

Opinion



"OK, Fred, I got it hooked to a tree. Start up the winch."

Commentary

Think of Cherish Wisconsin when buying new hunting, fishing licenses

By Mark LaBarbera and Bill Smith

Are you a kindred spirit? We are. When we first met the year we both accepted positions on the board of directors of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, small talk was about recent hunting and fishing adventures, favorite outdoor destinations, and recent reports in *Wisconsin Outdoor News*. There's always something to talk about related to natural resources pursuits here.

Like so many *WON* readers, we share a love of the outdoors that makes it easy to get to know new friends, no matter where you live, what you

have, or what you do for a living. One of us lives in northern Wisconsin, the other in southern Wisconsin, but like *WON* readers who cherish a lot of outdoor destinations and activities, we feel like long-time neighbors and kindred spirits. It is amazing how many of us have built a lifetime of memories in special places across Wisconsin, and how many lives, generation after generation, have been enhanced by those outdoor venues.

Talking about it, and now writing about it, reminds us how important those places are, and

(See Commentary Page 20)

Letters to the Editor

Commentary

(From Page 3)

why we cherish Wisconsin's outdoors. No matter what kind of outdoors enthusiast you are – a hiker or biker, a hunter or angler, a kayaker or birder, a skier or all of the above – Wisconsin provides endless opportunities for each of us to connect with nature in this kind of profound way. These experiences instill in us an appreciation for our state's woods, wildlife, and waters, and a commitment to ensuring that the legacy of enjoying our natural areas continues for generations to come.

Last year's hunting, fishing, sports, and conservation patron licenses have just expired, and for the next few months, hunters and anglers renewing their licenses have a unique opportunity to help protect the extra-special places we most enjoy. When we buy our licenses and renew our boat, ATV, or other registrations, we'll be asked whether we'd like to donate at least \$2 to the Cherish Wisconsin Outdoors Fund. Friends and I have started answering, "Yes, but make it \$4." If you cherish Wisconsin's outdoors and natural resources, we hope you'll do the same.

The Cherish Wisconsin Outdoors Fund will help cover costs for critical habitat management, including important waters, throughout the state. Setting land aside so it won't be developed is the first step in protecting it, but making sure those lands and waters stay healthy requires careful

management, including controlled burns, invasive species control, trail maintenance, and biodiversity projects.

We're not surprised that hunters and anglers are a generous bunch. You might say we started the "green movement," from the green in our camo and greenhead mallards to the greenback dollars we spend in support of our pursuits and pursuit of our sport. In 2014, the fund's first year, more than 25,000 license buyers gave to the Cherish Wisconsin Outdoors Fund through the DNR's Automated License Issuance System when they were asked to give \$2. These are individuals who are proud of what this state offers, proud of what may be a family tradition of enjoying time together outdoors, and proud to protect what they cherish.

This spring we encourage outdoors enthusiasts of all types to give \$2, \$4, or more, either by giving to the fund through the DNR's license registration process or by making a donation online at <http://CherishWisconsin.org/>. We hope you'll join us in celebrating this great opportunity to permanently protect the unique public lands we all love.

Mark LaBarbera, of Hazel Green, is founder of the Midwest Outdoor Heritage Education Expo and serves as treasurer of the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin.

Bill Smith, of Shell Lake, is retired from 34 years with the DNR. He is on the board of directors for the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin.



(L-r) Paul Karls, Bryant Kearney, Fletcher Geiger, Joe Karls, and Matt Neisen harvested five mature toms while hunting in Grant County.