

# Warm memories emerge at services for Besadny

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By Ron Seely  
Environment reporter

An overflowing crowd of friends and family said goodbye to former DNR Secretary Carroll "Buzz" Besadny on Saturday with song and story, laughter and tears.

They gathered for a memorial service at Covenant Presbyterian Church, on Madison's West Side, where Besadny was a member for 40 years.

Besadny died last week after a long battle with cancer. He was 69.

From Gov. Tommy Thompson to rank-and-file staffers at the DNR, his friends fondly remembered Besadny's rise from field biologist to secretary. Besadny served as chief of the agency for 12 years and retired in 1993.

Besadny was remembered as a devoted father and husband, an accomplished and respected civil



Memorial services were held Saturday for Carroll D. "Buzz" Besadny, 69, a DNR secretary for 12 years. He died last week after a long battle with cancer.

servant, a devout Christian, a good friend, and a man who loved a good story and a good laugh.

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.

Covenant Pastor John Hill recalled Besadny joking with him not long ago about not wanting a fancy obituary. Besadny's suggestion, Hill said, was, "Buzz died. Truck for sale."

Besadny's daughter, Sarah, told how after she moved from Madison she would receive a weekly letter from her father that he would type and mail off every Sunday. It would always be very neat, she recalled, and the first paragraph would always discuss the weather in Madison. The letter was always one page long, she said. Only once was it longer and that was after his trip to Israel when he sent 1½ pages.

Linda Bochert, who served as

Besadny's executive assistant for 12 years, spoke for all those who served with him in the agency when she said that, although employees admired him for his skill and professionalism, "we loved him more for who he was."

Nobody summed up Besadny's dedication to Wisconsin better than Herb Behnke, a member of the Natural Resources Board who also served during Besadny's tenure.

Behnke recalled a time when the agency was having trouble convincing a property owner from Illinois to sell some important acreage for a bike trail.

At one point DNR staff decided the only course was condemnation. But Gov. Tommy Thompson ordered Besadny to personally negotiate a deal.

Behnke said that Besadny ended up sitting in the man's kitchen to negotiate. The fellow

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## Besadny's accomplishments

Carroll "Buzz" Besadny's many accomplishments at the DNR include:

- Wisconsin Acid Rain Law and Lakes Protection Program, the first and strongest in the nation.

- Wisconsin's Groundwater Law, which became a national model.

- Implementation of the federal Clean Water Act. The state became the first in the country to meet nationwide "fishable and swimmable" standards set by the act.

- Land purchases that included the 127,300 acres of the Chippewa Flowage.

- Establishment of the Lower Wisconsin Riverway.

- Implementation of Chippewa treaty rights.

- Cooperative natural resource ventures with China and the former Soviet Union.

## Besadny

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asked Besadny if he wanted a drink.

"I'll have whatever your drinking," Besadny said.

"I drink vinegar and water," the man replied.

"Sounds good," Besadny responded.

After three drinks, Behnke said, the man relented.

"The man signed the agreement," Behnke said. "And Buzz left. He had to stop at four filling stations on the way home."

Kenya at a time (1963) British Colony was gaining independence. He traveled world and landed in N 1965. While clearing in he was asked to produce card, which was assigned American males eligible of duty in Vietnam.

Not having one, Kummerfeldt is a big-hunting guide in Wyoming teaches fly-fishing in Colorado and New Mexico. His sells basic survival kits their Survival Consultants is wed to his activities. "I enjoy anything in outdoors: canoeing, bird watching, hiking, mountain biking. If it involves the we've either done it or doing it or we will do it. To check out SCG, go web site at [www.outdoor](http://www.outdoor)

If you know of anyone who would make an interesting contact, John Nolan at 1-800-6168 or at [outdoors@madison.com](mailto:outdoors@madison.com)

**LUNAR TABLE**

The Universal Fishing Times and days in the month. For best results, begin one hour before and continue at the times given. The week's are indicated by an X.

Day	Major	Minor
Mon.	3:45 p.m.	4:10 a.m.
Tue.	4:30 p.m.	4:55 a.m.
Wed.	5:15 p.m.	5:40 a.m.
Thu.	6:00 p.m.	6:25 a.m.
Fri.	6:45 p.m.	7:10 a.m.
Sat.	7:30 p.m.	8:00 a.m.
Sun.	8:15 p.m.	9:25 p.m.

populations also have returned with significant numbers of robins, red-winged blackbirds, meadowlarks and bluebirds arriving.

The inland season for game fish, except for some waters such as the Wisconsin River, remains closed until May 1. Trout fishing is catch-and-release until May 1, the DNR said.

The agency also noted that 1998-99 licenses expired Wednesday.

would have been politically cowed into being someone other than who he was: Buzz Besadny, the DNR's leader, its heart, its guts, its backbone.

With all that said, it's right and good that someone has listed Besadny's professional feats. They're an important footnote worthy of praise. Whether it was through his work on acid rain, deer management, turkey stocking or clean water, to name a few, Besadny made Wisconsin a better place to live and to enjoy the outdoors.

All Wisconsinites will long benefit from his conservation work. If you're ever in Kewaunee, Besadny's hometown, look east across Lake Michigan's vast breadth and depth. Or, if you're offshore on the big lake, look west at Kewaunee's steep, rugged shoreline — where Wisconsin begins.

As you take in this region's beauty, pause to thank Besadny for his efforts. No need to be flowery. Just say thanks.

Former Madisonian Pat Durkin, editor of Deer and Deer Hunting magazine. To contact him, write: Midwest Features Inc., P.O. Box 259907, Madison, WI 53725-9907, or contact him by E-mail at: [Patdurkin@gglbbs.com](mailto:Patdurkin@gglbbs.com)

freshwater drum, quillback carp and mooneyes tugged at their 6-pound lines.

Jerry Davis, who grew up hunting and fishing in Lafayette County, is a biology professor at the University of Wisconsin at La Crosse. Contact him at (608) 785-6963 or (608) 788-7059 or E-mail him at [jerry.davis@uwlax.edu](mailto:jerry.davis@uwlax.edu)

inspired loyalty from the huge staff of this oft-maligned agency. You didn't step on Besadny's DNR without stepping on him. For instance, at yet another NRB meeting, an aggrieved businessman from the Lake Michigan shoreline used his 5 minutes during the board's public forum to rip the DNR for a litany of perceived wrongs.

Besadny sat stone-faced, occasionally giving a slight, disapproving head shake, while the man blasted away. When the man finished, Besadny asked the board's permission to respond. Without notes, Besadny addressed each of the man's charges and then gave the board a stinging history of the man's business practices. Even radio star Paul Harvey would have been impressed with Besadny's version of "the rest of the story." When Besadny sat back down, he glared at the man, caught his eye, and jabbed his index finger at him. Take that!

Now, some folks might say Besadny benefited from being part of a different era, a time when the DNR secretary was more powerful and independent because he was the NRB's appointee, not the governor's.

Buck pellets. It's hard to believe this son of Kewaunee

the Wisconsin River you hear about."

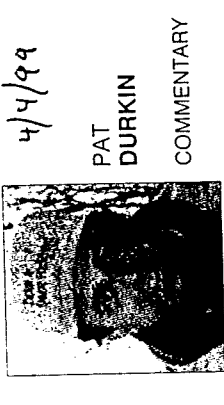
It's not that the fishermen ignore the Madison-area waters — they fish perch in Lake Mendota, winter and spring; they fish smallmouth bass in the Wisconsin River, summer and fall — but to them, the Mississippi River means walleyes and saugers.

They prefer to go against the grain when it comes to fishing river walleyes. They spend some time near the dam, where most of the anglers are, but mostly they fish far downstream. They say the fish are there.

"We like to look for current, wingdams, sand flats and

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he wouldn't waste any opportunity to lead, educate or correct. He had a memorable, purposeful stride when approaching the podium, and, once there, seemed to always know how to put his time to full use.

Sometimes, he began with short first-person stories that set the stage for his message. Back in the mid-1980s, for example, he was addressing the Natural Resources Board shortly after he had used his power to extend the firearms deer season in several regions. Besadny told how he had recently gone out his front door to pick up the mail. As the mailman handed over his letters, he asked Besadny which jerk was responsible for lengthening the deer season.

"I told him: 'You're looking at him. And I'll tell you what, you don't tell me how to run the deer season and I won't tell you how to deliver the mail.'"

From all accounts, Besadny

the Wisconsin River you hear about."

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# Much can be learned from Besadny's legacy

When former Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Secretary Carroll "Buzz" Besadny died March 16, he left behind an incredible list of professional accomplishments. But measuring a man's worth by cataloging career achievements is akin to using a slide rule to judge Shakespeare.

I make no claim of friendship, strong or fleeting, with Besadny. My perceptions come mostly from having watched him pace the firing line of public debate and policy-making during his reign. Certainly, Besadny held the power and prestige inherent to the DNR secretary's post, but the way he projected that power from 1980 to 1993 had just as much to do with his confidence and carriage.

Besadny wasn't an eloquent speaker, one given to flowery phrases or polished oratory. That just wasn't his style. Still, anytime he sat on the edge of his chair waiting to speak, you sensed urgency and sincerity. You knew

friends  
 We watched hopping along the way they fly bound, well, as a lot of that I didn't it aching, I can ure as neck ing a lot more these things



Photo: JERRY DAVIS

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## Besadny served the state with grace

When Carroll "Buzz" Besadny was appointed secretary of the state Department of Natural Resources in 1980, his critics said he wouldn't last three months on the job.



Besadny

He didn't. He lasted 12 years. Besadny died this week at age 69, following a career as a public servant that deserves to be held up as a model.

When Besadny was named to lead the DNR, after nearly 30 years as an employee of the department and its predecessor agency, he looked every bit a career bureaucrat, colorless and lacking the political base to command the state's most controversial agency. But Besadny proved he had a more valuable base — a commitment to the employees he supervised, the businesses and citizens he served and the environment he was charged with protecting.

Even his critics grew to respect the care he took to do the right thing — not the popular or expedient thing — and the grace and good humor he showed as he went about his job.

Among Besadny's contributions to the DNR was a shift in the agency's approach to its duties. In an effort to turn confrontation into cooperation, he changed the DNR's focus from "command and clobber" to "customer service." By respecting businesses and citizens as "customers," the DNR gained respect for the environment.

Besadny served Wisconsin well.

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Besadny, C. D. "Buzz"

MADISON - C. D. "Buzz" Besadny died peacefully surrounded by his family on March 16, 1999 at age 69. Buzz will be remembered by co-workers, friends and family for his unassuming manner, ever present humor and kind spirit. He was born on August 9, 1929 in Kewaunee, Wisconsin. In 1952 he married Barbara A. Smith in Delavan. In addition to his wife, his family includes his son, Bruce (Janet) Besadny and daughters, Barb Roeber (Larry Black), Sarah, and Jean (Andrew) Garcia. His grandchildren are Ryan and Caitlin Besadny and Benjamin, Justin and Andrea Garcia. Buzz is survived by two aunts, Sophie Pawlicki and Sally Biesiadny. In 1951 he graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a B.S. in Biology and in 1956 he earned a M.S. in Wildlife Management. During his 42 years with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), he served in many capacities culminating with 12 years as the Secretary of the DNR from which he retired in January 1993. His many accomplishments include: President of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, President of the Wildlife Society, member of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin Board of Directors, Commissioner of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, and Ruling Elder of the United Presbyterian Church. In addition to his accomplishments he received numerous awards including: Seth Gordon Award of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Environmentalist of the Year from the College of Natural Resources at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, First Centennial Award of the College of Letters and Science at the UW-Madison, and the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation Special Service Award. In addition, a fish facility in the Kewaunee area was named in honor of Buzz. Buzz would like to gratefully recognize special people including Dr. Michael Frontiera, Dr. Mark Kaufman, Dean Medical Center Staff, HospiceCare Staff (Jeanette, Marlene, Nancy, Katy, Gail) and special friend Mary Jane. Buzz donated his body to the UW Anatomy Department. The memorial service will be held at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, March 20, 1999 in COVENANT PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 326 S. Segoe Road, officiated by Rev. John Hill and Rev. Bette Duff. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to: Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin Endowment Fund, P.O. Box 129, Madison, WI 53701-0129; HospiceCare Inc., 2802 Coho St., Suite 100, Madison, WI 53713; Covenant Presbyterian Church, 326 S. Segoe Rd., Madison, WI 53705.

# Ex-DNR chief, 'Father Nature,' dies at age 69

## Besadny preceded department

By Ron Seely  
Environment reporter

Carroll "Buzz" Besadny, the former head of the state Department of Natural Resources who loved the outdoors, a good laugh and a rousing polka, died late Tuesday after a long battle with cancer.

Besadny, 69, was a respected conservationist who spent his entire 40-year career with the DNR. He started with the agency even before it was the DNR, going to work in 1952 as a conservation aide for the old Conservation Department after his graduation from UW-Madison with a degree in wildlife biology.

In 1967, after the Conservation Department merged with the Department of Resource Management to become the DNR, Besadny went to work as a research biologist. He worked his

way through the ranks to take over as head of the agency and retired in 1993 after 12 years as secretary.

A personable man who never outgrew his roots in the small Wisconsin community of Kewaunee, Besadny 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.

George Meyer, who succeeded Besadny as DNR secretary, described Besadny as a mentor and said he especially will remember how kind he was in the face of tremendous pressure as agency chief.

"He was a gentle, kind person," Meyer said, "one who cared for everyone."  
Meyer, along with many others, also recalled Besadny's sense of humor.

"He had a lot of jokes," Meyer said. "And some were better than others. But he loved to tell them all."

Former Gov. Anthony Earl, who preceded Besadny as DNR secretary, was a close friend and a regular fishing partner. He said

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## Besadny

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he'll also remember Besadny's grace and sense of humor.

"He was a wonderful friend," Earl said.

Besadny was dubbed "Father Nature" in a 1988 newspaper feature and the name stuck.

"Buzz will remain Wisconsin's 'Father Nature,'" Gov. Tommy Thompson said Wednesday. "He epitomized conservationism and public service. The state lost a very good friend... as did I."

Everybody knew Besadny as "Buzz," a nickname from his childhood.

He got the nickname from a girl in fifth grade who said he was always "hurrying and buzzing around."

His friends started calling him "Buzzy" and that eventually became the familiar "Buzz."

During his tenure as secretary, Besadny was responsible for overseeing a number of historical environmental and conservation initiatives including programs that involved recycling, groundwater, the federal Clean Air Act, and the purchase of hundreds of thousands of acres of wild Wisconsin countryside.

Besadny, who developed cancer shortly after his retirement, is survived by his wife, Barbara, four children and grandchildren.

A memorial service is scheduled for 2 p.m. Saturday at Covenant Presbyterian Church at Mineral Point and Segoe roads on Madison's West Side.