

A series of feature articles examine the diverse careers within the Department of Natural Resources. This month, learn of the work of District Fisheries Biologist Wayne Herndon.



We Are DNR

Wayne Herndon is motivated by curiosity. A Department of Natural Resources district fisheries biologist responsible for a string of counties along the Illinois River north of Havana, Herndon believes the most important word in any science career is “why.”

With 40 years of experience in the field, Herndon has had plenty of opportunities to go to great—and sometimes involved—lengths to answer this question.

Wayne Herndon credits growing up on the Illinois River as the motivation for his 40-year career as a DNR fisheries biologist.



“My schooling provided me the discipline of study and tools of knowledge necessary to function as a researcher and management biologist,” Herndon explained. “Being a field biologist means you are a detective, discovering problems in the environment, and then you put on the hat of a tactician and design a solution to the problem. Finally, you become the agent of change through applied management practices.”

Herndon attributes the Illinois River and his father, who grew up hunting and fishing the river bottoms, as the driving forces behind his decision to pursue a natural resources career.

“Back in the 1920s and 1930s, the Illinois River was a much different waterway,” said Herndon. “It had the reputation of being the most productive fish and game resource of all the rivers in the United States, and for providing more than 100 years of hunting and fishing traditions for the families who grew up in its watershed. I was inducted into this society at a very young age.”

Like other district fisheries biologists, Herndon’s work day may find him sampling the waters of his district, responding to the immediate crisis of a fish kill, recording data on his computer or formulating strategies for lake management.

Forty years of posing questions and observing changes—both on the Illinois landscape and within our society—have not dampened Herndon’s curiosity.

“In hindsight, I would have taken more humanities courses in college,” Herndon said. “We are truly becoming a global society and as resource managers it is necessary that we better appreciate other resources and societies, and that we are effective communicators. As world trade expands, exotic animals and plants move with cargos around the world. We need to better communicate with our trade partners the hazards that result from this movement.”

“But, most importantly,” Herndon concluded, “I’ve learned that you need to be patient. Most answers to the question ‘why’ are found only after time has elapsed.”



Career Track

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