

Rich Bishop

After the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service published the Restoration and Compensation Determination Plan (RCDP) in October 2000, David Allen and Rich Bishop led five public hearings to explain the results and defend against complaints from George Meyer and the paper companies. It was a two-hour drive from Green Bay to Escanaba, Michigan for one of the hearings. Allen took the more scenic route along the bay on Route 35. Bishop, the lead economist on the case, was head of the Agricultural Economics Department at UW-Madison and one of the best, and best-known, natural resource economists in the country.

Bishop had famously published peer-reviewed studies comparing how much money Wisconsin waterfowl hunters said they'd accept to surrender their hunting licenses, versus how much money they actually accepted. Their answers tracked with their actions, proving that such "stated preference" studies can be reliable tools. Superfund defendants seemed always to hate stated preference economics studies, probably because they're the only way to measure many public losses. Eliminating this kind of study from damage assessments eliminates whole categories of damages, a fact not lost on many Superfund defendants. Allen was pretty sure it irritated Bishop that Wisconsin was helping the paper companies make these arguments, despite Bishop's seeming unflappability. Bishop was now Allen's enthusiastic partner in explaining the merits of the Green Bay work and the technical weaknesses of George Meyer's complaints in his December letter to the editor.

Bishop and Allen had been working together for years, but their early relationship had begun a bit awkwardly. Allen had tried to hire him back in August 1992 through the university, but government attorneys and Bishop had each worried about the university having too much control over the timing and confidentiality of studies to meet the needs of a legal team preparing for litigation. Bishop had had extensive experience already as an expert on other damage assessments, including an infamous DDT case involving Montrose Chemical Corp. in Los Angeles.

Economics work on the Green Bay case was ultimately delayed for several years. Hagler Bailly then brought Bishop under its own subcontract — even before Fish and Wildlife hired Hagler Bailly. Bob Rowe, then the head of Hagler Bailey's Boulder office and a famous natural resource economist himself, had bragged to Allen that his company now "owned" Bishop. It had irritated Allen, but it was a savvy move. Allen had not wanted to lose access to Bishop. He was that good, and he was from Wisconsin.

Four years after the initial discussions with Bishop and the university, Allen had finally brought him on board under a Hagler Bailly contract. The long wait was worth it. Bishop and Rowe knew what they were doing, and Allen had since built a solid relationship with Rowe. However, the drive now from Green Bay to Escanaba was the longest Bishop and Allen had ever spent alone, and they had never discussed the earlier cancellation of the university research agreement.

After a while, Bishop, who was now working as Allen's consultant, asked if Allen had heard the tale of the city slicker and the dairy farmer. Bishop was an entertaining speaker, moving easily between the academic air of a full professor to the folksy charm of an avid Wisconsin hunter and angler. Allen was happy to hear his tale, even if it was just to help pass the time. Bishop began:

"Well, a dairy farmer down in Dane County was repairing a fence along a country road when a passing BMW slowed to a stop. The driver lowered his window and shouted to the farmer, 'Hey, I have a proposition for you. If I can tell you exactly how many cows you have, will you give me

one?' The farmer nodded, so the city slicker jumped out of the car — wearing an Italian suit, fine leather shoes, and designer sunglasses — and opened the trunk. He pulled out a laptop and a satellite antenna, downloaded GIS data and maps, ran a couple of algorithms, printed out a glossy report, then proclaimed, 'You have exactly 1,214 cows.' The surprised farmer confirmed the number, so the city slicker claimed his prize. The farmer chuckled, then offered his own proposition. He said, 'Listen, I'll bet all my cows against your car that I can tell you your exact profession. Interested?' The city slicker agreed. 'You're a consultant,' said the farmer confidently. 'How'd you know?' asked the city slicker. 'Well, you showed up here without an invitation, demanded pay for an answer I already knew to a question I never asked, and you don't know anything about my work.' Now, pointing at the car and chuckling again, he said, 'Let my dog out of the trunk and hand over your keys.'"

Allen laughed heartily, though he'd always seen this kind and approachable man as just the opposite of an unwelcome city slicker. Allen was also honored. The great professor was somehow intimating that Allen, like the farmer in his tale, or even Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, had possessed the power to accomplish his task all along. They needn't talk about the awkward past. It was time to look ahead and focus on explaining the RCDP at the next public meeting in their travels throughout Wisconsin and Michigan.