

Panel should aid conservation

The formation of a new panel of sorts may mean better cooperation between conservationists and the legislature in matters concerned with wildlife and natural resources.

As this column has believed for years, the members of the legislature over the years have shown a marked disregard for some matters involved in natural and wildlife resources.

Occasionally the legislature has done some good things for these important elements, but they have been the exception, rather than the rule. In short, we (the conservationists) can't always count our chickens before they are hatched. We still can't do that, but maybe we are getting closer.

The old organization was Fish and Wildlife Conservation Committee. It was/is made up of individuals from conservation groups in the state and employees of the Department of Natural Resources.

The big rub was/is the fact that members of this panel can't be involved because of obvious political concerns when consideration of some real meaty issues



'Bayou' Bill Scifres
OUTDOORS

is at hand. At quarterly meetings, Department of Natural Resources representatives simply did not participate. It's cumbersome, and this condition eliminates some fine minds.

To circumvent this situation, a new organization was formed, Fish and Wildlife Action Committee, a group that embraces the organizations of the conservation committee but not those who are DNR employees.

So now the action committee and the conservation committee meet separately without fear of political reprisal from the DNR's political brass.

The newly formed action committee is co-chaired by John Goss, a former DNR director

who was a political victim when a new governor was elected and who now serves as president of the Indiana Wildlife Federation, and Jack Corpuz, Indiana president of Pheasants Forever.

Currently, the membership of the new action committee is about the same as the conservation committee, not counting the DNR reps. This may, or may not, change in the future. It all depends on the thinking of members. I can see how greater representation might both help and hinder the cause.

However, no matter how that goes in the future, the formation of the action committee seems to be a step that was long overdue. Time alone will tell the story.

Pileated woodpecker

I have had the opportunity this winter to observe pileated woodpeckers at close range, and at least one of the three birds I have seen has thrown me for a coloration loop that is baffling.

One bird I see, the sexes are look-alikes, has the beautiful black body. But it seems a strange feather starts at about the point on the

side where the wing joins the body. It is about a half-inch wide and runs down to the tail. It may only cover the body.

It is a pale maroon, not red and not brown. It contrasts with the black well.

It makes me wonder if this color occurs only occasionally or if my close encounters simply make it visible. Perhaps it has been observed by others.

Who's running whom?

An out-of-state gun interest is trying to round up Hoosier front-enders to get more loads added to what they will probably get at the next Conservation Commission meeting.

It seems to me that muzzle-loader enthusiasts already are getting more than shotgunners and that our guys are handling this issue well (without their "help.")

"Bayou" Bill Scifres' outdoors column appears Saturdays in the Daily Journal. Comments can be sent to P.O. Box 699, Franklin, IN 46131.

Toyota set to make its NASCAR debut

By JENNA FRYER
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.

As Kasey Kahne navigated through traffic Friday at Daytona (Fla.) International Speedway, he couldn't quite recognize all the competition.

"Who's that in the 44?" Kahne radioed about the car three spots in front of him.

Meet Dale Jarrett, the 1999 Cup champion and new Toyota driver.

After a year of buildup, the Japanese automaker will make its highly anticipated debut tonight in the Budweiser Shootout.

There are two Camrys in the 21-car exhibition event, and Jarrett will lead them to the green flag after earning the pole in a blind draw.

"I'm excited to see what we have," said Jarrett, who won't be behind the wheel of the No. 88 Ford for the first time in 10 years. "I'll be glad to finally get into those race conditions to see where we stack up and see how

we can compete. How much work do we have to do? Or how little do we have to do?"

That's the pressing question in the Nextel Cup garage, where everyone is expected to tune in to check out the competition.

Because the Shootout is an all-star event for 2006 pole winners and past event winners, Jarrett and Brian Vickers are the only two drivers from Toyota's seven-car fleet participating.

"It's the first entry of a non-American manufacturer, so it's going to be an historical day," Dodge car owner Ray Evernham said. "And it's one more thing to pay attention to. They are the new competition, and everyone will want to see what they've got."

Based on Friday's two practice sessions, it's not totally clear how the Camrys will run. Jarrett was in the middle of the pack on the speed chart, but Vickers was all the way at the bottom, close to five mph off of Denny Hamlin's fast lap of 189.745 mph.

But that's OK for Toyota offi-

cial, who aren't all that worried about the Shootout. As far as they're concerned, the non-points event is nothing more than extra preparation time for the season-opening Daytona 500.

Dave Blaney and Jarrett, based on his past champion's provisional, are the only two Toyota drivers assured of making the 500 field, so Toyota is taking every chance it can get to gain information it can carry-over into qualifying.

Andy Graves, director of Toyota's Cup program, has been in this position before: He helped start Chip Ganassi's NASCAR program in 2001, the same year Dodge re-entered the Cup series. Bill Elliott ran a Dodge in the Shootout, then won the pole for 500, and Sterling Marlin drove his Dodge to a victory in a later qualifying event.

"The biggest thing I know from the past and starting a new program is it was big to be in the Shootout as far as the information we were able to gather," Graves said. "We're going to be able to collect a lot of data and feedback that

all the teams can use. So we're absolutely grateful to have even one car in the race, let alone two."

Graves said the two Camrys also will be out to "earn some respect on the racetrack, with both the competition and the fans."

Right now, Jarrett would settle for some within the industry.

Because he's with a new team and didn't carry any points into this season, his spot in the garage pecking order is near the bottom of the list.

It meant the former champion had to park his team hauler in the truck garage, a five-minute walk from the hustle and bustle of the Nextel Cup epicenter.

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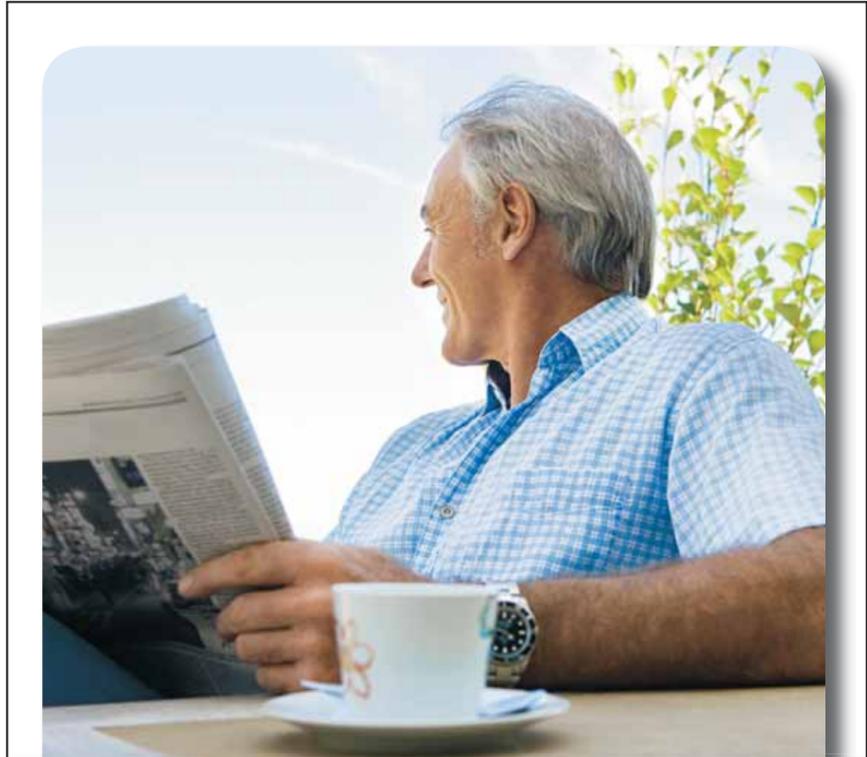
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