

INSIDE



TAKE AIM WITH ARCHERY!

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Where there's
SMOKE...

Sky high with DNR pilots
Shore fishing pointers
Meet the chairman of the board

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Phil Miller

BACK COVER: The wood lily (*Lilium philadelphicum*) is a resident of the stabilized dunes at Jackson Harbor Ridges State Natural Area on Washington Island in Door County. **INSET:** Jackson Harbor Ridges. For more information, or to order a guidebook to State Natural Areas for \$18.00 (postage paid), contact the State Natural Areas Program, Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation, DNR, P.O. Box 7921, Madison, WI 53707 or visit dnr.wi.gov and search "SNA."
Thomas A. Meyer, DNR

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BRINGING DIVERSITY,
TRANSPARENCY AND
CUSTOMER SERVICE TO THE
FOREFRONT OF MANAGING
NATURAL RESOURCES.

Natural Resources Board Chairman Preston Cole

Marcus Smith

Preston Cole was raised on 15 acres in southwestern Michigan. Living in a farming community it was expected that he would join the Benton Harbor High School Future Farmers of America. And he did. His first conservation teachings came from his parents who told him that he should leave this planet in better shape than he found it. Their message stuck and led him to the University of Missouri where he studied agriculture before moving into the school's Forestry, Fisheries and Wildlife program, graduating with a forestry management degree in 1987.

For over 20 years, Cole has worked for the city of Milwaukee in a variety of positions — City Forester, Environmental Services Superintendent and his current position as Director of Operations for the Department of Public Works (DPW).

He hunts ducks, geese and pheasants, and enjoys hiking the state park system with his wife, Laura.

Meet Preston Cole, chairman of the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board (NRB).

Cole has been an NRB member since August 2007. At the urging of colleagues, he ran for and was elected the NRB's first African-American chairman in January 2013. On May 28, 2013, Gov. Scott Walker reappointed him to a six-year term. In announcing the reappointment, Gov. Walker cited Cole's "knowledge and depth of experience" as making him "uniquely qualified to continue serving the state of Wisconsin on the board."

Cole values transparency and has been a strong advocate for using social media, webcasts (live broadcasts) and videotaping NRB meetings to inform the public on issues facing the Department

of Natural Resources and the board. The meetings are archived so people can watch them as their schedules allow.

Cole says now that NRB meetings are webcast, people watch the meetings, "because the board is on the record, and people really want to hear about issues that are going on that impact them, whether it's hunting, fishing, forestry, air or water rules."

He believes that taped NRB meetings "offer a wonderful opportunity to shed insight on the process about how the board works as the policy-making organization."

Supporting the use of social media is a natural offshoot of his duties at the city of Milwaukee, where he championed using social media as part of the DPW's communication strategies to increase awareness of public works programs and weather-related emergency operations.

"It's important to me — through any means necessary — to open up what the Natural Resources Board is responsible for, what we are challenged to do, and how the residents can use it to voice their opinions

on issues that concern them," he says.

Whether it's the department or the NRB, customer service and "solutions-based management" are just as important to him as transparency. He believes the public's concerns and problems should be resolved in a timely manner and "not taking a long bureaucratic process to let them know what the rules are whether it's air, water or the rules that we issue."

He says the department is "doing a yeoman's job of continuing to look for ways to provide service excellence to its constituencies. We should be steadfast, we should be thoughtful and we should be open about what it is we need to do, whether it affects their business or their backyard."

During his time at the city of Milwaukee, Cole has worked on several "greening activities" such as the Greening Milwaukee Schools program that involved summertime playground conditions.

DPW staff visited about 16 schools where they discovered that many of the schools had paved over their playgrounds.

"Youngsters in Milwaukee were playing on hot asphalt and during the summertime those temperatures were well in excess of 115 degrees. It also increased storm water into an already overburdened system," Cole recalls. "The Green-

Preston Cole chairs the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board, which sets policy for the Department of Natural Resources and exercises authority and responsibility in accordance with governing state laws.

BEN PIERSON



Preston Cole was appointed to the NRB on Aug. 17, 2007 and reappointed by Gov. Scott Walker on May 28, 2013.

MARCUS SMITH



To learn more about the NRB, find its calendar of meetings or to watch a webcast of a meeting, visit dnr.wi.gov and search keyword "NRB."

BEN PIERSON

ing Milwaukee Schools program was a partnership with Milwaukee Public Schools where we would excavate asphalt and plant trees and use it as outdoor education for a science curriculum and get kids toiling in the soil and understanding the impact of their environment, so we can produce another generation of young stewards, while at the same time improving the community in which they live."

The window sill in Cole's office is crowded with awards and mementoes from his conservation work, civic engagement and volunteerism. One award he's proudest of, is receiving the National Urban Forester's Medal of Honor in 1992.

Cole was the first African-American to graduate from the University of Missouri with a degree in forestry management in 1987. That fact was not lost on him and he set out to find ways to remedy that.

Cole organized a diversity in urban forestry program that was able to "find ways to encourage men and women of color to enter into a curriculum through their course work and open up jobs for people at all levels in urban forestry, specifically people of color."

He "hosted a national discussion" that

resulted in significant policy changes relative to how the U.S. Forest Service deals with and recruits urban foresters into their program. The result was a forestry curriculum at Southern University and A&M College, a historically black college in Baton Rouge, La.

Working with the university, the Forest Service awards scholarships to students who graduate with degrees in urban forestry management or urban forestry and research, to assist them as they pursue a Master of Science and conduct research around urban communities. Cole believes that national discussion "became kind of a spark for the rest of the urban forestry community to have that open and honest discussion, because the forestry community does not represent what the rest of America looks like."

Cole wants to connect nontraditional audiences with opportunities to get outdoors. Take for example his volunteer work with the Urban Ecology Center.

Ken Leinbach, executive director of the Urban Ecology Center, says, "Preston Cole has been a longtime supporter of our work at the Urban Ecology Center in the various roles he has held in Milwaukee. Our efforts to get urban kids exposed to the natural world fits closely with his

personal ethic as shown by his career path. As a successful African-American man in the conservation field, Preston is the perfect role model for the students that we serve."

"Seeing how those kids are engaged begins to lay the foundation for those children becoming stewards of the environment," says Cole. "I think what the Urban Ecology Center is doing as an organization — and organizations like the Urban Ecology Center — are so important, so that these children understand the natural environment in which they live."

Several years ago he submitted a question in the Wisconsin Conservation Congress spring hearing questionnaire: "With youth declining in outdoor activities, should the WCC establish a Youth Conservation Congress?"

The question passed in 69 counties and 13 youth delegates attended the May 2013 Wisconsin Conservation Congress statewide meeting.

"This shows how the board and the congress work together to look to the future of hunting, fishing and trapping," Cole says. "The youth congress will serve as a sounding board for attracting more youth to outdoor activities. The advice we get from these committed young stewards will undoubtedly assist the department, Natural Resources Board and Wisconsin Conservation Congress in developing strategies that keep our youth engaged."

When asked to describe what he views as qualities he brings to the NRB as chairman, Cole says, "I continue to count on things like collaboration, leadership, and of course, being a conservationist with a forestry management background."

He believes his "conservation approach to things in resource management" will serve him in good stead on the board.

"I think I can add some value not only in breadth but in scope in terms of issues that impact our resources," he says.

DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp says, "Preston is a chairman to model. He is thoughtful and understands the importance of the Natural Resources Board. His commitment to what is in the best interest of Wisconsin's citizens and our natural resources are what make him a perfect fit for this very important position. His advice and observations are priceless." ❧

Marcus Smith is the DNR's Southeast Wisconsin public affairs manager.