire MacKenzie Environmental Education Center would have closed had the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation not come forward. No one needs to guess how effective education programs will be for the agency without adequate staff.

### Wildlife Disease Control

Early wildlife disease management was confined to minimizing pheasant losses at the Poynette Game Farm using diagnostic work by two pathologists and a chemist. The service was extended to the thousands of captive wildlife license holders in an effort to keep the commercial end of animal-raising programs thriving in the state. The annual volume was staggering; 1940 alone accounted for over 34,000 tested animals.

Dr. Daniel Trainer's rabies research at the University of Wisconsin and University of Wisconsin graduate student (later conservation biologist) Robert Dorney's ruffed grouse disease study were the extent of state agency involvement in wildlife disease concerns in the 1950s and 1960s. Dr. Trainer's effort also established a new level of public awareness about the potential deadliness of certain types of wildlife disease.

The outbreak of disease at the Poynette Game Farm in 1981 and the hiring of the Bureau of Wildlife Management's first wildlife disease specialist, Dr. Terry Amundson, were pivotal in establishing statewide disease contingency plans. The outbreaks of botulism at Horicon Marsh Wildlife Area, duck plague (duck virus enteritis, DVE) at two captive wildlife sites, parvovirus in central Wisconsin, and Lyme disease statewide tested the system but demonstrated that the DNR was prepared to deal with any type of disease threat.

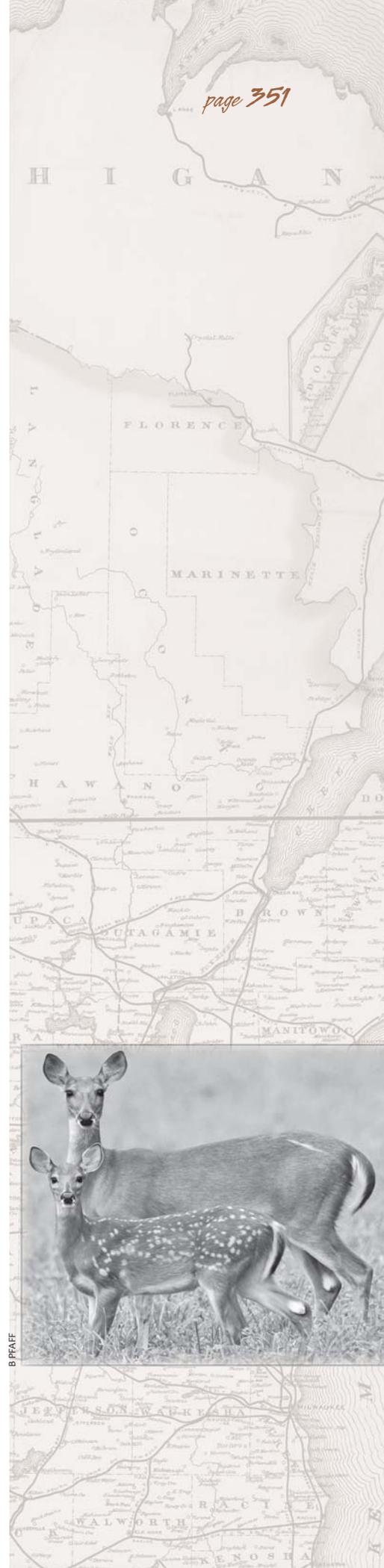
The 1981 decision by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to locate the national wildlife disease center in Madison, Wisconsin, was a huge success story for the state. Under the leadership of Dr. Milton Friend, this facility brought rapid diagnostic abilities to the Midwest and bolstered Wisconsin's wildlife leadership reputation worldwide. The availability of wildlife health expertise so proximate to the state's wildlife managers is a priceless benefit.

### Chronic Wasting Disease

The initials CWD are known to almost everyone in Wisconsin and to every deer hunter as the worse thing that's happened to wild populations since market hunting. It has been devastating to deer, DNR budgets, deer hunters, and wildlife managers. The details of this story are presented in Chapter 9. The disease has been detected in several counties across southern Wisconsin since 2002 and has placed a permanent cloud over one of the finest deer management programs in the United States. Several other states and at least one Canadian province struggle with CWD in free-ranging deer populations. Eradication of this poorly understood disease remains a daunting problem.

CWD presents a multi-faceted dilemma for the Wisconsin DNR. Just identifying the extent of the problem has been a monumental task. Complicating the science challenge has been informing the public about the disease, management strategies, and eradication progress. This end of the management equation has been a nightmare for the DNR and resulted in a multi-million dollar annual effort with no end in sight. Fortunately, the constant flow of information generated by the agency has resulted in enough public credibility to enable steady reduction of deer numbers in areas known to contain CWD.

The evolution of CWD detection and resultant public reactions could produce a fascinating sociological study. Early on, the public was angry, quick to blame the DNR, reluctant to eat venison, and under-harvested deer on huge chunks of private



## The Gamekeepers

land as people protected “their deer.” Two short years later, as the size of the CWD management zone increased, normalcy was almost restored as most hunters seemed to accept that the disease was endemic and just something they had to put up with to enjoy their favorite recreational sport.

CWD was a sad closing note on the years of historical growth for the wildlife management profession. While progress has been made to minimize CWD as a threat to deer hunting enjoyment in Wisconsin, there is no question that DNR credibility has been harmed in the process. Only sound research and scientifically based decision making coupled with a cooperative public can eliminate or minimize the effects of this problem in the years ahead.

### Species Management

The history of wildlife management provided numerous success and failure stories of how wild animals fared along the way. Not surprisingly, research success led to management success. Most stories ended in some form of success; some were not so successful. The reader should note that the following highlights are not intended to be an all-inclusive listing.

#### Deer

Early management efforts focused on conservative buck-only hunting seasons and winter feeding, producing a miserable failure for the resource and the public. The bitter citizen feeling faded and confidence improved with deer registration and the season framework improvements in the 1950s and 1960s. Broad-scale habitat maintenance work on public and private lands has combined with the strong research base (population models) and aggressive regulations to elevate Wisconsin into one of the top deer hunting states in the country.

#### Ring-necked Pheasant

The ring-necked pheasant (discussed in the game farm portion of this chapter) was a combination of successes and failures. Overall, it remains on the record as a “qualified success” because it was established in the wild and continues to persist. The important question is: for how long?

#### Canada Geese

Canada geese are now an abundant resource because of successful research and management. The Mississippi Flyway system, effective harvest quotas, refuges, and habitat management contributed to producing a large, healthy population of Canada geese of several races.

The giant Canada goose population growth in Wisconsin and elsewhere has a good news/bad news storyline. The good news is that the splendid bird has been brought back from the brink of extinction to very abundant numbers. The bad news is



that these birds tend to concentrate on golf courses, marinas, and city parks, making a mess that people detest. More of that scenario is on the horizon.

While it doesn't relate to Wisconsin, it should be noted that inadequate control of the continental snow goose population and the ideal nesting conditions in Canada have led to huge increases of snow geese that in turn led to destruction of primary Canada goose range and displacement of Canada geese to marginal range. Creating liberal hunting seasons seems to be the only viable solution to the snow goose problem.

### Ducks

Duck management presents a mixed bag of successes and failures. The wood duck was brought back from near extinction at the turn of the century to huntable levels with the creation of the artificial nesting box. Flowage development on state-owned land and evolution of dense nesting cover techniques have been a boon to locally produced mallards and blue-winged teal.

The Wetland Reserve and Conservation Reserve programs have enhanced the habitat base in Wisconsin, but critical wetlands are still being drained, and agriculture, highways, and commercial development still receive priority over ducks. Prairie habitat in the United States and Canada is still declining, and continental populations of diving ducks including canvasbacks, redheads, and scaup remain in peril.

### Gray Wolf

The restoration of timber wolf populations is a tremendous success story. While many people had a hand in this effort, researchers and wildlife managers played key roles in the many activities involved in recovery efforts. Individual wildlife managers who participated in major coordinating roles, including Bill Meier, Adrian Wydeven, and Dick Thiel, deserve special recognition. However, the courts intervened, removing the DNR's population-control abilities, so future management is in doubt.

### Prairie Chicken

Prairie chicken research success led to management success as well. Wildlife managers were responsible for purchasing critical habitat and managing these lands over the past 35 years to ensure bird survival. Those dedicated land managers who deserve special recognition include Oz Mattson, John Berkahn, Bruce Gruthoff, and James Keir.

### Species Restoration

Species restoration has been extremely successful for cormorants, bald eagles, ospreys, fishers, peregrine falcons, and whooping cranes. Wild turkey and elk reintroductions were remarkably successful and are described below. Reintroduced American martens are established and breeding in Wisconsin but have yet to expand their range. Each effort involved innovative thinking, solid research, range assessment, disease contingencies, public relations, and a tremendous amount of dedication by professional wildlife managers and biologists.



*Artificial nesting platforms, habitat restoration, and public education facilitated species restorations.*



PHOTOS: DNR FILE



## Elk Reintroduction

Elk had disappeared from Wisconsin by the early 1950s. As public interest in elk reintroduction grew during the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was little support from the DNR or U.S. Forest Service biologists as most saw it as a diversion of money and labor from other priorities. Some expressed the opinion that enough controversy existed with deer without bringing another *ungulate* into the northern forest. Key personnel at the U.S. Forest Service Regional Office in Milwaukee and at the Glidden Ranger District (Chequamegon National Forest), however, were supportive of reintroduction, and their influence was likely pivotal for getting the project underway.

### Local Attitudes

Area snowmobilers and Bayfield orchardists convinced the Bayfield County Board of Supervisors to oppose the establishment of an elk population in this area. Combining local opposition with rather lukewarm support from DNR biologists caused the Natural Resources Board to vote down a plan to reintroduce elk to Bayfield Peninsula (northern Wisconsin) in 1993. Newly formed Wisconsin chapters of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) were not deterred and kept the idea in front of decision makers.

A citizen group calling itself the Wisconsin Elk Study Committee (WESCO) went to work lobbying legislators and Governor Thompson about the merits of the elk project. WESCO was composed of Dr. Raymond Anderson (retired UW-Stevens Point faculty), Dr. Orrin Rongstad (retired UW-Madison faculty), Marten Hanson (local supporter), Neil Paulson (retired U.S. Forest Service supervisor) and Bernie Lemon (RMEF chair). The group was successful in convincing the governor to insert \$50,000 in the 1993–95 biennial budgets to fund a feasibility study of the reintroduction project involving a small number of wild elk.

### Implementation

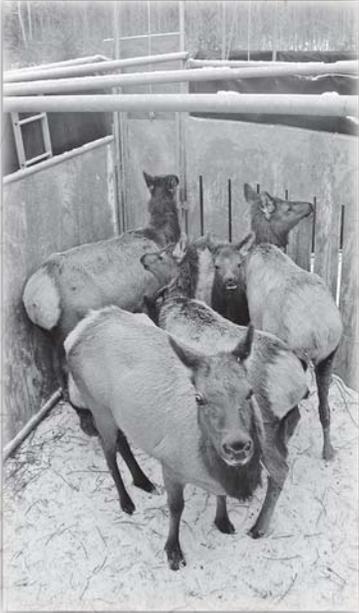
The study guidelines developed by WESCO with DNR oversight called for a four-year study of a small number of elk released in the Clam Lake area in northern Wisconsin. DNR biologists led by Tom Hauge and Bill Mytton made sure that game farm stock was not to be used in any part of the reintroduction and that health monitoring was mandatory.

Twenty-five elk were obtained from Michigan, held for 90 days in captivity for blood testing and observation, and transported to a Sawyer County pen on May 3, 1995 (four miles south from the junction of Sawyer, Bayfield, and Ashland counties). After being held for a two-week acclimation period, they were released to the wild from that pen on May 17. Radio transmitters were attached to the elk to enable observers to monitor movements and document activities during the study period.

### Funding

Ultimately, funding and support solidified and ensured the program's success including donations from the RMEF (\$100,000 per year), the U.S. Navy (ELF Project, \$50,000 per year through 2005), state funds (DNR, \$50,000 per biennium 1995–99), and tribal gaming revenue (\$100,000 per year through 2008). Private and business donations also contributed supportive funds. Bernie Lemon—an elk enthusiast from New Berlin who started the state's first chapter of the RMEF—led among private donors with the most money donated. Currently, there are 26 RMEF chapters and over 6,500 members. The RMEF has invested almost \$4 million in Wisconsin on elk reintroduction, research,

*Ungulate*  
Mammal having hoofs.



DNR FILE



DNR FILE

*Elk reintroductions appear to be successful in Wisconsin.*



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monitoring, habitat management, conservation easements, and fee title land acquisition. They have also established the Great Lakes Conservation Initiative that includes these types of management activities on elk range in Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin.

### **Monitoring**

Dr. Ray Anderson directed the initial herd monitoring activity by using a radio-tagging technique that allowed daily tracking of individuals during the first three years of the study. During the fourth year, adult elk were only checked every other day, but cows with calves were monitored daily. Though this herd didn't grow the first year, it did increase 15 to 20% over the next seven years.

Elk herd management responsibilities were transferred from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to the DNR in May 1999. DNR senior wildlife biologist Laine Stowell, formerly in the bureau's central office (wildlife damage specialist), transferred to Hayward to lead the elk project on July 30, 2000. DNR wildlife staff from Hayward, Ladysmith, Spooner, and Park Falls assisted Stowell in winter trapping 253 elk (including many recaptures) from 2002 through 2008 and attached 108 radio collars in the process. The same staff along with RMEF and Natural Resources Foundation volunteers also assisted Stowell in finding and placing collars on 96 elk calves from 2001 through 2008.

Stowell reported that 70 elk of about 130 in the total herd are wearing collars as of January 29, 2008, so it's clear he has a good handle on herd condition from one year to the next. Calf collars wear out in about two years while adult collars last six years and need to be replaced on that schedule.

### **Mortality**

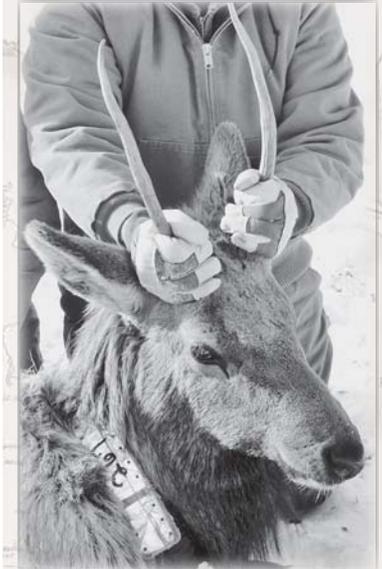
Radio-collar tracking continued annually following the 1995 elk reintroduction and revealed alarming increases in mortality that appeared to be associated with illegal feeding activities by hunters and landowners. Stowell documented revealing evidence of the consequences when well-meaning people artificially feed elk in winter. Car-elk collisions increased significantly in the vicinity of feeding operations conducted near highways. Autopsies conducted on dead elk found near feeding stations found lethal concentrations of liver flukes, a parasite known to flourish where elk concentrate. More dramatically, elk drownings were recorded as elk attempted river crossings to gain access to backyard feeders. Stowell facilitated increased and ongoing law enforcement and landowner education efforts beginning in 2005, which resulted in reduced elk mortality and improved distribution across the range.

Twenty-four confirmed elk-vehicle collisions were documented between 1995 and 2008 (60% were cow elk) and obviously had adverse impact on the productivity of the young Clam Lake elk herd. A special, innovative, six-mile elk crossing warning system was installed on State Highway 77 on December 19, 2006, with the help of a \$21,000 cost-sharing grant from RMEF. Flashing lights are activated by elk radio collars and warn motorists that elk are near the highway corridor. The elk-crossing warning system combined with blaze orange reflective collars, feeding prohibition regulations, careful placement of elk trapping, and habitat development projects along with cooperation from local residents all contributed to reduced elk-vehicle collisions in the area.

### **Future Plans**

While elk population expansion has been slow, elk occupied a 65-square-mile area around Clam Lake in 2007. The current management plan calls for natural herd growth without supplemental stocking. However, the DNR Elk Advisory Committee supports obtaining additional elk to stimulate genetic diversity and productivity in the Clam Lake herd. Natural Resources Board approval is required before that project can be undertaken.

The U.S. Forest Service revised its ten-year land management plan in 2006, incorporating aspen and openings management strategies to benefit elk on the core elk range. They have also adopted Stowell's recommendations in their "Travel Management Rule" to establish a limited number of forest road closures to protect critical elk calving



PHOTOS: DNR FILE

## The Gamekeepers

and wintering areas. Herd health and habitat monitoring will continue along with coordination with the U.S. Forest Service, which owns most of the land used by the elk.

Elk population goals for specific locations have been codified in the DNR's administrative rules using two hunting zones and specific population goals: Zone A with a population goal of 600 elk for a 288-square-mile area (Clam Lake at its center) and Zone B with a goal of 800 elk for an 824-square-mile area (comprising a sizeable portion of Ashland, Bayfield, Sawyer, and Price counties). Provisions for a limited December bull elk hunt are included in the rules once the overall population reaches 200 animals.

This new species arrival provides a unique attraction to northern Wisconsin and shows promise for becoming a permanent part of the landscape. The Natural Resources Board has approved establishing a second elk herd in Jackson County once a safe population can be found and barriers mitigated.

### Wild Turkey

The establishment of the wild turkey as a viable wild population was probably the biggest wildlife success story of them all. While it's widely known that wild turkeys were reestablished in the state, and the basic story of how it was done has been published, the story of its real beginning and the labor that went into producing this success is known only by a few of its participants. The people involved in this remarkable story are unsung heroes in the wildlife profession. Some have been mentioned in publications about the wild turkey program in Wisconsin, but most were overlooked. The following story will attempt to credit those individuals for their contributions.

### A New Approach

The struggle to establish wild turkey populations in the state had been ongoing since the early 1900s. Various subspecies were tried in the 1950s and 1960s with mixed results. The first of those experiments was with Pennsylvania stock released in Meadow Valley in central Wisconsin in 1957. The last effort of this period was in 1967 when Merriam-strain turkeys from New Mexico were released in Wyalusing State Park in Grant County. While a small number were hanging on into the 1970s, it seemed like the wild turkey just wasn't meant to be reestablished as a viable population in Wisconsin.

About 1973, the Farm Game Wildlife Section leader, Ed Frank, conducted a meeting in Spring Green involving southwestern Wisconsin game managers to discuss the future of the turkey program. Iowa and Minnesota were two years into successful reintroductions, and Wisconsin lagged behind. Ideas were tossed around, and a commitment was made to renew Wisconsin's interest in a restoration effort.

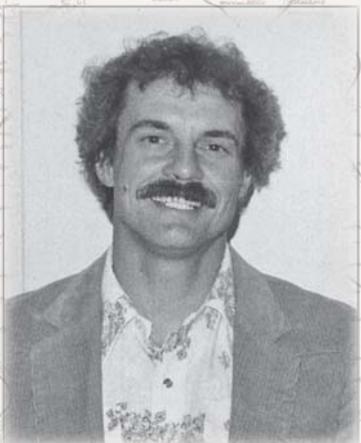
Game manager Carl Batha, newly hired and stationed at Spring Green, came up with an idea later in 1973 that seemed promising. Batha had received his master's degree in wildlife management from Southeast Missouri State University in 1972 and had completed his thesis on wild turkeys. He wrote a memorandum to the central office suggesting the use of wild-trapped birds from Missouri rather than the game farm stock Wisconsin had been using. Memos were exchanged on the topic over the next few months, and a plan began to form.

John Keener became very excited about pursuing a new turkey establishment project. Since the best turkey range seemed to be in southwestern Wisconsin, one of the first things he did was telephone Mississippi River biologist Ron Nicklaus to discuss the possibility of using him to spearhead the program. It was very unusual for the bureau to delegate major program responsibility to a field station. Nicklaus agreed to the arrangement, and Keener told Ed Frank, Upland Game Section leader, that the workload relief for him was worth the sacrifice of program control. Ed would remain bureau liaison and coordinate with Nicklaus.

Keener began to explore the turkey project in casual conversations with Missouri biologists during Mississippi Flyway Council meetings. He found out that Missouri was very interested in reestablishing a ruffed grouse population, an abundant game bird in Wisconsin at that time. Keener's discussions led to execution of a formal agreement in 1974 to trade Wisconsin grouse for Missouri wild turkeys at a three-for-one ratio. The following year, planning and budgeting took place in both states to execute the agreement.



DNR FILE



DNR FILE

Carl Batha, 1983.

## Getting Started

Trapping ruffed grouse in the wild was a new challenge for wildlife managers in the field. Early on, Nicklaus used a university student with some experience, but he proved inadequate for the task. Researcher John Kubisiak had the expertise but was overcommitted with his own workload and could only offer advice.

Nicklaus had to start from scratch on every aspect of the program. Trapping grouse required learning techniques, inventing equipment, locating trapping areas, and processing fragile wild birds without injury. Personnel had to be hired and trained to do fieldwork. A method of holding ruffed grouse in captivity and transporting them to Missouri with its associated logistics had to be developed. And that was just for starters.

Once the field program was operational, Nicklaus had to recruit personnel to handle large numbers of 20-pound, thrashing wild birds not happy about their plight. DNR staff could help initially, but he'd have to hire and train new employees later. Training included sexing, ageing, weighing, blood testing, and recording data. Transportation to prearranged release sites had to be quick and efficient to minimize additional bird stress. Surveys would need to be established to monitor the bird's progress in the wild.

After Nicklaus was operational in grouse trapping, Carl Batha and his staff out of the DNR's Dodgeville office assisted in the effort. Wildlife biologist David Linderud and his staff out of the DNR's office at Alma trapped ruffed grouse as well but not until much later.

## Turkeys Released

On a cold January day in 1976, the first wild turkeys arrived in Wisconsin. Nicklaus, La Crosse wildlife manager Ray Kyro, and wildlife technician Roger Anderson processed the birds carefully during this historical event. Dr. Thomas Yuill of the University of Wisconsin-Madison examined each turkey and took blood samples. A few hours later, the excitement peaked as 45 turkeys were taken to the Bad Axe watershed in Vernon County and released—turkey restoration was underway.

Kyro and Anderson had numerous other wildlife management responsibilities in their three-county area, so Nicklaus hired John Nelson in March 1976 as a full-time assistant. They had worked together in 1972 when Nicklaus was pursuing his master's degree working on steel shot performance at the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation. Nelson had a degree in wildlife ecology from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and was an experienced turkey hunter. The pair would make an indelible mark on wildlife history.

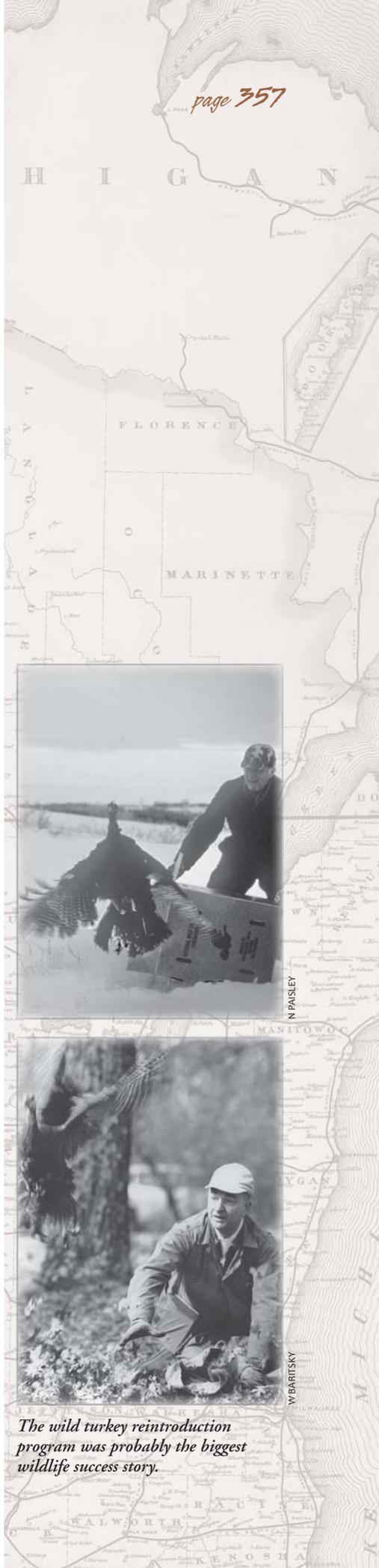
Turkey releases eventually sent a total of 334 Missouri birds into Buffalo, Iowa, Trempealeau, Jackson, La Crosse, Vernon, and Dane counties over the next year. A Wild Turkey Advisory Committee composed of Ed Frank, Ron Nicklaus, Carl Batha, John Nelson, Joe Haug, John Kubisiak, Terry Valen, and warden Doug Radke guided the program's progress and met frequently over the years to maintain the science of this new venture.

## Other Considerations

Nicklaus's responsibilities didn't end with bird establishment logistics. He recognized from his review of the literature and many discussions with other states offering turkey hunting that landowners were a critical element of a successful turkey program. The vast majority of turkey habitat was on private lands, and any future turkey hunting would require their cooperation. Nicklaus and Nelson initiated hundreds of landowner contacts in the course of building those relationships.

The most tenuous contact Nicklaus had to make was with the Westby Rod and Gun Club. He had to convince club members to temporarily stop releasing pheasants in the area to minimize the disease risk to the new turkey population. They were reluctant but agreed when Nicklaus gave his word that he'd notify them at the earliest sign that the turkey population was stable enough. He did so four years later—true to his word.

Wisconsin biologists were also aware that "hunting quality" was an important ingredient to the equation. Nicklaus and Nelson had hunted turkeys in Missouri and South Dakota. Nelson also hunted turkeys in South Carolina and Mississippi, so they



*The wild turkey reintroduction program was probably the biggest wildlife success story.*

## The Gamekeepers

both had a good understanding of hunting season frameworks. They also received solid management advice from biologists in other states including John Lewis in Missouri, Terry Little in Iowa, and Gary Nelson and Bill Porter in Minnesota.

Nicklaus concluded after several DNR staff discussions that there were two crucial ingredients for a quality hunting experience:

- Individual hunters had to be completely dependent on his/her own resources.
- Hunter interference by others should be avoided (separated by time and space).

### Southern Help

Carl Batha became the Southern District's wildlife staff specialist in April 1975 and coordinated additional help in providing ruffed grouse to Missouri. Under the supervision of Lewis Meyer in Dodgeville, game managers Paul Brandt (Boscobel) and Tom Meier (Spring Green) directed grouse trapping operations in the Dodgeville area from 1976 to 1978. Wildlife technician Fletcher Flanburgh and LTEs Roger Halverson and John Schweitzer did most of the unheralded grunt work. Werner Schweitzer, John's father and retired Soil Conservation Service agent, often volunteered his help.

Batha and his crew received some unexpected instruction in ruffed grouse trapping in 1976. Dr. Ralph Dimmick of the University of Tennessee had grouse trapping expertise and was interested in getting wild birds for his home state. He was a friend of Joe Frank, area supervisor at Horicon, and Joe encouraged his friend to write a letter of his interest to the DNR secretary, Anthony Earl. Although Dr. Dimmick erroneously addressed his letter to bowling professional Earl Anthony, the right Earl got the letter and granted his request.

Dr. Dimmick traveled to Wisconsin and spent considerable time with Batha walking miles of southwestern Wisconsin habitat. His technique was to walk until grouse broods were flushed before setting a trap with drift fences (side barriers to funnel grouse to the trap). While Dr. Dimmick eventually trapped grouse for Tennessee, Batha also hired him to train the Dodgeville work crew in grouse trapping principles. The acquired training skills improved trapping success and contributions to the Missouri trade agreement.

### La Crosse Work Crew

The lead for coordinating the entire turkey relocation program remained vested in Ron Nicklaus working out of the DNR's La Crosse office. Wildlife technicians Nelson and Anderson initially did turkey trapping without help from anyone, a labor-intensive task. By 1979, wildlife managers were seeing so many expanding flocks in the primary release areas that trapping and relocating local turkeys became the standard method for stimulating faster range expansion into the 1980s.

The La Crosse, Dodgeville, and Alma DNR work crews contributed to these translocation activities. LTE crews were hired for turkey trapping in Buffalo, Crawford, Grant, Iowa, Lafayette, Trempealeau, and other counties throughout most of the 1980s to support the massive relocation program that expanded to a statewide effort. The DNR staff also ran turkey surveys in the spring to monitor population growth.

The La Crosse LTE crew that materialized was a source of pride for both Nicklaus and Nelson. Nelson rented an old farmhouse that soon became the de facto headquarters for the crew and equipment. The name "Gobbler's Knob" was applied to the site, and the resultant camaraderie from site activities generated a spirited work force consisting of from one to five individuals committed to well beyond the eight-hour day. Its central location in the heart of the work area proved to be cost-efficient and ideally suited for the Vernon and Crawford county operation.

Winter turkey trapping on a large scale ended for the La Crosse area in 1986. The La Crosse LTE crew had stocked 36 release sites in southwestern Wisconsin and the Kettle Moraine State Forest with turkeys from Missouri and Wisconsin. They processed and released all 334 birds from Missouri and 364 wild-trapped birds taken from Vernon and Crawford counties. Many of the LTE workers, including Keith Krause, Ken Jonas, Tim Grunewald, Steve Sisback, Elley Talley, Cheri Rezaback, Neal Paisley, and Charlie Burke, went on to other DNR positions, state service, or private conservation



Jon Bergquist released wild turkeys in Southern District.



Ron Nicklaus (left) at a turkey registration station, 1985.

organization careers. Kyro, Nelson, Anderson, and Paisley did some limited turkey trapping to support the translocation effort the winter of 1988–89 and a few winters thereafter before the major trapping period ended during the winter of 1992–93.

### **Alma Work Crew**

Wildlife biologist David Linderud, stationed at Alma, Wisconsin, hired a six-month employee, Phil Olson, to help him trap grouse in Buffalo County in the winter of 1983–84 to assist in the Missouri trade agreement. Linderud also participated on the DNR's Wild Turkey Advisory Committee and assisted in the selection of three turkey release sites in Buffalo County and two sites in Trempealeau County for that winter.

In the summer of 1984, Duane Olson was hired by Linderud to continue grouse trapping activities. Members of the Waumandee and Alma Rod and Gun Clubs helped build and place grouse traps and also assisted in tending the traps throughout the year. LTE Brian Bjorke took over the trapping project in 1985 and 1986, with Linderud and Olson helping when necessary. The four-year trapping effort resulted in more than 180 grouse for Missouri.

Linderud, Duane Olson, and Brian Bjorke also trapped wild turkeys in Buffalo and Trempealeau counties from 1988 through the winter of 1992–93. Their efforts relocated 550 turkeys to Adams, Buffalo, Chippewa, Dodge, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson, Marathon, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, Portage, and Trempealeau counties.

### **Dodgeville Work Crew**

More of the wild turkey trapping and relocation work fell on the Southern District's Dodgeville Area after 1984. Area wildlife manager Lewis Meyers retired that year and was replaced by Tom Howard. Howard's field crew was composed of wildlife managers Paul Brandt and Tom Hauge (replaced by Genny Fannucchi in 1985) along with wildlife technicians Al Cornell and Fletcher Flansburgh in charge of LTEs John Milikan, Roger Halverson, and Paul Kruse. The Dodgeville crew worked countless hours that hardly anyone noticed. Locating turkey flocks, obtaining landowner trapping permission, establishing baiting stations, monitoring bait use, setting up trapping equipment, and sitting in freezing conditions waiting for a chance to fire rocket or cannon nets over a flock were major, time-consuming chores each fall and winter.

Once nets were fired, removing turkeys from the net was the next challenge. Quieting the lunging, thrashing birds; freeing heads, feet, and wing tips from twisted nets; and carrying them to the crates while avoiding pecking bills and kicking spurs using frozen fingers required some unique skills. The birds were then sexed, aged, and blood tested before being crated for transportation.

Several hundred turkeys were fitted with colored patagial (wing) tags to enable post-release dispersment monitoring. Most birds were taken to other Wisconsin release sites where local biologists and technicians assisted in the release. Kentucky, Michigan, Texas, and North Carolina were the recipients of the out-of-state releases. The Dodgeville crew provided more than 3,000 birds for the program over a ten-year period.

### **Program Expansion**

An interesting side note is that wildlife managers had reservations about releasing turkeys outside of what they thought was the best range in Wisconsin. It was widely understood by biologists that a successful program depended on good range and that diverting efforts to areas beyond southwestern Wisconsin and Mississippi River hilly terrain would fail. National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) aggressive goals and generous funding along with a wildlife manager attitude changing to "it can't hurt to try" greatly expanded the original plan. It was the best move they could have possibly made in expanding the wild turkey population in Wisconsin.

And the story doesn't end with just a successful wild turkey reintroduction. Nicklaus convinced Bob Putney of the NWTf to start a chapter in Wisconsin. In July 1981, about 40 people met in a restaurant west of Milwaukee to discuss forming a Wisconsin chapter of the NWTf. A Wisconsin organization followed, and NWTf involvement in Wisconsin facilitated funding and hunter support.



## The Gamekeepers

A turkey curriculum committee was formed composed of representatives from the NWTf, Conservation Congress, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, University of Wisconsin, and the DNR. After numerous meetings and draft course outlines, Nicklaus, Nelson, and LTE Charlie Burke developed a curriculum for teaching students about turkey biology, management history, hunter-landowner relations, safety, and hunting regulations. Nicklaus then assigned Burke to write the publication *Wisconsin Turkey Hunter's Guide*. Volunteers were to be trained to teach the materials to sport newcomers.

Membership in the Wisconsin chapter of the NWTf increased to over 500 just two years later, and volunteers initiated turkey hunter education clinics. This education effort was responsible for not only ensuring that hunters would have sound, ethical background to support future hunting but paid particular attention to cementing good landowner-hunter relationships. The public responded well to these clinics and became enthusiastic about a very unique opportunity.

### Turkey Hunting

By 1982, the core turkey population in southwestern Wisconsin had reached a level (5,000 to 6,000) that warranted a hunting season. Nicklaus consulted with West Central District wildlife staff specialist, Terry Valen, and selected some citizen participation techniques for conducting public meetings for hunting season input. A series of public meetings were held using a moderator to generate a list of ideas. The best ideas produced the first spring turkey hunting framework including the following:

- Permits and special stamp required
- Landowner preference for 20% of hunting permits
- Bearded turkeys only legal game
- Three hunting periods
- Five-day period lengths
- Two-day rest between periods
- Daily hunting hours closed at noon

The landowner preference system required legislation, but the Conservation Congress leadership was reluctant to support it. It was the first time such authority was sought by the DNR, and some Conservation Congress Executive Council members, including Henry Liebzeit, were adamantly opposed to the new law. Nicklaus and Nelson set up a wild turkey display at the Conservation Congress statewide meeting and did a terrific sales job on the delegates (rumor had it that some Wild Turkey whiskey was involved).

John Keener and Ed Frank also did their part in obtaining support for the landowner preference law. They gave numerous talks to other organizations and gave special attention to the Conservation Congress's Upland Game Study Committee. By the time they spoke to the Conservation Congress Executive Council at the 1982 statewide meeting, the combined support of other organizations and the positive response of the Conservation Congress delegates made the outcome clear.

The first spring gobbler season was proposed for 1983 with a one-bird limit by permit offered in four western Wisconsin zones. Each turkey killed had to be registered with the DNR. The proposal was overwhelmingly approved, and the rules were put in place along with the landowner preference system. The first spring hunt yielded 182 turkeys taken by 1,200 permit holders. Encouraged by this success, wildlife managers cautiously expanded the number of permits in 1984 to 1,950 for the same four zones. The turkey harvest increased to 303. Over time, liberalized regulations included more hunting zones, six hunting periods, five-day permit periods, 5 p.m. daily closures, and second permit issuance. Fall turkey hunting was initiated in 1989.

In those early years, Nicklaus handled everything associated with the spring hunt including processing hunting permit applications and issuing permits. Nicklaus along with Nelson and Anderson also registered all of the turkeys taken in the spring season, recorded all the harvest records, and crafted the associated publicity. Later, the central office processed the paperwork, and Dodgeville and La Crosse field personnel supervised turkey registration stations at various area businesses.



*Turkey hunting successes like this convinced many participants to join the hunt.*

WISCONSIN WATERFOWL ASSOCIATION

## Turkey Damage

Not everyone welcomed the dramatic increase in the turkey population. Farmer complaints about crop damage became common, and some hunters swore that wild turkeys were responsible for the downswing in ruffed grouse numbers and the upswing in the coyote population. The first listed complaint had legitimacy; the latter two did not.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison and the DNR cooperated in a turkey damage investigation in 1987 to determine the extent of the agricultural damage. Associate professor Scott Craven was in charge of the study and was assisted by student Clint Miller. While a survey of landowners eventually documented that turkey damage to crops was mostly very minor, public perception was that it was much higher, which resulted in educational programs as well as increased hunting recommendations. A follow-up study by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services confirmed that turkey damage was not significant.

DNR researchers investigated southwestern Wisconsin wild turkey habitat and food in the 1980s and 1990s. Research LTEs R. Neal Paisley and Bob Wright shot feeding turkeys in Crawford County during July and August in 1988 through 1991, and LTE Jim Jansen used his rifle prowess to shoot more than 200 turkeys in Iowa, Grant, and Lafayette counties in late April through June 1992–93. Waste grain, weed seeds, and insects were discovered to be significant turkey food. John Kubisiak, Robert Rolley, Paisley, and Wright presented the results in the DNR publication *Wild Turkey Ecology and Management in Wisconsin* in 2001.

## New Regime

Ron Nicklaus received numerous state and national awards for his innovative work and tremendous dedication as did Tom Howard. Turkey program responsibilities were returned to Ed Frank in Madison in 1986, and Nicklaus and Nelson returned to their normal duties. Tom Howard and his Dodgeville crew continued turkey trapping and relocation through 1993 with some help from Kyro, Anderson, and Paisley. Nicklaus received an attractive offer to work as an executive with Ducks Unlimited and left state service in September 1987.

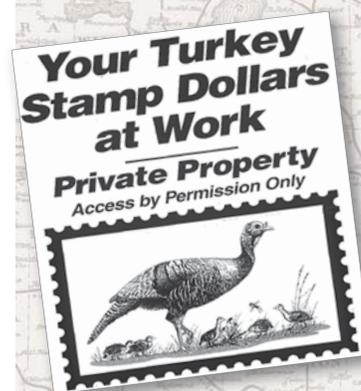
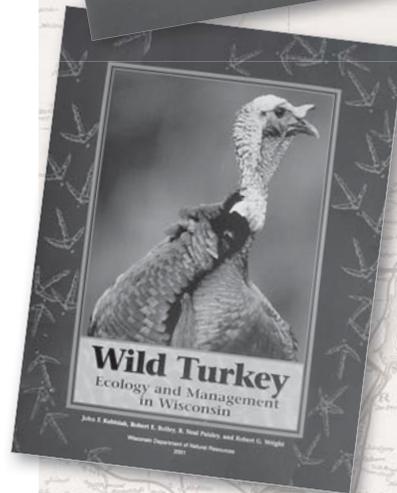
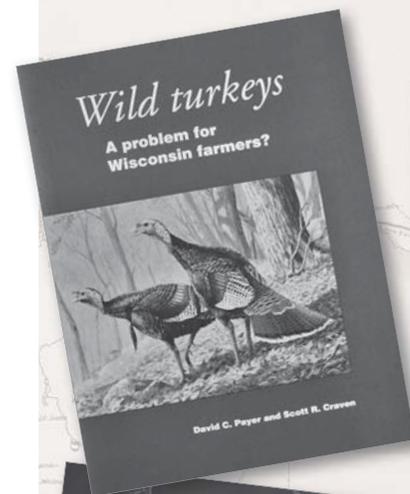
Bill Vander Zouwen replaced Ed Frank as upland wildlife specialist a short time before Ed retired in 1991. When Bill advanced to become the leader for the Wildlife and Landscape Ecology Section in 1993, he continued the ecologist duties with help from Tom Howard (turkeys), Mike Foy (pheasants), and Jim Keir (prairie grouse) until Keith Warnke was hired as the upland wildlife ecologist the following year.

Program funding for the turkey translocation project through the 1980s was provided by federal Pittman-Robertson revenue and state hunting license sales. The NWTf replaced these funds in 1990 with an innovative funding mechanism. They located other states interested in establishing wild turkey populations and brokered a deal that provided trapped turkeys from Wisconsin at \$500 per bird. This funding source completely paid for the entire trapping and relocation program through 1993.

Turkey stamp revenues now account for more than \$500,000 annually and are earmarked for wild turkey management (i.e. the funds can't be used for any other purpose). In light of declining finances elsewhere, this special fund became vital for developing, managing, censusing, restoring, and maintaining wild turkey populations in Wisconsin. Incredibly, turkey hunting has been projected to generate between \$48 and \$58 million a year for Wisconsin business and tourism industry.

Today, the wild turkey is thriving in at least 54 counties, and the total population is estimated to exceed 250,000. The annual spring harvest total is near 50,000, and fall harvests have exceeded 10,000 in recent years. Hunting quality is considered by many to be the finest of all Wisconsin hunting pursuits, and the frequency of trophy-sized gobblers adds to that image.

Dr. Scott Hull was hired as Upland Wildlife Ecologist on May 1, 2006, and led the DNR turkey program until transferring to the Science Services bureau in 2010. NWTf turkey biologist Dave Neu supervised a turkey trapping and relocation project in northern Wisconsin to fill additional niches for this unique resource. The public now enjoys watching the largest and wariest game bird in the United States feeding along roadside fields as if it had been there all along.



## A Job Well Done

Clearly, the maturing profession of wildlife management has completed its statutory obligations in taking care of the public's wildlife resources in an exemplary manner. While a review of program highlights is helpful in making that determination, unsaid is all the tedious detail also required of its participants. The reader should note that for every productive hour producing the marvels of science, virtually thousands of hours were spent on the routine paperwork, meetings, travel, communications, and a myriad of bureaucratic tasks that come with the assignments.

Wisconsin wildlife biologists willingly take on these responsibilities because of a dedication that goes beyond just earning a paycheck. And they do so while subject to a sometimes skeptical public expressing the view that their public servants aren't "doing their job." The task gets even more difficult when some hunters decide to bypass the profession and bring legislative pressure to bear on various points of disagreement or the Legislature itself decides they know more about wildlife management than wildlife professionals. Called "biopolitics," this aspect of managing the public's resource often prevails over scientific fact finding, ironic given the historic 1927 decision by the Legislature to "turn over" natural resource management to the profession.

## Public Supporters

Despite historical biopolitical conflict during the growth of the Wisconsin wildlife conservation program, many individuals and organizations outside of government have stepped up to provide essential ideas, support, and funding for this cause. Their individual efforts are most deserving of special mention.

Aldo Leopold once wrote, "The public reaction to abuse of natural resources is called the conservation movement." People concerned about natural resources and doing something about it started this great movement in the nineteenth century. It began with a demand for early laws to restrict harvest and has grown to a complex network of private and public organizations, local ordinances and state statutes, federal laws and Washington-based watchdogs, coupled with millions of citizens participating in conservation activities.

Early pioneers like Increase Lapham, John Muir, Aldo Leopold, and Sigurd Olson were instrumental in laying the foundation of Wisconsin conservation programs. Wilhelmine LaBudde, Pearl Pohl, A.D. Sutherland, Paul Olson, Richard Hemp, Laurence Jahn, Leslie Woerpel, Bud Jordahl, Herb Behnke, and literally thousands of other individuals played key roles in making Wisconsin a leader in conservation.

Private organizations, however, should get a great deal of credit for building and supporting Wisconsin's conservation movement and the wildlife management program. The Wisconsin Audubon Society, organized in 1897, was one of the first to come on the scene and demand protection for declining bird populations. The League of American Sportsmen, which became active nationally in 1898, joined in that effort. Hundreds of conservation minded clubs were formed over the next 50 years and shaped the conservation movement in this state.

In the wildlife management arena, the first organization to have a hand in the creation of the wildlife management profession was the Izaak Walton League. Its early role was described in Chapter 1. The Ikes were led by board director Aldo Leopold and Bill Aberg, who drafted the law that created the Wisconsin Conservation Department in 1927, and Leopold followed it up by influencing the new agency to create a Game Division in 1928.

Over 250 sportsmen clubs reported a membership of about 40,000 members by 1936. That list would exceed 600 over the years and involve over 100,000 individuals. The Wisconsin Federation of Women's Clubs and other civic organizations conducted conservation education programs in 1936 when the new state law requiring such teaching was mandated by law. By 1940, the Wisconsin Bowhunters Association, Friends of our Native Landscape, and the Society for Ornithology were active.



H. LANGE

Early attempts to create an umbrella organization (a federation) for all sportsmen clubs failed but were rekindled by the “deer wars” of the 1940s. Following yet another frustrating, argumentative Conservation Commission meeting in Eagle River on February 20, 1949, a group of men, including Stevens Point businessman Les Woerpel, got together to express their frustrations over the extent of politics in conservation.

Woerpel left that February meeting determined to create an organization that would keep politics out of the decision-making process, which he recognized should be based on good science. Over the next several months, he contacted a large number of conservation leaders and sportsmen clubs that eventually became organized in 1949 under the title of “Wisconsin Federation of Conservation Clubs.” In 1951, Les Woerpel became the Federation’s first president. In 1965, the name was changed to the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation with Woerpel as its executive director.

Many other organizations have made their presence known and played important roles in the conservation theater. Listing all of them is not possible, and mentioning only some of them is hazardous because of oversights. However, not to give the reader any inkling of those significant organizations would be an even bigger oversight. Here are some of the groups that I know personally have been steady with their contributions, with apologies to the hundreds more who continue to serve the conservation cause:

- Izaak Walton League of America (many state chapters)
- Audubon Society (many state chapters)
- Dane County Conservation League
- Green County Conservation League
- Brown County Conservation League
- Walworth County Conservation Alliance
- Sheboygan County Sportsmen’s Alliance
- Ducks Unlimited (many state chapters)
- Wisconsin Chapter of The Wildlife Society
- Trout Unlimited (many state chapters)
- The Ruffed Grouse Society (many state chapters)
- The Sharp-tailed Grouse Society
- Whitetails Unlimited
- The Wisconsin Bowhunters
- Wings Over Wisconsin (many state chapters)
- Pheasants Forever (many state chapters)
- Wisconsin Wetlands Association
- Wisconsin Deer Hunters Association
- Wisconsin Waterfowl Association
- Wisconsin Wildlife Federation
- National Wild Turkey Federation (many state chapters)
- The Wisconsin Association of Field Trial Clubs
- The Nature Conservancy
- 1,000 Friends of Wisconsin
- Wisconsin River Alliance
- County Land Conservation Committees
- The thousands who serve on and support “Friends” groups
- The thousands of county delegates who served or are serving on the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, its Executive Council, and various study committees

*Thank you.* 

