

One Family - Two Unique Conservationists

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Bob and Dick Hunt on a grouse hunting expedition.

In the 1980s environmental groups with varied missions came together around one issue.

They wanted to honor people who contribute to Wisconsin's rich conservation ethic AND to keep that ethic alive.

With that, the Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame – housed at UW Stevens Point – was born.

Its first inductees were Aldo Leopold and John Muir.

In honor of Earth Day – just two days from now – WUWM Environmental Reporter Susan Bence introduces us to two brothers who this weekend will join the Conservation Hall of Fame.

Dick Hunt still can't believe he's about to be a "hall of famer"

"I don't know they didn't tell me who got the will brilliant idea to this, but it's staggering," Dick says.

Back in 1940s, Dick says he had no idea where he would land.

"I got out of the Navy in 1946. I had the GI bill and I didn't know what to do so when I talked to the university they said, well we're starting a new program with a major in conservation, And I thought, gosh, that sounds pretty good," Dick says.

Don't be fooled, Dick, now 85, didn't just fall into conservation.

His dad was an avid outdoorsman

"And my dad knew so much about wildlife, if it swam, crawled, walked or ran AND FLEW, my dad could tell me what it was," Dick says.

Duck hunting was a particular passion; and it fell to young Dick to handle what came after the hunt.

"From the time I was nine or ten, I'd come home from school, here on the kitchen table would be a little white piece of paper "Dick Clean Ducks," Dick says.

Sometimes Dick tackled as many as 10 mallards

"This meant pick the feathers, make sure you got inside the duck cavity, all the lung tissue and the kidneys and all that kind of stuff. Cause that's the way my dad did it, but it taught me a lot about ducks," Dick says.

Ultimately, Dick finished his degree at UW-Madison, but lacked field experience. He learned of an intriguing prairie chicken study, and decided he had nothing to lose.

"I'll write to the project leader and ask him if he'll take me on as a helper for room and board. So I wrote a letter and got a reply back - come up immediately," Dick says.

Dick moved on to other research projects.

"Guys on pheasants wanted some habitat surveys, I went to Horicon banded waterfowl, worked on muskrats," Dick says.

Ultimately, Dick landed at the Horicon Marsh - for good - as a waterfowl biologist.

One of his specialties became mallards.

"Hunters groups wanted the department to build a big program," Dick says.

Hunters hoped the state would to cultivate a healthy mallard population, that would migrate south and then return to Wisconsin each spring to nest.

Instead, Dick discovered - after five years raising, banding and releasing mallards - that the ducks he raised lacked the instinctive "migratory sense" of a duck hatched in the wild.

"The study showed we were stocking and it didn't pay. It was too costly. We said it would be better to put money in habitat," Dick says.

Dick's brother, Bob Hunt IS here with us in the room, but it's impossible for him to get a word in.

Ask Dick....

"Bob and I did spend a lot of time hunting together and trout fishing; he's probably one of the best trout fishermen in the state of Wisconsin. Now that's no bull," Dick says.

Bob - age 78 - is a quiet, modest fellow.

"Well I was born in 1933, graduated from high school Madison East in 1951; college at UW Madison and I hated every minute of it, I was just a shy little kid from the country, so I quit," Bob says.

After a couple of years of military service....

"I came back on the GI bill. I improved gradually to the point at which my major professor said, well your record is a little spotty, but I'll take a chance on you; you can come to grad school under my supervision," Bob says.

Bob was in his element.

He launched a long-term study in a pristine trout stream in southcentral Wisconsin.

"It was the only stream in Wisconsin where it was ever done," Bob says.

He became a premier trout researcher.

"The biggest thing that I was able to do some very intensive work on degraded trout streams and how to bring them back to health," Bob says.

What trout need, Bob says, is deep water and a place to hide underneath the bank, to get out of the sunshine.

Of course, there's a lot more to trout and to Bob's story.

Throughout his career, he published over four dozen articles and a book that he planned to title

"Field tested techniques to improve trout habitat in Wisconsin Streams," Bob says.

But Bob went with his wife's suggestion, Trout Stream Therapy. and attributes the still popular publication to her version.

Before I leave, Dick Hunt is bursting to share one last story - how he came up with a new twist on teaching waterfowl identification.

"A wonderful technique that's been adopted by states all across the country, some of them, to use in training hunters and kids," Dick says.

Up until Dick's innovation, "taxidermied" ducks were arranged with their wings "plastered" to their sides.

But wings, he says, reveal a lot about the bird - for instance, its sex and age.

So, Dick came up with a technique of extending one wing.

"And there you've got bird with the wing out, the full body plumage and the full wing plumage," Dick says.

Dick dubbed his creation "a duck on a stick".

"So if you're going to write something up, mention that duck on the stick thing," Dick says.

Do you know that feeling - when you meet certain people and you just know you won't do their story justice? I

walked out of feeling that way about Bob and Dick Hunt.

But I also left knowing, these are two unique conservationists, whose careers blended seamlessly with their passions.



2012 Conservation Hall of Fame Inductees - Bob and Dick Hunt