

Walking the talk

Persell models stewardship of the environment

By SUSAN HEGARTY

Rep. John Persell (DFL-Bemidji) was content with his 30-year career as an environmental policy analyst, but something President



Rep. John Persell

Ronald Reagan did upset him. Rather than get mad, he's now ready to get even.

In 1986, Reagan took solar panels off the roof of the White House that Jimmy Carter put up. "I became very frustrated," Persell said. So in the 1990s, he began his political involvement, garnering all 87 votes to become a Frohn Township board supervisor.

Persell said people have digressed from stewardship of the environment during the past 50 years. However, he is happy with progress made regarding the treatment of

mercury as a toxic substance. "Minnesota began to lead the way, much to their credit."

He serves as vice chairman of the House Environment and Natural Resources Finance Division and is pleased to be a member of the House Environment Policy and Oversight Committee. "I've been involved in policy, particularly environmental quality policy. That's been my career for 30 plus years with tribal government."

Also a member of the House Energy Finance and Policy Division, he is insistent about the need to develop renewable energy sources. "We have to have sustainable management. It's not just a use it or lose it kind of mentality," he said.

He walks the talk, too. Persell lives on six acres in Bemidji and produces 60 percent of his own residential electricity from the wind turbine in his yard, the only one of its kind in Beltrami County.

DISTRICT 4A

Population: (2007 est.) 36,836

Largest City: Bemidji

Counties: Beltrami, Cass, Itasca

Top Concern: Sustainability of the environment

An avid outdoorsman and member of the House Game, Fish and Forestry Division, Persell fishes and hunts deer for food, and he cleans his own catch. He said he's sympathetic to proposed legislation that would ban lead bullets, which proponents say may be harmful to wildlife who ingest the lead shot from discarded carcasses.

Though he doesn't serve on education committees, the father of three and grandfather of six also supports early childhood education. "It pays us back 12:1 for every dollar we invest." As a Greater Minnesota representative, he added, "We need to restructure the education funding formula so that rural districts get their cut."