

# Tom Busiahn

I'm working for the United States Fish and Wildlife Service now in our agency headquarters in Washington D.C., but 25 years ago I was right here or technically a few miles down the road in Old Odanah in the old St. Mary's school building where GLIFWC was headquartered then. It's very good to be back and to see so many old friends, many I haven't seen in a lot of years. We're about to go through generational change, I think, in leadership of some of these organizations.

I want to congratulate the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission for their record of 25 years of serving the tribal governments and the tribal members who are exercising their rights to hunt and fish. The Commission has provided that professional and competent service for the tribes that has really brought it to be one of the elite resource management agencies in the nation. It's recognized as such, and it's very good to see that it has established itself so well.

It's good to get together for something like this. I was really happy when I heard that this symposium was going to be held and to look back and see what lessons we can learn from the past. You saw in the video some of the tumultuous times that happened in the 1980s. We heard about the litigation and the very difficult negotiations that went on, and all of that is in our memories. Our paper that is associated with this session, we call it a success story because of the end result. I always like to look at results. What is the result of our work? The resource is healthy, as we heard this morning from Jon Gilbert and others, and the treaty right is being exercised in a responsible way. So the results are good and we can look back at the 25 years and say we've done some good work.

But I think we should also look ahead. What do the next 25 years bring? It's good to see that there are some young people here today, because I was serious, a new generation is coming on and a lot of the older folks will be leaving. The new generation of tribal leaders and harvesters needs to learn from what has gone before.

Now, when I look back to the early times of GLIFWC, I remember a day I was at Red Cliff working in my office as a tribal biologist. One morning, the phone rang and I picked it up and it was our new tribal attorney, Henry Buffalo, who just not too long before that graduated from the University of Wisconsin. And he says, "Tom I think we should try to get the tribes together and establish a Great Lakes Indian Fisheries Commission." And I said, "Henry, I've thought about that, but forget it, it will never work." But Henry persevered and we worked with the Red Cliff tribal chairman at that time, Tommy Joe Gordon, to bring the Lake Superior tribes together. The first organizational meeting of the Great Lakes Indian Fisheries Commission was held in April of 1982. That group got some money from the BIA through a 638 contract and hired its first staff then in 1982.

And now flash forward a little bit to January 1983. Again, I was sitting in my office at Red Cliff serving as a tribal biologist, and the news came out that there was a Circuit Court decision that reaffirmed the tribal rights in the inland areas of Wisconsin. And that was big news. And for those of us who were working in tribal resource management at that time, our lives were never the same again because they marshaled all the resources through the Voigt Intertribal Task Force to bring the tribes up to speed so that they could exercise rights and work with the state to have some capability to work with the state.

I went to work for the Great Lakes Indian Fisheries Commission later in 1983, and then in the spring of 1984 those organizations merged and became the Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission and so that's when I started working for the current organization.

Those are my recollections of those times and how it got together. The bottom line, again looking at results, is that tribal involvement through the commission and through the tribal government in resource management in the upper Great Lakes region has provided positive results for the resources, for the fish and wildlife population, for tribal members, but also for the whole community of folks who live in the upper Great Lakes region. These positive results also extend to non-Indians as well, because these systems and these populations are some of the best managed populations that I think we're going to see anywhere in the world, and that includes how well we understand them.

The tribes brought a different perspective, additional capabilities and a greater degree of accountability to the system. The tribes are always serving as the watchdog on the DNR and the DNR is always serving as the watchdog on the tribes. As a biologist working as a team we have put together, as I said, some of the best-management regimes for fish and wildlife I think anywhere in the world.

These resources certainly are still facing threats. Habitat loss, development, the legacy of logging and mining, invasive species and now climate change; all of these things are affecting the resources today and will continue to affect them over time. There's no lack of challenges even though they are well managed. The information that we have on the walleye populations, the deer populations and the lake trout will really help to confront these challenges as we move ahead into the next 25 years.

If we look ahead at the next 25 years, what challenges will we face? Can the tribes working with the State DNR, with the other conservation organizations and with the larger non-Indian community continue to provide benefits that are going to help anyone manage the resource as we look forward?

Some of the challenges that we'll face is that people are less and less connected with nature and with fish and wildlife. We sit in our air-conditioned homes and our kids are playing video games and we watch our cable TV. Maybe that's how we experience fishing is by watching a program on television. We need to maintain and build that connection with nature. And I know that GLIFWC has been working to raise that understanding and awareness and appreciation among young people for the outdoors, for the fish and wildlife and for the activities of harvest. We need to keep doing that and perhaps the Commission can actually expand that to beyond the tribal membership to help raise the general awareness around the whole region.

Protecting and restoring habitat is going to be a continual problem. In some cases the habitats in the upper Great Lakes are healing, but in other cases they're still being degraded. For example, development of the lakeshores by building and clearing lakeshores are affecting the spawning habitats. We need to help the habitats in order to confront climate change, which is upon us, and which is going to be a continuing issue.

So, I'll conclude by saying that the tribal governments, the tribal communities and the Commission have been a very positive influence in protecting and restoring the fish and wildlife of this area and in developing scientific understanding as well as bringing the traditional viewpoints that may have been lacking in resource management before. And the results are positive. Hopefully, we can keep that going in that direction for the next 25 years and for many generations beyond.

I'm very glad to be here. Thank you.