

A true fish finder

DNR's Bush helped make Rock River, Lake Koshkonong what they are today

DNR fisheries technicians electroshocked a 51½-inch muskie on the Rock River below the Beloit dam last week.

She is still swimming there, waiting for the opportunity to make your knees knock and lips tremble.

Should you be fortunate enough to dance with this gargantuan "toothier" to the point of choosing between a quick photo and the taxidermist, don't forget to thank Don Bush. He almost certainly played a role in the chain of events that jerked your chain in a fishing experience you will never forget.

Bush, 58, is retiring after 36 years of DNR service. This veteran fisheries biologist has been working out of the Neville DNR station since 1980. He can't tell you whether this "Rock River Monster" left the hatchery truck as an advanced finger-

ling in Beaver Dam Lake, the Madison chain or Lake Koshkonong late in the last century.

Experience has taught the often jovial Bush that the life journey of a fish can start anywhere in the Rock River drainage basin. Managing biomass populations at the basin level rather than a lake-by-lake basis is an evolution of philosophy by Bush and other scientists that enable Wisconsin to continue its leadership role with fisheries resources in the United States and around the world.

I'm not ashamed to say that Don Bush is one of my personal heroes. He is clearly part of the solution instead of the problem in our often confusing and complex world.

Fishing is a great way to sort things out. Bush has made it easier to leave your demons at the dock. A fish at the other end of your line deserves your full attention.

If launching the boat is easier for you than it was for your grandfather here on the Rock River or across southern Wisconsin, you can thank Don Bush for that, too. He has been instrumental in creating over 20 boat ramps un-

der his watch. He has also worked tirelessly in bringing several recreational properties into the public domain.

One of this humble biologist's greatest accomplishments is helping establish a brook trout population in the East fork of Raccoon Creek about 10 miles west of Beloit. This is the only place you'll find brookies swimming in Rock County.

Nobody alive today could truthfully claim successful temptation of Wisconsin's prettiest fish in Rock County before Don Bush visited this delightful little stream and left a legacy that anglers yet unborn will someday discover.

Grandfather—or even Dad—can recall when Rock River and Lake Koshkonong were known for little more than dirty water and carp.

Rough fish and turbid water go hand-in-hand. Bush has spent a lifetime as a carp cowboy, rounding them up and heading them out so that walleyes, pike, bass, perch and other desirable species can find your hook.

Fishing on Lake Koshkonong is better now than it has ever been. Manag-

ing a 10,000-acre lake in the middle of a medium-sized river is a profound management challenge under the very best of conditions.

Bush has turned a veritable cesspool into a game fish spa, with the Rock River system one of the best walleye fisheries in the state. Ironically, a major part of this success can be traced to the Bark River hatchery—a reconfigured sewer treatment plant.

Bush and Herculean work by a legion of volunteers kept this program going during a critical time when the state's financial situation was just as tough as it is today. We now have an exciting and balanced fishery, right in our own backyard.

Next month, Don Bush will flash his Eastwood smile, hop on his Harley and ride off into retirement.

There is one major difference between the actor who played Rowdy Yates, the Man with No Name and "Dirty" Harry Callahan: Don Bush is a real American hero.

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