



In this issue...

Water, Water Everywhere – and in Politics, Too?

You may not like the fact, but it is political campaign season in Wisconsin and the nation. Every even-numbered year, River Alliance uses its summer newsletter to connect you to the “politics of water conservation.” An old political activist friend of ours once said that “brushing your teeth is a political act.” By that he meant that there are few human endeavors that don’t have the wires and threads of politics bound up in them.

We do not tell you which candidates to vote for; we cannot do that. We hope to take a more transcendent view with this issue of The FLOW. Individual candidates and politicians come and go, but the ebb and flow of what matters to them politically is really up to us, the citizens. Herein we feature three people whose citizenship and political participation is spurred by their love of land and water, and for whom political involvement is neither a high-minded

civic duty nor groveling to heartless politicians. It is simply the right and necessary thing to do if you want to see change.

Elsewhere in this issue, we showcase two landmark conservation victories that are inspiring for the fact that they would not have happened without effective and committed grassroots pressure by ordinary citizens doing extraordinary things.

From the Politics of Insurance to the Politics of Conservation



by Denny Caneff

The River Alliance got to know and love **Laura DeGolier** over thermistors, dissolved oxygen meters and flow gauges – the tools of the trade for citizen water quality monitoring. She had an abiding curiosity about just what lurked in the streams of her home county and city of Fond du Lac, and just what story was being told in the water samples that she and her fellow Park Watch volunteers were collecting. Being as much a political creature as a scientific one, Laura continually looked upstream from her monitoring sites and the data she collected to ask what policies were needed and what laws were not being followed, to address the unhealthy conditions the citizen monitors were detecting in their samples.

It didn’t take long for us to discover that she knew, appreciated and actually liked politics – a rare state of mind among river rats who don’t want political stuff getting in the way of their enjoyment of rivers. She’s an astute set of eyes and ears on water issues in the city of Fond du Lac, keeping a wary eye on developments with agriculture in her territory and its impacts on surface and water quality. She’s effective politically because, despite all that she knows about water quality issues, she understands that being effective comes with who she knows, and the quality of the relationships she and her allies have with public officials.

Granddad the senator

Laura was almost born political. Her first political memory is staying up until 2:00 one early morning in 1952, when her grandfather was elected to the state Senate, representing Ozaukee and Washington counties. As a child, she made a visit to the Capitol inner sanctum of Republican Gov. Vernon Thompson: “My family was invited to the unveiling of the Governor’s portrait. What a wonderful room, with all the gold inlay in the ceiling and walls. It was probably Thompson’s last official event, late 1958. He lost to Gaylord Nelson.”

“I have helped on, oh, I can’t even remember how many campaigns,” she says. She combined politics with her profession when, in 1986, her association of insurance agents created a “political involvement committee”.

“I was the only woman, it was a chauvinist operation, and I almost gave it up,” she recalls. But she has remained politically active for the insurance industry at both state and congressional levels. She is remarkably effective in that realm for the same reasons she’s remarkable in the conservation realm: she’s fearless and dogged.

“You need good relationships, no matter the political party. You don’t know who your friends are going to be in this [conservation politics] business.”

Laura DeGolier



Laura meets with her state representative, John Townsend, during Conservation Lobby Day 2008. (photo courtesy Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters)

“I like to think I’m the wind beneath the wings of people who are afraid to engage,” Laura says. Over her decades of political activism she’s learned a few simple things that, she believes, are the difference between being effective and being ignored.

“A lot of people are impatient. They think they should get instant results, and when they don’t, they quit,” she observes (this is something we at River Alliance witness all the time). She prefers to work at the local level rather than at the state legislature: “It’s much more hands-on, more accessible to regular people, and you deal a lot more with staff [at the county or city level].”

As for legislators, “You know, it’s about education. You gotta educate ‘em,” she says. And she adds, perhaps with an eye toward November and a likely shake-up of the Legislature, “You need good relationships, no matter the political party. You don’t know who your friends are going to be in this [conservation politics] business. Politics is fluid; you have to stay in the mix.” ■

Join a Group, Knock on Doors, Do What You Can Do



Much of Eleanor Wolf’s activism these days is directed to protecting the Lower Chippewa River. (River Alliance photo)

Our first encounter with **Eleanor Wolf**, of Eau Claire, was when she invited the River Alliance to attend a board meeting of the Lower Chippewa River Alliance a couple of years ago. On the group’s mind at the time was the management of several thousand acres along the Lower Chippewa that any environmental activist living in Wisconsin in the 1970s will remember well – the site of the proposed-but-never-built Tyrone nuclear power plant.

Public outcry at the time helped stop the plant. The utility (Xcel Energy) has hung onto the property but was not managing it at all, making it a haven for ATVs to rip scars into the sandy skin of this unique bottomland.

The Alliance’s approach to Xcel was smart: write a letter outlining their concerns and requesting a meeting with the company so they could convey what they wanted the company to do to better manage its land.

“The board came away discouraged” from that meeting, she recounts, but they persisted, and it has paid off: Xcel has posted the property, banned ATVs and other motorized vehicles, cleaned out junk, and hired a part-time land manager. “It’s amazing what they’ve done,” she says.

Bella, then the county board

Eleanor clearly remembers her political first light of dawn. “It was the early 1970s, and Bella Abzug (congresswoman, feminist, political commentator) came to Madison,” she recalls, “and she said to the women there: it’s your turn.”

Eleanor, a dairy farmer at the time, took up Abzug’s call and ran for county supervisor in Green County. Beating the local town chairman by a few votes, her victory doubled the number of women on the county board at the time. She moved to Eau Claire in 1983, but never ran for public office again.

The success she’s had in local affairs hasn’t kept her away from statewide politics. This is something we find quite rare in river activists. We love it, of course, when someone well connected locally is willing to mix it up with legislators. For the faint of political heart – and Eleanor understands well that unease – she has sensible and pragmatic advice. First, there’s the safety of numbers: she advises getting involved with a group that has a political interest. Then engage with legislators in a way that’s easy for ordinary people, and effective in the eyes of lawmakers.

“Here in Eau Claire, we have environmental issues breakfasts with legislators. We make a pitch on an issue, usually the priorities of the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters and its coalition,” she explains. “It’s not fund raising, it’s informal and citizens feel comfortable.”

Her advice for grabbing the heart, mind and attention of a legislator is even more pointed: “Get involved in one legislative campaign. Interview the candidate to be sure your interests align. You don’t want to do a lot of work for a candidate who won’t be an asset for your issues. And don’t just write a check – go knock on doors and make phone calls. If that candidate wins, and you helped, you can bet they will listen to you.”

With over 40 years of political activism behind her, Eleanor says it’s that very activism and engagement that keeps her from getting cynical. “I’m pretty pessimistic about climate change, but staying engaged [in the political process] is an inoculant against cynicism. In the end, you do what you can do, and that can be a lot.” ■

“I’m pretty pessimistic about climate change, but staying engaged [in the political process] is an inoculant against cynicism.”

Eleanor Wolf



captive wildlife statutes up to date. Part of those statutes provide for hound dog training and trial programs. I’m pleased to see that it is working and that our strong sporting dog heritage will continue.

What kind of luck have you had getting people who share your conservation values engaged politically? Most people would rather not, it seems, and I wonder if that’s been your experience.

Most of my success starts with a coffee klatsch format, whether it’s in a work-place setting, at a sportsman’s club or at sporting dog competitions. There’s always time to talk about current events that affect your interests and I think you can get more done in small groups of people who are willing to talk both pros and cons. I tend to use the word “conservation” more than “preservation” and will always try to rationalize a pragmatic solution.

Why is it so hard for people to get engaged in the political process, when we are surrounded in this country by rhetoric about “the democratic process” and “let the people decide”?

There tends to be a lot of misinformation out there and I think that most people are suspicious of elements within the process, most notably the financial side of our electoral system. In all the surveys, Wisconsinites want and will support a professional DNR free from political decisions or indecisions.

The recent legislative efforts to have the Natural Resources Board appoint the DNR secretary, rather than the governor, is a good example of why people are frustrated. Both parties seem to have a difficult time doing what is right given the influence of some strategically placed election contributions and their desire to build a war chest for the next election. This doesn’t mean that we should throw in the towel. It does mean that each voter should attempt to research the candidates and never be afraid to ask the tough questions.

I know you’re involved with the Wildlife Federation, and perhaps Friends of the Little Plover. What advantage do you see of working through an organization with the political process?

I got involved with the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation due to my interest in sporting dogs. I found that this organization had the respect of both our legislators and the folks in the DNR. My involvement with the Federation has opened many other discussions which go well beyond that of the sporting dogs. The recent effort on behalf of the Little Plover River is a good example. While I’m not much of a fishing guy, I certainly respect the interest that people have in fishing, whether it’s rivers, lakes or streams. The river is a mile or so from our house and all three of our kids enjoyed outings along the river. We’ve gone through the public rights stage to save the river, which has been an education in itself. At this point, it’s a bit like a three-legged stool with the interests of local government, the agri-business community and conservation efforts on behalf of fish and wildlife coming together to try to solve some pretty long-term serious water quantity and quality problems. ■

Q&A with Jerry Knuth

A life-long Wisconsinite, Jerry Knuth is a retired insurance executive in Plover. He exercises his conservation politics through the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation. River Alliance first met him on the banks of the Little Plover River; he shared our concern that groundwater pumping was drying up this stream that once harbored trout. Herewith is our conversation with Jerry.

When did you first get involved in something politically? And how did that event “hook” you to continue?

My first encounter involved some local politics which dates back to the mid 1970s. My wife and I had just purchased a house-in-the-country (now known as the village of Plover) and there was a movement to bring water and sewer into our neighborhood. We organized, hired an attorney and sat in on a lot of village board meetings, as we didn’t want to give them a blank check.

Luckily, they had their ears on and the situation was mitigated without a lot of legal haggling. It’s difficult to pay attention to everything that goes on at the village level. I found that it pays to stay in touch with your neighbors as they often have additional info or another perspective.

You mentioned that you’re not a big fan of politics, but you recognize there’s a place for legislation and legislators. Can you elaborate a bit about what you mean?



“I tend to use the word ‘conservation’ more than ‘preservation’ and will always try to rationalize a pragmatic solution.”

Jerry Knuth

My wife and I have some very strong second generation leanings. She comes from a union background with her dad having been a millwright at the local paper mill, as well as her own chosen profession as a teacher. I have strong roots to the dairy industry and some 35 years in the business world. Our political discussions are often centered around the dinner table. I was often outnumbered when our three sons were growing up. Now it’s just Marilyn and I in the point/counterpoint discussions. More often than not, we tend to meet in the middle and can usually agree.

What value is there for YOU in your political “activism”? What makes you frustrated, or uneasy about it?

I’ve always enjoyed my diversions from the day-to-day grind in the business world. I find it important that Wisconsin’s rich array of natural resources be available to future generations. It’s frustrating to see how long it takes to get things accomplished when they tend to be very clear-cut issues (at least in my mind).

Can you name an event or a political victory you’re most proud of?

I was involved for 20+ years in working with the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources and our legislators in bringing



Stream of Thought

Denny Caneff
Executive Director

It's a Long Way to the Capitol from a Riverside Tavern

Last month, over a table at the Lure, a bar-restaurant and marina on the banks of the Petenwell Flowage of the Wisconsin River, I huddled with Lure owner Tom Koren and Rick Carlson, who with his family runs Carlson's Rustic Ridge, a supper club and banquet business on Castle Rock Flowage in Juneau County, downstream from Tom and the Lure.

They both suffer from the same phenomenon – green, stinky, algae-laden water at the peak of their summer season. Tom is a founding member of the Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards, or PACRS, a grassroots group that has garnered early and positive attention for taking on the algae blooms and their root causes.



Tom Koren, proprietor of the Lure (in the blue shirt) explains to Sen. Julie Lassa (red shirt) and Rep. Marlin Schneider (far left, blue jacket) the predicament of algae pollution for his marina and restaurant business. His organization, the Petenwell and Castle Rock Stewards (PACRS) held a "Pontoons and Politics" tour of Petenwell Flowage for legislators in August 2008. (River Alliance photo)

The reason for the huddle? I wanted to convince them to take a day away from their businesses and make their pitch to legislators in the Capitol about phosphorus pollution. I could feel it in their faces and voices they were not thrilled about the prospect. I have heard their questions from other citizens that we've cajoled into the same mission: Is this worth it? Will they listen to us? What difference does it make if we show up? What if they ask us questions we can't answer? And how long will this take, anyway?

Here's a crucial moment in citizen advocacy: How do I convince Tom and Rick that this is a high calling, it IS worth their time, and our political system is in grave trouble if their participation is hollow and meaningless, or they opt out because of the many obstacle they see? We didn't get into all that. They agreed to come, and we talked about how they could craft their testimony.

But the very questions Tom and Rick raised uncover some uncomfortable truths about citizen advocacy. We cling to a lot of high-minded ideals here in America about citizen democracy, "the voice of the people," and other notions. We may think of it as the highest and purest form of democratic participation – citizens speaking publicly and directly to their elected officials about an issue of concern to them – but the barriers are numerous and considerable. The least of the barriers is the basic knowledge of most ordinary citizens that the "system" is worked hard and often by big interests with money and power at stake. No citizen wants to be a Don Quixote.

Travel, Testify, Back In Time For Supper

There are the simple mechanics of it. Legislative hearings are almost always held in the middle of the day – terrible timing for working people, or for a guy who ought to be there for his restaurant's lunch hour. You can never say how long a hearing will last – it could be an hour, it could be eight – meaning the restaurant guy may not be back in time for happy hour or the start of prime rib night.

As for "Will legislators listen?", I've seen legislators intimidate and even harangue a testifying citizen. But more often than not, citizens get deserved deference from legislators.

I felt quite sure in telling Rick and Tom that perhaps more than just about anyone's testimony at this particular hearing – complicated rules about controlling phosphorus from sewage plants and factories – lawmakers will listen to them. Lawmakers have seen the lobbyists and the experts and their pitches a thousand times; there's nothing like a personal story from an ordinary citizen speaking from their heart about how some policy, or the lack of one, affects their lives, their livelihoods, and their families that cuts through the tedious droning of a legislative hearing.

Tom and Rick came to the hearing of the Senate Environment Committee. As I knew they would, they spoke eloquently and delivered their stories convincingly. They clearly had the senators' close attention. Both told of customers

showing up at their businesses to rent a boat or use the beach, and quickly fleeing the sight and the stench of the algae blooms. It was over in about five minutes.

It was refreshing to hear business owners ask for more regulation; the usual lament from manufacturers and Big Agriculture is how some new (and usually very modest) pollution regulation will put them out of business. Tom's and Rick's small businesses are clearly harmed by our failure to better regulate phosphorus pollution, but that fact is outshouted by the political titans.

I'm pleased that Tom and Rick made the trip to the Capitol to make their pitch for stronger pollution rules, and most proud of them for their eloquence. I suspect it all may have been a bit anti-climactic for them; nothing dramatic happened and nothing was decided. That's typical for a legislative hearing. And this is another crucial moment in citizen advocacy – convincing ordinary citizens that while their letter or call or testimony won't change a thing in and of itself, it is the constant drumbeat of their speaking up forcefully but respectfully, staying in the game for the long haul, not taking their ball and going home when they don't get the answer they want, that makes them most effective, and allows our system live up to its noble ideals. ■

(Editor's note: as this goes to press, it appears the bill that Tom and Rick testified in support of – new phosphorus regulations – will take effect in early September. We like to think Tom and Rick helped put it over the top. Those new rules are a good thing, and a big step forward in river protection.)

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When she isn't working the phones to cajole lawmakers, Laura DeGolier spends a lot of time on the land and in the water of her home territory of the city and county of Fond du Lac. Here she monitors water quality in the South Branch of the Rock River. (Photo courtesy Laura DeGolier)

The Politics of Water Conservation

Victory is Possible: Two Big and Remarkable Conservation Wins

It was an interesting challenge we gave ourselves: find couple of conservation political victories that illustrate effective grassroots action, made a difference in the Wisconsin landscape – geographic and political -- and offer lessons for future political action. There were a number of them we could have gone with, notably the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund, the Kickapoo Valley Reserve, and the Lower Wisconsin Riverway.

We highlight here one story well known because of how protracted and contentious it was, and another that is less well known but significant in how a compromise was reached and success came quickly. Both of these involved legislative action.

Lessons? They're not obvious here, but there is one crucial ingredient: committed and sustained grassroots energy. How that is done deserves its own article. For now, we tell the tales of stopping the Crandon mine and saving isolated wetlands.

Crandon Mine: Political Mettle Overcomes Appetite for Precious Metal



by Chris Clayton

In 1976, 55 million tons of zinc-copper sulfide ore were discovered at the headwaters of the Wolf River, and Exxon Minerals, a subsidiary of Exxon Corporation, wanted to construct a mine. Exxon Mobil Corporation has consistently been one of the largest companies on the planet, with \$310 billion in revenue in 2009. With influence and power to spare, Exxon only needed the proper permissions to move the project forward.

Or so they thought. For nearly two decades, a whole lot of people from around the state opposed the Crandon mine, persistently standing in the way of Exxon and the other mining companies who later attempted to open the mine. By 2003, the threat posed by mining at this site ended when the Mole Lake Sokaogon Chippewa and Forest County Potawatomi bought it from the Nicolet Minerals Company.

If ever in Wisconsin there was an instance of people organizing in large numbers to influence decisions having huge ramifications for our rivers, the “Crandon mine victory” was it. Looking to the future, there is much to glean from the powerful lessons provided by citizens who helped save the Wolf River.

Threats Flow Downstream

In trying to sway public opinion on a potential mine at the headwaters of the Wolf River, mining companies were no fools: they focused on the local benefits of mining production, including the potential for new jobs. Despite that spin, everyone immediately realized that mining sulfide ore meant that acid mine drainage was an issue – THE issue, in fact.

The risks of acid mine drainage contaminating the Wolf River were great, catching the attention of everyone downstream. The Mole Lake Chippewa Reservation had the most to lose as it sat directly downstream of the proposed mine site. The Wolf River is viewed as sacred by the Menominee and invaluable to non-natives living downstream. The mining company decided to not degrade the river by using it to dispose of wastewater, but their curious solution was to pipe mining wastewater to the Wisconsin River. With that announcement, the areas at risk from this operation got quite a bit larger – and so did the opposition.

Democracy in Action

The Crandon mine proposal first drew attention locally. The mining company sought local zoning permissions before seeking permission from the state. Exxon tried to simply railroad the proposal through the local political process. In a strong show of opposition, the Town of Nashville voted out four of five town supervisors, replacing them with individuals who would represent town voters by ensuring transparency and upholding local zoning authority. Prior to overturning the board, the Wisconsin Resources Protection Council sued the town board and the mining company for closed-door meetings in order to broker a secretive agreement between the town and the mining company.

The companies that sought to open the Crandon mine had plenty of money, and they used it to divide and conquer along the lines of race, socio-economics and political interests.

“Exxon dealt with and spoke directly to the decision makers that had the authority to allow mining,” says Al Gedicks, professor of Sociology at UW-La Crosse and past consultant to the Mole Lake Sokaogon Chippewa. “The alliance of individuals who opposed the Crandon mine dealt with and spoke directly to the grassroots.”

Dave Blouin helped form the Mining Impact Coalition and helped coordinate the many groups working on the Crandon mine issue. “Rather than running straight to our legislators, we all decided to coordinate the opposition by taking a speaking tour up and down the Wolf and Wisconsin Rivers,” Dave recalls. The speaking tour strengthened the sentiment found at the grassroots and empowered people to act. Speakers addressed big issues relating to the proposed mine – native issues, environmental issues and socio-economic issues.

Gedicks points out, “This was the first time many people had ever seen a Native American speak about these issues. Many people had previously viewed natives as outsiders who had controversially won the right to spear fish on non-native lands. The speaking tour showed that the mining companies were the true outsiders and a real threat to these highly valued waters.”

Threats to the Wolf and Wisconsin Rivers were made clear, causing former antagonists to realize they were on the same side. Blouin states that in response to the speaking tour, “Groups organized, and we had plenty of tasks for them to do.”

Moratorium Passes With Grassroots Support

“This was an organized effort among many groups who were not organized in the past,” says Representative Spencer Black, who was at the epicenter of legislative activity around the Crandon mine. He observed that environmental organizations worked closely with each other, Native Americans and sport fishing groups bridged earlier divides to work together on this

issue and several unions also joined the opposition.

An opportunity opened up to make progress at the state level when Rep. Black offered up what became known as the Mining Moratorium Law. In effect, the law places the burden of proof on companies proposing to mine sulfide ores to show that they have done so elsewhere without acid drainage or heavy metals polluting ground or surface waters. Rep. Black explains, “The intended effect of the law is not to ban mining in Wisconsin, but to force the advancement of technology to ensure protection of the state’s natural resources.”

Mining interests spent large sums of money to lobby the Wisconsin legislature, but support for the law was very strong.

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Crandon Mine cont.

“Tens of thousands of people attended meetings with their legislators, made phone calls to legislators, and wrote letters. Overwhelming support for the law had been built, and that support was voiced persistently and effectively,” says Black. “What eventually pushed the bill through both houses of the legislature and got it signed by the Governor was the organized support for the bill, which in the end outweighed the opposition.”

Even though Governor Tommy Thompson had threatened to veto the bill, in 1998 he signed it into law on the banks of the Wolf River.

Save the Wolf River

“Save the Wolf River” became the primary rallying cry in the fight against the mine. But such cries did not force people to get behind this cause for a particular reason.

“Be willing to let everyone speak,” says Blouin. “We never tried to make this movement speak with one voice. Many voices offered many perspectives on why the Crandon mine was a bad idea.”

It took persistence – about a decade before the last battle was won – among all involved to realize that day in which the tribes bought the mine site. Many participants say it was the first time in Wisconsin’s history that grassroots organizing had been accomplished to such large success. The story of the Crandon mine gives us a model for organizing for present and future issues.



Tens of thousands of petition signatures by citizens calling for a moratorium on metallic mining were delivered in 1997 by mine opponents, including River Alliance’s then executive director Sara Johnson. Legislators Spencer Black and Kevin Shibilski look on. (River Alliance photo)

Gedicks states, “The traditional tools of grassroots organizing are more powerful than all the money used to buy technical, marketing, and political expertise.” The Wolf River flows as testament to that fact. ■

Editor’s note: there is at least one quite serious mining proposal in Oneida County, and local discussions have begun about exploiting iron ore in northern Wisconsin’s Gogebic iron range. Meanwhile, Native Americans are battling mining companies on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan who are building roads – the obvious precursor to building the mine. And they are still poking around for precious metals in the Upper Peninsula inside the Menominee River watershed, not far from Wisconsin.

Look for details on these mining activities in upcoming editions of our e-newsletter, Word on the Stream.



Buelah Bog, a wetland in Walworth County (Photo courtesy Eric Shackelford)

Fast, Furious and Bipartisan Saved the Wetlands



by Lori Grant

In 2001, a U.S. Supreme Court decision had the potential of dooming tens of millions of acres of wetlands nationwide to the bulldozer. Wisconsin conservationists turned that window of vulnerability into a window of opportunity and scored a significant and remarkable conservation victory later that year.

Wetlands of all types and sizes serve a range of important functions; 75% of Wisconsin’s wildlife, including game, fish and the critters they eat depend on wetlands for some portion of their life cycle: they provide flood storage, filter pollutants from runoff; and of course, they’re beautiful. In the past, the value of “mosquito-infested swamps” was not understood or appreciated, leading to filling and destroying many wetland systems across the country. By the 1970’s, the federal Clean Water Act (CWA) created regulations to reduce filling of wetlands.

Unfortunately, a major blow was struck to CWA protective measures in early January, 2001. The U.S. Supreme Court overturned a decision by the Army Corps to prevent a small, isolated wetland from being filled, calling into question when and if isolated wetlands could be protected at all. Alarm bells rang around the country as developers who had been

denied permits to fill wetlands rubbed their hands in glee. Wisconsin’s DNR estimated that up to 80% of the state’s remaining 5.3 million acres of wetlands were suddenly at risk; the door had been opened for a free-for-all of wetland filling around the state.

Remarkably, just five months after this game-changing judgment, known as the SWANCC decision, Republican Governor Scott McCallum called a special legislative session and a consensus bill ensuring protection for Wisconsin’s isolated wetlands was adopted unanimously in both the Democrat-majority Senate and the Republican-majority Assembly. The new law required that the state approve filling of any wetlands not deemed covered under federal law. Charlie Luthin, then-executive director of the Wisconsin Wetlands Association and ring-leader for the Wisconsin grassroots legislative effort, has stories to tell about how it came to be, and lessons to apply for the future.

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River Alliance Program Update

Three Fish Stories – All True!

Fish figure somehow into three of our program updates. While our aquatic invasive species project has a largely local focus, we can't ignore what's going on in Chicago, with the invasive Asian carp knocking on the front door of Lake Michigan. They don't make scary videos of New Zealand mud snails for YouTube, but the fact that trout anglers may transport that invasive creature has our attention. And lake sturgeon can't jump to get around hydro dams. We are involved in a multi-million dollar project to restore lake sturgeon to Lake Michigan by getting them around those obstacles.

Keeping Rock Snot out of Dane County Streams

The River Alliance, Dane County Environmental Council, Dane County Parks, the Wisconsin DNR, and Southern Wisconsin Trout Unlimited are partnering to post signs at trout stream access points throughout Dane County.

Why? The driftless area, the southwest portion of Wisconsin left unscathed by the last glacier, is a fly fishing destination. There is a very high correlation between where people fly-fish and the presence of invasive species, such as Didymo (*Didymosphenia geminata*, colloquially known as "rock snot") and New Zealand mudsnails (*Potamopyrgus antipodarum*). We are concerned about anglers unintentionally transporting invasive species to our home waters. Didymo cells and New Zealand mudsnails can remain viable for weeks out of water, especially in moist conditions such as the nooks and crannies of felt soled boots. The signs are intended to encourage wading anglers to inspect, clean and dry their equipment before and after wading.

There has been great interest by county conservation staff in replicating this effort in northern Wisconsin. At least four counties (Forest, Florence, Langlade, and Lincoln) have approached the River Alliance with the necessary funding to post similar signage on their coldwater fisheries. The River Alliance will assist in ordering additional signs this winter for statewide distribution. If you, your local group, or trout unlimited chapter are interested in purchasing signs, please contact Laura MacFarland, Imacfarland@wisconsinrivers.org by December 2010. ■



This sign, developed by River Alliance for posting on Dane County trout streams such as Black Earth Creek, pictured here, tells anglers how to keep their fishing act clean and free of invasives. (River Alliance photo)

Keeping Carp Out of the Great Lakes

In 1900 Chicago accomplished an astounding engineering feat. In the largest earth-moving effort undertaken in North America at the time, they disintegrated the watershed boundary between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River. The impetus for constructing a 12-mile canal linking the two was a series of major typhoid outbreaks in the mid 1800s caused by sewage buildup along Chicago's Lake Michigan waterfront from where the city also drew its drinking water. The idea was to reverse the flow of the Chicago River to carry water from the Great Lakes to the city, then discharge the water (now wastewater) via the newly constructed canal to the Illinois River, which runs to the Mississippi.



This is an aerial view of the two dams on the Menominee River at Marinette, Wisconsin and Menominee, Michigan that are the object of the sturgeon passage project funded by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and involve the River Alliance. When the project is fully realized, lake sturgeon will be able to move, unimpeded, around both dams seen here. The dams are owned and operated by North American Hydro. (Photo courtesy North American Hydro)

For the past 100 years, this man-made connection between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River basins has allowed invasive species like the zebra mussel to spread. The zebra mussel, one of the 180 known invasives in the Great Lakes, quickly spread to the heart of North America via the arterial Mississippi River after it was introduced to the Great Lakes via ballast water in 1985. Well, in return, the south is sending us the infamous Asian carp. Despite another astounding engineering feat creating an electrical field pulsating in the water of the canal, the carp are likely to find their way into the Great Lakes.

Prevention is essential, but transformation is even better

Last month, Wisconsin and four other Great Lakes states filed a lawsuit against the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago. The complaint requests that the court order that the Army Corps expedite a feasibility study developing and evaluating options for the permanent physical separation of the Chicago Area Waterway System from Lake Michigan so as to prevent the transfer of Asian carp or other invasive species between the Mississippi River Basin and the Great Lakes Basin.

In August, the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Seaway Cities Initiative announced they are "Envisioning a Chicago Area Waterway System for the 21st Century" by embarking on a \$2 million study of the possibility of a transformative project to restore the watershed divide, improve waste management and simultaneously boost the region's economy.

Meanwhile in D.C., there is legislation to the same tune floating in the halls of the U.S. Capitol. On June 30th the Permanent Prevention of Asian Carp Acts (HR 5625/S 3553) were introduced. Two days later they were sent to committee (the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works). This legislation directs the Army Corps of Engineers to complete a study within 18 months on how to permanently separate the Mississippi River from the Great Lakes basin. ■

Federal Grants Will Help Pass the Sturgeon

River Alliance has received two federal grants, each for \$1.5 million, to develop the means to move lake sturgeon around two hydro dams on the Menominee River. This project is the first step in what could become one of the biggest fish restoration projects via constructed fish passage devices in the country.

The grants will help pay to get sturgeon downstream around the Park Mill dam, and upstream, via elevator, around the Menominee dam. The two dams are about a mile apart in the cities of Marinette, Wisconsin, and Menominee, Michigan, and about two miles from the mouth of the river at Lake Michigan.

Our project partners are the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the natural resources agencies of the two states, and the dams' owner, North American Hydro. The grantors are the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Both grants came under the auspices of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

The Lake Michigan lake sturgeon population has been seriously depleted from the usual causes: pollution, mindless fishing and loss of habitat (caused in part by dams that block the sturgeon's migration up and down rivers). Boosting that population has been a priority of federal and state natural resource agencies for nearly two decades.

Helping sturgeon migrate to riverine spawning grounds is essential to restoring these ancient and venerable fish. Getting them to move around hydro dams – essentially, installing elevators for upstream passage and fish-friendly waterslides for downstream – is key to restoring them. We see fish passage on the lowest two dams on the Menominee as "dominoes" for triggering fish passage at several other hydro dams upstream. (Studies are underway at a set of dams, White Rapids and Chalk Hill, owned by WE Energies, and fish passage talks have begun with Wisconsin Public Service Corp. for its Grand Rapids hydro plant.)

Our hope is that by the end of 2013, lake sturgeon will be moving around the Menominee and Park Mill dams. (Don't worry: upstream passage is carefully controlled and monitored so unwanted creatures like sea lamprey don't invade the Menominee and its tributaries.) ■

Wetlands cont.

Hands across the partisan aisle for wetlands

As with any legislative victory, serendipity and pure politics played roles, along with building a diverse coalition of supporters, bringing credible science and passion to the public hearings and being open to negotiation to develop a bill that could be passed. Brand new Governor McCallum, in his first week in office and upon learning the risk to Wisconsin's wetlands resulting from the SWANCC decision, issued a press release declaring that Wisconsin would not lose its wetlands. This set the stage. It helped that there had been a couple of recent controversial wetland losses in the state, so the press picked up on the issue and gave it plenty of exposure.



Charlie Luthin, Executive Director, Natural Resources Foundation, bonding with native wetland vegetation. (Photo courtesy of Michael K. Anderson, Photographer, <http://singingcanoe.smugmug.com>)

Senator James Baumgart, a Democrat from Sheboygan and “hook and bullet” conservationist, recognized the threat to wildlife habitat and sponsored a bill to protect isolated wetlands under state law. He portrayed the effort not as a partisan or environmental issue, but as a conservation issue important to the heritage of the state. The Wisconsin Waterfowl Association impressed upon Republican Senator Dale Schulz the importance of wetland protection to preserving Wisconsin's hunting and fishing traditions, and a bipartisan bill was born.

Hook-and-bullets and tree-huggers united

Today, state and local environmental groups routinely collaborate with hunting and fishing groups to promote good laws to protect natural resources, but heretofore those collaborations were rare and difficult. The novelty of this collaboration had a big impact, with each group playing different roles. In addition to many of the state environmental groups (Wisconsin Wetlands Association, Sierra Club, Audubon Society, River Alliance and the Wisconsin Association of Lakes) who organized their members and testified at public hearings, hunting groups effectively lobbied the more conservative legislators, and Trout Unlimited, led by long-time River Alliance friend Stu Grimstad, brought the passion to the legislature by getting their members to public hearings and having them write letters to legislators.

Another important tactic was bringing in credible, plain-spoken scientists to provide basic information about the importance of wetlands. As Charlie put it, “You have to have the science and the passion to win the day.” Continued prodding of the press helped keep the pressure on too.

Despite strong support for the bill, there was also plenty of opposition. The bill made it through the Senate but not the Assembly before the legislative session ended. The Governor indicated he would call a special session if a compromise could be reached, so representatives of interest groups on both sides of the issue, along with staff from the Governor's and Senator Baumgart's offices, negotiated. The breakthrough occurred when everyone at the table agreed they could live with a bill that provided “no more than status quo,” or no greater level of regulation than what landowners had gotten used to under the Clean Water Act.

As soon as this hurdle was cleared, the Governor called the special session and wetland protection was restored. The River Alliance honored Senator Baumgart as a River Champion in 2002 for his leadership.

As Charlie sums up, the keys to success are understanding the politics of the issue, finding diverse allies that can appeal to the varying views of legislators of both parties, delivering credible scientific evidence to educate citizens and lawmakers, and most importantly, making sure people passionate about the issue make their voices heard by their legislators. Finally, the willingness to support a compromise can be the difference between a good (perhaps not perfect, but good enough) bill or no bill at all.

“When it comes to creating new laws, things don't happen on the edges. We need to be more centrist than extreme,” says Charlie. ■

Be an educated voter!

Here are some tips for finding out about a candidate's conservation positions:

- ✓ Check out their website.
- ✓ If they have held public office before, investigate their voting record – the Wisconsin Legislature has a vote research tool (<http://www.legis.state.wi.us/voterresearch.htm>).
- ✓ Tap into research done by others. For example, the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters puts together a scorecard (www.conservationvoters.org) and the League of Women Voters of Wisconsin publishes candidate answers to a number of questions (www.lwvwi.org).
- ✓ Find out who endorses them.
- ✓ Ask them directly.
- ✓ Help out on their campaign or give them money - this should help them remember you when you ask them for something.
- ✓ Read the news.
- ✓ See what their opponent says, but be careful with that information.

“Get involved in one legislative campaign. Interview the candidate to be sure your interests align. You don't want to do a lot of work for a candidate who won't be an asset for your issues. And don't just write a check – go knock on doors and make phone calls for them. If that candidate wins, and you helped, you can bet they will listen to you.”

Eau Claire conservation activist Eleanor Wolf



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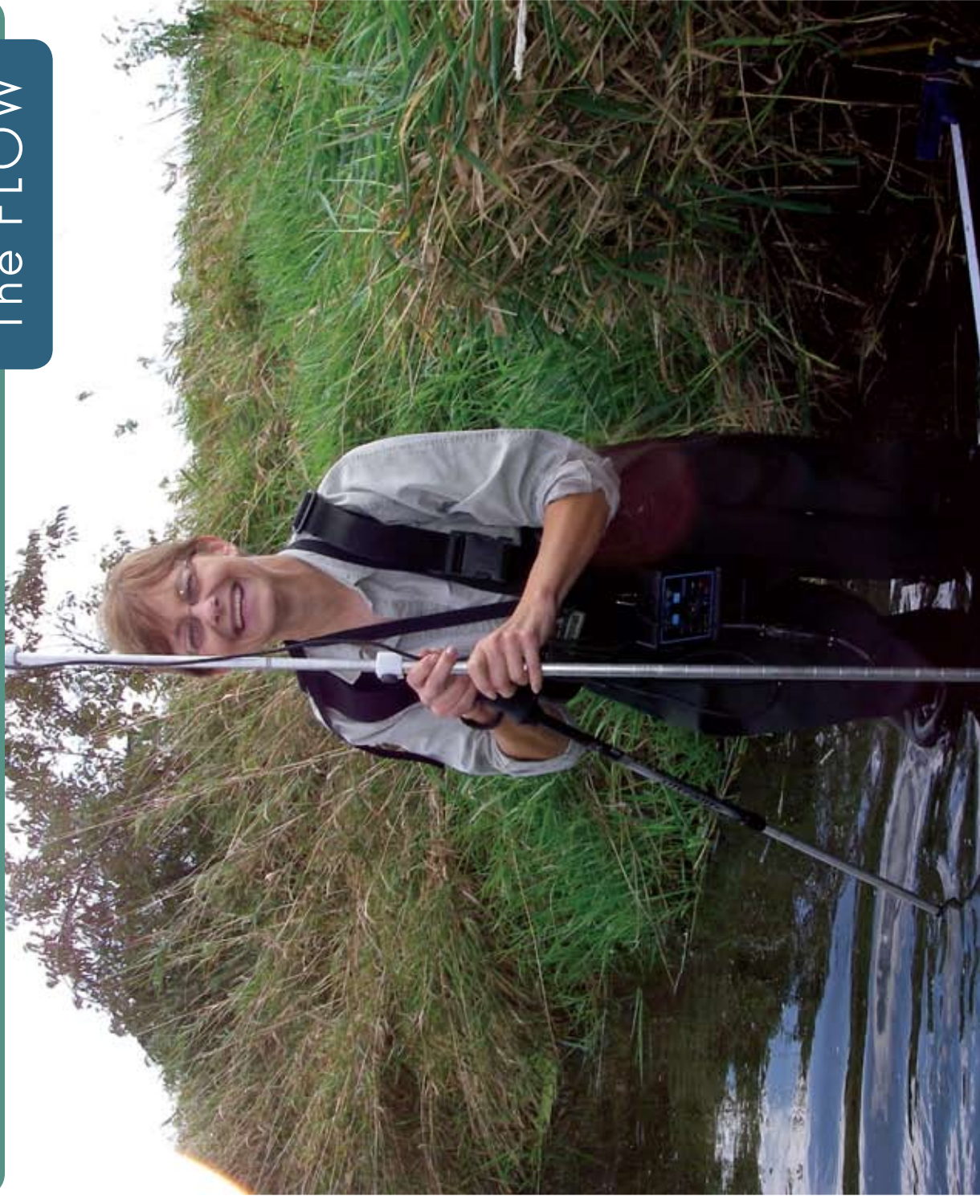
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Member Profile: Ron Kaminkow



We have come to know Ron through his annual "pass the hat for the River Alliance" excursion with friends on the Wisconsin River. Ron has raised hundreds of dollars this way for our river conservation work.

How did you get involved with the River Alliance?

I have always been enamored of rivers and upon moving to Wisconsin in 1990, I bought a canoe and began paddling as many of them as I could. I have long been a member of various environmental groups, so I joined American Rivers and then the River Alliance of Wisconsin.

What made you decide to become a supporter?

I have coordinated an annual canoe trip on the Wisconsin River every July since 1991 which usually draws 25 to 30 friends, comrades, and fellow workers. Many of us are union and political activists, many affiliated with the Industrial Workers of the World (sometime known as "Wobblies"). I began handing out the River Alliance newsletter a number of years ago, and for the last three years, we have taken up a collection for the River Alliance. It has become an integral part of the experience now which the group seems to have enthusiastically endorsed.

What issue facing rivers is of the biggest concern to you?

Commercial, residential, and agricultural development all threaten our rivers. As long as our economy remains in private hands, and as long as basic economic decisions are made

by corporations in the interest of private profit as opposed to the public good, no river anywhere is safe.

What draws you to rivers?

Probably the same thing that drew me first to the life of a hobo, then a railroad brakeman and now engineer -- the sense of freedom and adventure, never knowing what is around the next bend, what beauty, what challenge and experience lies ahead. Being on, in, and around a river makes me feel alive and connected to the world.

Describe your perfect day on a river.

Paddling leisurely down the Wisconsin with a good friend and a cooler of beer under a hot July sun, watching the turtles, sandhill cranes, great blue herons and other critters, enjoying a picnic lunch, occasionally stopping for a swim on a sandbar, then watching the sunset on the water.

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