

Dave O'Malley



I had a number of different jobs at DNR over a 34 year career with the state. Every job was an adventure beginning with my first LTE job, at the Woodruff Fish Hatchery, after graduating from college in May 1976. I received my degree from U.W. Stevens Point with a B.S. in Natural Resources and a Wildlife Management major. Funny how things turn out since about the only program at DNR I did not work in was Wildlife.

Growing up on a farm in Waunakee, I loved being outside and was nuts about hunting and fishing. I never considered any field of work besides natural resources and my dream since a youngster was to pursue a career in the outdoors. Little did I know that most work at DNR was going to be much more office oriented than I desired.

My first permanent job at DNR was providing grants to communities for building or upgrading their wastewater treatment plants. After 5 years of that I escaped to Rhinelander to work in the great Northwoods to work in the solid waste/superfund and recycling programs. I loved living up north but my true love lived in Madison (now my lovely wife LaVonne) so “we” decided I would explore opportunities back in Madison.



Von and Caylee

LaVonne and I had previously met after a Badger Football game in Madison and she rescued me from that wild single life that might have killed me. We got married four years later in 1988. That began my return to the friendly confines of GEF II where I worked in the Water Resources Program developing Water Quality Mgt. (Basin) Plans. Not too long after, I transferred to a Land Program River Specialist position primarily working on completing property master plans for DNR properties that included a river running through it. I co-led teams of DNR specialists, from a variety of disciplines, completing master plans for parks, wildlife and natural areas. These were some of my most challenging but very rewarding projects. The most controversial, but also the most interesting of these, were the master plans we developed for the Dells of the Wisconsin River State Natural Area and Mirror Lake State Park/Dell Creek Wildlife Area. I really enjoyed working with the DNR staff assigned to these planning teams. All the public controversy experienced was quite a team building effort. The potential expansion

of DNR property boundaries was the most volatile issue and it really got local land rights folks downright angry. I was threatened with tar and feathering! I explained to a small group of locals that I was Irish and they might get more than they bargained for. Funny, they were not so threatening after that. Amazing what you can get away with saying to someone if you keep a smile on your face...

My last job at DNR was working as a Land Agent in Fitchburg and I enjoyed this most, of all my prior positions. It was great working with willing landowners, assisting them in selling some really nice properties to the state and knowing these lands would be protected for public recreation forever. The best part of the Land Agent position was working with dedicated DNR staff from across a variety of programs. I really learned a lot.

So enough of DNR work history, let me describe some of my real passions. I still do lots of hunting, fishing, canoeing, kayaking, biking, cross country, downhill skiing and keeping up my training for an occasional triathlon. I ski as much as possible and last winter completed my 10th Birkebeiner. I also managed to finish two Ironman triathlons in Madison in 2007 and 2009. Both of those were an amazing journey that required a lot of training and stubborn persistence on my part along with a lot of patience from my wife. After all that training and planning it was really exhilarating to cross the finish line standing up. Along the way, I learned a lot about training smart and the importance of good nutrition and fitness.

I retired in August 2011 and the adventures continue. My best retirement gift was a handmade wooden sea kayak. It was a kit I bought years ago and never got around to starting. Von had secretly orchestrated the construction of it by enlisting the skills of my good friend Joe Brusca. Joe built this beautiful kayak with Pat McCutcheon, Paul Stone, Tom Aten, Ken Kosciak and even Joe's wife Sue helped. Wow

that was something, what good friends. I've spent a lot of time on the water with this kayak and it paddles very fast.



The greatest retirement gift!

The biggest adventure of my retirement so far was the month we spent in Belize last winter to train for and complete the La Ruta Maya Canoe Race, a 4 day 170 mile paddle across Belize. I traveled and paddled with two other buddies, from Cross Plains and Woodruff, who had also recently retired. This race was an opportunity of a lifetime and at a perfect time. We lived and trained with local racers and their families in the small village of Burrell Boom along the Belize River located about 30 miles northwest of Belize City. The locals were extremely friendly and accommodating. Every other night we were invited to a different home for dinner and we ate a lot of great local food. They really appreciated us old white guys coming down to their country to compete in this race,

on their turf. It was very important to them we had a good time and that we were safe.



Dave, his paddling buddies and the support crew!

The race was like the Tour De France only with canoes. The Belizeans call it their Super Bowl. The local interest and support was unbelievable. We named our team the “Cheesy Riders” and had bright yellow team shirts. Besides being some of the few lighter faces in the race, we really stood out and locals were very interested in talking with us which made for great fun. Everyone comes out to support their favorite team but they cheered for us as well. Each days finish was in a different village and at the end of the day each had a festival for the racers and support crews. There were thousands of cheering spectators in the villages and at the few road crossings. Even the very small villages in the middle of nowhere had people out cheering for the paddlers. Our wives and a couple experienced Canadian friends provided our race support. They had quite an experience meeting the

locals and navigating some pretty difficult jungle roads to make our check points. Luckily one of our local racer friends wife helped the them find their way. We paddled on the Belize River from San Ignacio in the West to the ocean at Belize City. Most of the river was jungle and small farms with second growth forest. Wildlife viewing included howler monkeys, lots of birds, dolphins, poisonous snakes, and small crocs. It was a wild time and the Belizeans are the nicest people I have ever met. We made friends for a lifetime and we will be back. I hope to do the race again!



Calm water in Belize!

We hope to continue to travel and have lots of new adventures. In the meantime there are always lots of home, farmland and cabin projects. I really enjoy having more time to manage our 160 acres of hunting land in northeastern Crawford County and spending time at our family cabin on Little St. Germain Lake.



A good day of fishing near St. Germain

In the warmer months, I have been working part time at a fish farm located near Deerfield. We raise Lake Perch in ponds that are eventually sold for stocking farm ponds and for restaurants.

We live along the Cherokee Marsh in the Town of Westport with a great view of the river so it is pretty nice being home too. My Springer Spaniel Caylee takes me for a lot of walks and Von always has projects for me too. In the spring I hope to start lining up work for my small tractor business "Land Management Services". I bought a new Kubota Tractor and used trailer that I will haul to properties to mow trails and CRP fields and maybe do a few wildlife food plots. Other than that I think I have enough to keep busy . . .

