

## Jim March



I retired from the Department of Natural Resources July 6, 1998, with 31+ years of service. The first 15 years were spent in Research, starting in fall, 1966, as an LTE with the Wetlands Wildlife Research Group at Horicon, supervised by Dick Hunt who became my mentor and life-long friend.

Prior to coming to Horicon I attended Wisconsin State University-Oshkosh for two semesters, then transferred to the University of Minnesota, St. Paul campus and earned BS and MS degrees in Wildlife Management. Before entering graduate school I turned down an opportunity to become a federal game management agent trainee with the U. S. Fish and

Wildlife Service. I'll always wonder where that career path would have led.

Also, before the end of my senior year, I dated a neighboring sorority girl, Billie Price. By fall, 1964, we were engaged and in June 1965, married.

On June 19, 2010, we celebrate our 45th anniversary. On June 5th, our son, family, many friends and former neighbors surprised us with an "early" anniversary picnic at a park in Waunakee-they'd planned this for 6 months!

Billie and I moved to Madison in fall, 1966, yours truly to start work on a PhD degree in Wildlife Ecology and Billie to complete her dietary internship, both at UW-



Madison. In November, I started commuting to Horicon after being offered the eventual opportunity to fill a vacant Assistant Project Leader position with the Wetlands group while at the same time taking over an ongoing study of Wisconsin's duck populations for my doctoral research and dissertation.

That spring we moved to the Horicon area, living first in the Town of Theresa and later in Horicon. Our daughter, Heather, was born on Christmas Day, 1967. Earlier, in July, I got my permanent biologist position with the Wisconsin Conservation Department and Billie was hired as the dietitian at Waupun Hospital.

Because I received my master's from the University of Minnesota in June 1967, I got \$50 a month more starting salary from WCD. My research involved developing reliable methods for surveying Wisconsin's breeding duck populations and assessing the contribution of locally raised ducks to the state's harvest. The study eventually led to my doctorate, a 400-page thesis and a DNR Technical Bulletin. All of this, however, took about 10 years. Along the way, I flew transects across the state three springs at 100-150 feet as the observer/recorder on the aerial breeding duck survey, and became good friends with the warden pilots, especially Ken Corbett. Over the years I flew many times with those superb pilots and have a lot of great stories as a result. I also supervised 5-7 LTE's and banded over 10,000 ducks, mostly of Wisconsin origin. My work was adopted as Wisconsin's annual spring waterfowl surveys, still operational today. Another important event occurred in May 1972-our son, Hans, was born.

Eventually I became a Project Leader in the new Department of Natural Resources and in May 1973, was promoted to Group Leader of the Farm Wildlife Research Group, supervising the likes of Bob Dumke, Chuck Pils,



LeRoy Petersen, Gene Woehler, the late Reynold Zeller and Mark Martin. I hated to leave Wetlands and was still working on my thesis, etc. but couldn't pass up the promotion when the Department agreed to move the position from Madison to Horicon! Over the next 5 years I assisted pheasant, fox and raptor research at Waterloo and also did work on deer and small woodlots. I also managed to get the Farm group involved in a little waterfowl/wetlands research.

In 1978 I became Acting Wildlife Research Section Chief, taking over for Jim Hale and in 1979, was promoted to that position. That November, after 11 years in Horicon, Billie, our two children, and I moved to Madison and took up what proved to be a 25-year residency on Goose Lake in the Town of Verona.

A year or so later, I was "bored" with routine research administration and wanted to go where the "action" in DNR took place. July 1981 was a major career change as I was promoted to the Assistant District Director-Resource Management vacancy in Southern District. Since my Research office had been at Nevin, I was pretty familiar with District Director Doug Morrissette and his excellent SD staff. I held that position until the "re-organization" years when I became the Land Leader in the South Central Region. Besides Doug, I served under Jim Huntoon and Ruthe Badger in those two positions.

Dating back to the Horicon days, I held Special Conservation Warden credentials for about 25 years and enjoyed knowing a majority of the Wisconsin Conservation Warden force-several Chief Wardens, e.g. Tom Harelson, were close friends. In January 1989, Jim Huntoon and Buzz Besadny let me accept a 6-month acting assignment in the Bureau of Wildlife Management, working for Steve Miller to prepare Wisconsin's proposal for its Joint Venture under the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. The Joint Venture Proposal was eventually accepted and has, I've been told, brought millions of \$\$ to Wisconsin for waterfowl and habitat work. I'm most proud of this work but it's success has resulted from the work of many other folks. I just put their data, ideas and words on paper. It was a "fun" assignment and I was lucky to get it.

By 1996, I'd already decided to retire in 1998, a year early. The minimal annual pay increases and the stress of "re-org" had taken its toll on me and others, making the freedom of retirement more attractive than the slight

penalty for leaving at age 56. When I discussed this with Ruthe Badger and Division Administrator Steve Miller, I was offered another chance to make a significant contribution to Wisconsin's future resource management. Secretary George Meyer needed someone to assemble a team and prepare a report assessing issues affecting hunting, fishing and trapping in Wisconsin and develop strategic directions for the future. I readily accepted the assignment, put together a great inter-bureau team, wrote the document, helped get the Natural Resources Board to approve it and retired, July 6, 1998. That was fun too!

After retirement, I served about 5 years on the Dane County Conservation Congress delegation, three as County Chair. In that role I gained some different perspectives than while working for DNR. Over the years I also served as a director on 2 or 3 other conservation organizations in Dane County and was secretary/treasurer of the Sugar River Chapter of Ducks Unlimited for its first 15 years.

In July 2004, Billie and I bought a home in Verde Valley in the Town of Medary east of La Crosse. We moved to help our daughter care for our two grandkids, Will and Emma, but my goal was also to "escape" the rampant development and hustle & bustle around Verona and Madison. I convinced Billie to retire from her job with the Department of Health and Family Services that next January and we've been in "the valley" ever since.

I spend most of my time hunting, fishing, farming (we bought a 174 acre farm near Fennimore in Grant County in 1989), and reading.



Together, Billie and I also fly-fish, travel and golf; she also gardens and does leaded glass. We both miss our friends and neighbors, as well as our son and daughter-in-law back in the Madison area, but have been lucky to make some wonderful acquaintances by the "Big River".



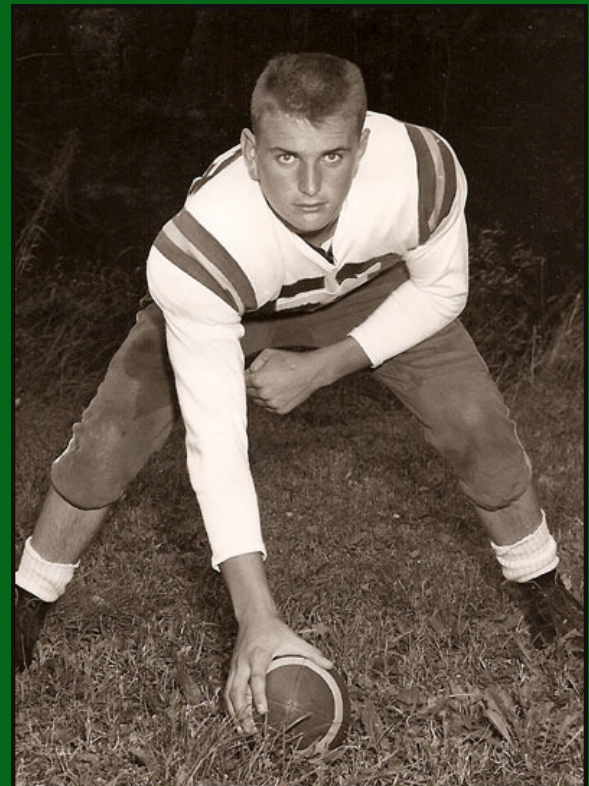
I love the Mississippi, Minnesota's trout streams and being able to hunt the 5 acres surrounding our house. Playing with the grandkids is pretty neat too. I periodically help the Upper Mississippi

Fish and Wildlife Refuge staff, take kids on nature walks in the La Crosse River marsh and do volunteer tax consultation for AARP, just to break the "monotony". Billie is president of a local garden club, hosts house guests from Europe and Asia and exhibits at a couple of art shows, plus entertaining the grandkids.

Although I was born in Oshkosh, at age 6, we moved to Markesan in Green Lake County where I graduated from high school in 1960.

I played football for the "Hornets", took college prep courses, was Senior Class president and learned to smoke and drink beer. Must have gotten some education too as I did pretty well at the universities.

Looking back, I believe there was never any real choice for me to make in selecting a career. Growing up I spent



many days on Lake Buttes des Morts at my Grandfather's home.

I can't remember when I wasn't "nuts" about ducks and hunting. As a 4th generation duck hunter, it was just a major part of my early life. Guess it was only natural I'd spend a good part of my career around ducks and other wildlife and their conservation and management. Fisheries Biologist Vern Hacker, a family friend, was also a role model for my choice of careers. Being a biologist was really a great job although I didn't realize it at the time. Later, when I was having a bad day in the district or region, I remembered those earlier times when all I worried about was whether the cannon net would go off and I'd catch some ducks to band. What kept me going were always the wonderful people I worked with, many who are now gone, but also many who I still consider close friends today. I was also quite lucky to have started in the waterfowl business when it was still "growing" and could work with and learn from all the "giants" throughout North America who are now legends in that field. Three times I was given a chance to leave Wisconsin, twice with other state conservation agencies and once with a university but always managed to talk myself into staying-it now seems like a good choice!

