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Title

Bettoli Retires after Years of Work Dedicated to the Wise Use, Conservation and Management of Fisheries Resources

Investigator

PI: Phil Bettoli

Funding

\$5.1 million in external funding earned throughout his career



After more than three decades of work dedicated to the wise use, conservation and management of fisheries resources, Dr. Phil Bettoli, biology professor and assistant unit leader of the U.S. Geological Survey's Tennessee Cooperative Fishery Research Unit (TCFRU), has retired. His fisheries career has produced a remarkable \$5.1 million in externally funded research projects designed to help conserve sport fish, threatened and endangered species and ensure that the state's thriving fish industry is healthy and sustainable.

Bettoli has handed over all of his research projects, including work on Asian carp, to the new TCFRU leader, Dr. Mark Rogers, who came to Tennessee Tech from the Great Lakes Science Center. Dr. Amanda Rosenberg—with a background in malacology, which is the study of mollusks—is taking over the work of former TCFRU Unit Leader Dr. Jim Layzer, who retired around three years ago and worked closely with Bettoli to preserve the state's aquatic populations for almost 15 years.

Even though he's officially retired, Bettoli says he's still been very busy, as he remains a part-time employee with the university. "I've submitted two papers that were accepted this year and am working on two book chapters. I'm also helping train the new Unit leaders and their students."

Throughout his career, Bettoli mentored 59 master's students, which is a figure well above the average numbers of students advised by most faculty. He attributes this to the graduate student support from the Center for the Management, Utilization and Protection of Water Resources when he first came on board.

"I took full advantage of the opportunities I had at that time to work with many students," Bettoli said. A thriving fisheries research program that graduated students ready to work in the field was the result of these opportunities.

Bettoli is proud that a majority of the students produced by the TCFRU and the Water Center have gone on to be managers of wildlife areas like the Smoky Mountain streams and other aquatic habitats throughout the state and nation.

"I can write thousands of papers," Bettoli said, "but to produce that many people who can go on to carry out our work in the real world is the main way to promote fisheries research."

Frank Fiss, a former staff member of the TCFRU, is now Chief of Fisheries at the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. Bobby Wilson is the Assistant Director of TWRA. Jason Henegar is the Assistant Fisheries Chief of TWRA, and Tim Churchill is the Chief of the Real Estate Division at TWRA.

Wilson, Henegar, and Churchill are also all products of the TCFRU and/or Water Center.

"I'm the luckiest guy in the world to have gotten to work with this quality of students just starting out with the TCFRU and Water Center," Bettoli said. "I have been so supported by TTU and the Water Center, and without the Center and the Department of Biology, I couldn't have achieved half of what I've done. I've gotten to experience some of the most collegial relationships in the country while working at TTU."

But Bettoli also says that his work has not been without its challenges. "It's always hard trying to juggle people and budgets, especially when you have to ensure that students maintain funding for the two to three years required to earn their degrees."

And managing federal, state and university obligations was also challenging. Bettoli was an employee of the federal TCFRU but also maintained status as a Tennessee Tech faculty.

Bettoli says that there are 42 other cooperatives like the TCFRU around the country. Missouri was the first to be developed. The co-ops bring federal resources and expertise to help universities and states meet challenges. All the staff in the co-ops are composed of Ph.D. holders who maintain all the rights and privileges of tenured faculty within their respective university.

As a faculty member, Bettoli—who earned his doctorate in wildlife and fisheries science from Texas A&M, his master's in biology from Tennessee Tech, and his bachelor's in wildlife ecology from the University of Maine—published 83 peer-reviewed papers and book chapters and 58 final reports. He was also a co-winner of Tennessee Tech's prestigious Donald Caplenor Outstanding Faculty Research Award in 2007.

But in 2013, Bettoli achieved what he feels was the culmination of his extensive career. He was inducted into the American Fisheries Society's Fisheries Management Section's Hall of Excellence. His plaque is on display in Nebraska.

On winning this honor, Bettoli remarked, "My motto is to surround yourself with people who bring out the best in you and that you bring out the best in them."

Bettoli says that there is still a lot of external funding available in fisheries research.

"The commercial and sport fishing industry in Tennessee is very viable," Bettoli said. "There's a lot of work to be done, and the TCFRU is positioned in good hands to carry on the research we've already established."

Last edited 2018.02.06 by Hill, Amy.