



**Carroll D. “Buzz” Besadny  
1929-1999**

**“Wisconsin personified, a solid citizen who tells homey stories about himself, thinks before he talks, takes his time to consider all sides, then makes up his mind, digs in and holds his ground.”**

**– Buzz Besadny, as described  
by The Milwaukee Journal  
1988**

Carroll D. "Buzz" Besadny devoted his entire career to conservation in Wisconsin. His 42-year tenure at the Department of Natural Resources, culminating with 12 years as the secretary, was filled with an extraordinary array of accomplishments that have greatly benefited Wisconsin. They also mark an interesting time in the evolution of conservation management in the state, with the state still adjusting from basic changes to the way game management, conservation and environmental protection were being merged into the work of one agency.

Upon graduation from the University of Wisconsin-Madison as a wildlife biology major in 1952 (later earning an M.S. in wildlife management), Besadny began working at Wisconsin Conservation Department, which became the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources on July 1, 1968.

Besadny's work at DNR included: research project leader, game farm resource group leader and research coordinator before being made director of the Bureau of Environmental Impact and then administrator of the Division of Resource Management. Besadny's dedication and accomplishments led to his appointment as department head in 1980. He served for 12 years as DNR Secretary before his retirement in 1993. Appointed by a citizen board, Besadny earned the respect of the three governors he served – Lee Sherman Dreyfus, Anthony S. Earl and Tommy G. Thompson.

A biologist, Besadny constantly emphasized using science as a key component in natural resources policies and decisions. His tenure was marked by initiatives in groundwater protection, soil erosion control, public land acquisition, toxic substance control, recycling and multiple use forestry.

While he led the department, it made major progress in deer management, turkey reintroduction and pheasant management. Along the way, he became known as "Father

Nature,” a moniker pinned on him in the *Wisconsin* magazine of the Milwaukee Journal in 1988: “Father Nature.”

The nickname’s appropriateness becomes clear upon surveying a list of Besadny’s endeavors. He was responsible for the successful implementation of the federal Clean Water Act, making Wisconsin the first state to meet nationwide “fishable and swimmable” standards. He implemented the nation’s first wastewater compliance management program and made important land purchases totaling 127,300 acres, including the Chippewa Flowage, under Wisconsin’s Outdoor Recreational Act Program (ORAP.) Additionally, with Besadny as head, the DNR enacted the Wisconsin Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program in 1989, a successor to ORAP with similar goals. The program protects natural resources and expands outdoor recreation opportunities, using both private resources and public funds to acquire land and easements, develop and improve recreational facilities, and restore wildlife habitat. It evolved into a 20-year, \$60 million/year plan from a 10-year, \$23 million/year program.

Among Besadny’s priorities as DNR secretary was wildlife management. In his tenure, the DNR established deer census and tracking methods, began a hunter’s choice program and a pheasant management program. The reintroduction of wild turkeys begun with Besadny at the helm has blossomed into a wildlife management success story, opening the door to new hunting and wildlife viewing opportunities for thousands of state residents.

In 1980, when he was appointed secretary, the Department of Natural Resources was still reeling from the controversy surrounding the merger between the Conservation Department and the Department of Resource Management that created the DNR. According to George Meyer, who succeeded Besadny as DNR chief, quoted in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, Besadny was under “tremendous pressure” at this time. Besadny led the DNR to important action and along the way he became greatly admired by his peers and staff and respected by his critics. The Wisconsin Conservation Congress, a group with which Besadny sometimes quarreled, called Besadny “the ultimate professional.”

Besadny’s accomplishments have been recognized with countless awards and honors, ranging from having a fish facility named after him in his birthplace of

Kewaunee, Wisconsin (The C.D. "Buzz" Besadny Andronomous Fisheries Facility), to being named Environmentalist of the Year by the College of Natural Resources at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. Besadny received the Seth Gordon Award for outstanding leadership from the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and was appointed by George Bush to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission in 1990.

But aside from these more-conventional accolades, Besadny also earned some notable commendations from his colleagues and the public, most just descriptions of his inspiring unpretentiousness, charisma, and professionalism. Ron Seely, environment reporter for the *Wisconsin State Journal* described Besadny as "a personable man who never outgrew his roots (and was) much loved by the rank-and-file staffers of the huge conservation agency, mainly because he never forgot he was one of them for so many years." In an article he wrote after attending Besadny's funeral in 1999, Seely noted, "For all his achievements and his travels around the world, friends remembered, Besadny remained a humble man who lived in the same modest ranch home for years and who brought liver sausage sandwiches for lunch in his DNR office."

George Meyer described Besadny in the *Wisconsin State Journal* as "a gentle, kind person, who cared for everyone."

Besadny's executive assistant, Linda Bochert, quoted in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, after discussing Besadny's excellent professional reputation among DNR employees added, "We loved him more for who he was."

In another story in the *Wisconsin State Journal*, written shortly after Besadny's death, Pat Durkin, editor of *Deer and Deer Hunting* magazine, commented: "From all accounts, Besadny inspired loyalty from the huge staff of (the DNR). You didn't step on Besadny's DNR without stepping on him." Durkin went on to describe Besadny as "the DNR's leader, its heart, its guts, its backbone."

After retiring, Besadny volunteered with his local library on Madison's west side, helped improve management practices at the State Investment Board and spent time with his grandchildren. Then Governor Tommy Thompson said of Besadny upon his death in 1999 at age 69: "Buzz will remain Wisconsin's Father Nature. He epitomized conservationism and public service. The state lost a very good friend."

*The Wisconsin State Journal* noted at his death that Besadny was remembered as a devoted father and husband, an accomplished and respected civil servant, a devout Christian, a good friend and a man who loved a good story and a good laugh. Not a bad way to be remembered, indeed.

**CARROLL D. "BUZZ" BESADNY  
1929-1999**

BIRTH: August 9, 1929, Kewaunee, Wisconsin.  
DEATH: March 16, 1999, Madison, Wisconsin  
EDUCATION: B.S., Biology, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1951.  
M.S., Wildlife Management, University of Wisconsin-Madison,  
1956.

**BIOGRAPHICAL HISTORY**

CAREER

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), 1952-1993. Began as research project and union leader, served as research project leader, game farm resource group leader, research coordinator, director of the Bureau of Environmental Impact, and administrator of the Division of Resource Management. Appointed DNR secretary in 1980; served until retirement in 1993.

ORGANIZATIONS, ACTIVITIES

President, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, 1983-1984.

President, Wildlife Society, 1974-1975.

Member, Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin Board of Directors.

Commissioner, Great Lakes Fishery Commission.

Ruling Elder, United Presbyterian Church.

#### AWARDS, HONORS

Appointed to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission by President George H.W. Bush, 1990.

Wisconsin Idea Award in Natural Resources Policy, 1998.

First Centennial Award, College of Letters and Sciences, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1989.

First Distinguished Alumnus Award, Kewaunee High School, 1988.

Environmentalist of the Year, College of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, 1986.

Seth Gordon Award for outstanding leadership, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, 1986.

Conservation Scholarship instituted in his honor by the Wisconsin Environmental Working Group and Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce, 1994.

D.N.R. named a salmon and migratory trout egg collecting facility in Kewaunee the C.D. "Buzz" Besadny Anadromous Fisheries Facility, 1993

#### BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Full notes on sources will be provided as an addendum.

This biography is co-authored by Bill Berry and Evonne R. Berry. The narrative portion of the biography was written by Evonne R. Berry.

Bill Berry  
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