

Gone Fishing

Sometimes talkers make the best companions.

BY GEORGE VUKELICH

The best part of going fishing with a lot of folks is that they just sit there in the boat and don't talk. The best part of going fishing with Bud Jordahl is that he just doesn't sit there.

Harold C. (Bud) Jordahl is a former member and chairman of the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board and a recently retired professor of regional planning at the UW-Extension. He also knows his way around the political thicket. He worked closely with Gov. (then-senator) Gaylord Nelson on environmental issues, and the feeling up at the American Legion Bar is that the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore wouldn't have been created without him.

We were sitting in Bud Jordahl's boat the other day, and we got to talking about the prospect for mining up in the north country in view of the fact that the DNR has declared that mining could be carried out without posing the threat to the environment that some opponents say it would.

I reminded him that we had this same conversation for the Capital Times way back in the halcyon summer of 1977, and he had said then the state of Wisconsin was "overmatched" against the corporate giants. He smiled as he brought in a bass. "Since then," he said, "the state took local control of mining away from the people. Now some people wonder what side the state is on in this 'match.'"

Bud kept fishing, his windburned face a dead ringer for that of another serious professor of deep waters, Norman MacLean, who wrote the legendary *A River Runs Through It*.



"I've argued for 17 years," Bud Jordahl said back in 1977, "as an official of Wisconsin state government, then later with the Department of the Interior and with the Upper Great Lakes Regional Commission, that we should make much greater investments in terms of knowing what natural resources we have, both on the surface and below the surface."

"With that knowledge, the government, the people are in a much better position to respond to an Exxon, for example, when Exxon comes in and indicates that they've discovered copper and zinc and other minerals in Forest County."

"Now we have no way of knowing what they've discovered. We have no real idea of the magnitude, the value of the land and all the other things that are associated with extracting those resources."

The mining decisions today are still made in the privacy of the corporate boardroom, Jordahl said, the same way decisions were made in the old days when iron ore was mined in northern Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan. All those decisions to mine were made by private corporations, and after all the mines closed up, the local economies were left in dire economic straits. Boom and bust.

Bringing in a bass, Bud Jordahl observed, 'the state has taken local control of mining away from the people.'

"I think the government should have intervened in that process," Jordahl said. "We should have planned the extraction of iron ore in an orderly fashion across those three states. We should have planned in such a way that mining operations could have moved sequentially, geographically."

Jordahl believes that if the state had possessed such a plan in the old days, the mining of iron ore could have continued over a much longer period of time without disrupting the lives of thousands of miners and their northern communities. The Catch-22 is that it's hard to come up with such a plan until you know what's down there in the soil, in the basements, far below the abodes of Prof. Francis Hole's beloved nematodes and springtails.

Because the state of Wisconsin has no inventory of minerals in its own soil, it is at a disadvantage. The mining corporations, through aeromagnetic surveys and samplings, have a much

better idea of what's down there. In effect, the state and DNR wind up playing cards with the mining corporation's deck.

Jordahl lauds the dedicated professionals who are providing the state with more information about its resources than it used to have: Tom Evans of the Geologic and Natural History Survey, minerals geologist Mike Mudry, and Bert Dickes, professor of

geology at UW-Superior, an expert on gas and oil reserves in the Bayfield Peninsula rift. They're all good people, Jordahl says, but there's no way the state can develop parity of knowledge with the multinationals, because the state is not willing to make the financial investment that a mineral inventory requires—and that the multinationals make.

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"The people are standing up to the corporations and the state," he notes. "At the DNR hearings up in Ladysmith on the proposed Kennecott copper mining south and west of the Flambeau River, 300 local people showed up and sat for over a week, listening! These aren't ring-tailed radicals. These are local people. Something's happening up north. Go find out." ■

"It's not just copper," Jordahl says, "but other mineral resources as well. I'm confident that in the years ahead, we will continue to discover metallic resources underneath that 400 to 600 feet of glacial till that covers the Precambrian rock in northern Wisconsin. The problem is we don't know what's down there. Government doesn't know. Society doesn't know. So we can't plan for it."

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