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Hemp's contributions won't be forgotten

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It is unfortunate that Dick Hemp won't be here to help Wisconsin's conservation/environmental community get a good start in the new and critical decade of the '90s.

Certainly help will be needed, and the tall, stately, always gentlemanly activist from Mosinee had been doing just that for this state for nearly half a century.

But we'll have to get along, now, without Richard A. Hemp.

When he turned in his credentials Upstairs on Christmas Eve, they had to recruit a band of angels to carry them. Few men in their lifetimes accomplished as much or contributed so much.

It would be easy, but inaccurate, to say that Hemp will be remembered mostly for his 11 years of service on the Wisconsin Board of Natural Resources, a service that ended last May.

Among the things that made him such an effective member of that important policy-making body were those activities that had come before.

In 1943, he became secretary of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, and he was its chairman from 1948 to '52.

In 1954, he moved from the board of directors to become president of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation.

Hunters, fishermen and others will recognize that then, as now, the Congress and the Federation were the state's primary advocacy organizations in matters of outdoor recreation.

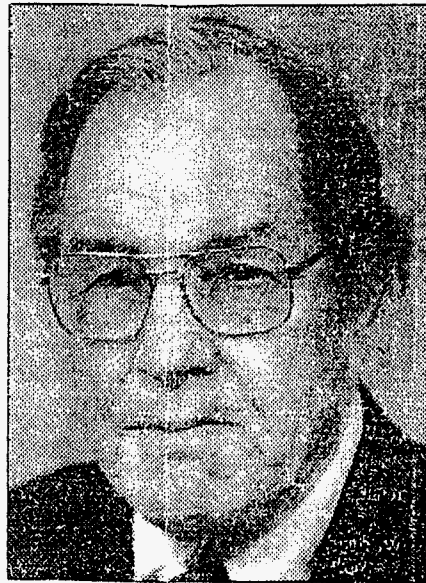
But there was more, much more, to this man's conservation/environmental background.

He was a member of the first advisory committee of the former Department of Resource Development, and he was an original member of the Wisconsin Natural Beauty Council.

He served on the Outdoor Recreation Act Program (ORAP) task force and the DNR Council of Environmental Advisers and the DNR law enforcement and hunter ethics task forces.

In addition, he also served as chairman of the Marathon County Resource Development Council, a citizens' group that drew up the county's first comprehensive plan for zoning and resource management.

And if all of that wasn't enough, Hemp also found time to serve the Mosinee Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, Sportsman's Alliance, Board of Education and Library



Dick Hemp

Board of Trustees. He was that community's postmaster from 1939 to '72 and owned and published Mosinee's only newspaper.

Dick Hemp, it is easy to see, never lived in a tunnel. His horizons were as broad as the

forests he loved and his interests were as diverse as the trout streams he fished.

John Lawton of Madison, former chairman of the DNR board, who served on the board with Hemp and who also served with him on the Conservation Congress, remembers Hemp with awe and hushed respect.

Lawton, who also is one of the most powerful and respected conservationists ever in the state, said he was amazed at the depth of Hemp's analytical mind and his stunning sense of mission.

"He had a sure feel for what was right," Lawton said. "He quickly mastered the complexities of the issues that we, as a board, faced. I was so certain of his ability to grasp the right course on many issues that I sometimes waited to see how Hemp was going to vote before I voted."

Among the professionals at the DNR, Hemp's successful fight to keep politics out of conservation will be remembered as his chief legacy. Hemp was the point man in the assault on those who would have empowered the governor to appoint DNR leadership.

A report written by Hemp in 1979 on that subject remains today one of the most effective and powerful arguments against political control of the DNR.

All of Hemp's considerable contributions

on behalf of conservation did not go without public recognition. He was one of 10 nonprofessional conservationists in the country to receive the American Motors Conservation Award.

Cited as Wisconsin's Outstanding Conservationist by the Milwaukee County Conservation Alliance in 1950, he was similarly cited by the Waukesha County Conservation Alliance and by the Wisconsin Chapter of the Izaak Walton League of America.

Early in 1989, the Tomorrow River Fishery Area in Portage County was officially renamed the Richard A. Hemp Fishery Area.

It was a particularly appropriate action, given Hemp's record of public service and his devotion, as a fisherman, to the river named Tomorrow.

In an interview with The Journal shortly after he was appointed to the DNR board, Hemp was asked what he wanted his greatest contribution to be.

"I ask myself if I am going to leave the world in as good a shape as when I came into it and what can I do for future generations. What I would hope to do is achieve something for my children and yours and all the others."

Dick Hemp did that, of course. In spades.