

**Robert Barham, Secretary
Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF)**

Robert Barham, a life-long resident of Oak Ridge, served as a State Senator for Louisiana's 33rd District from 1994 to 2008.

Barham's public service began when he was elected mayor of the town of Oak Ridge in 1982. He served in that capacity until 1988 and then as a councilman for Oak Ridge from 1989 to 1994. He also served in the U.S. Army from 1970 to 1972.

From 1973 through 1994, Barham supervised family farming operations in northeast Louisiana that included corn, cotton, rice and soybean production, as well as timber production and raising cattle.

He and his wife, Melba, have three children: Robert, Jr., a teacher at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; Rebecca, an attorney in Baton Rouge; and Henry, a third year medical student at Louisiana State University-Shreveport.

Secretary Barham has been a member of LWF since 2000 and a Sponsor member since 2004. He has been a friend of conservation in during his years at the Legislature, working to establish the Black Bayou Lake National Wildlife Refuge and to protect and conserve Louisiana's native box turtles and alligator snapping turtle for which he was recognized by the LWF as Conservation Legislator of the Year in 2000. He also authored legislation establishing the Louisiana Prescribed Fire Council and sponsored or coauthored other conservation-oriented bills and resolutions. He is a farmer and sportsman, managing his forest and farmland in Morehouse Parish for wildlife, timber, cattle, food and fiber. He has served on the Board of Directors of the Louisiana Nature Conservancy, has been a strong advocate in the Legislature of acquiring and conserving wildlife habitat, and is a co-chair, along with LWF friend and member Senator Joe McPherson, of the Louisiana Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus. Senator Barham has been a person LWF could count on to carry good conservation legislation and we look forward to continuing that cooperative relationship as he leads the Louisiana Department of Wildlife & Fisheries.

Senator Robert J. Barham – 1999 Conservation Legislator of the Year

In addition to the essential role of representing their constituent's views at the State Capitol and providing leadership on state policy and fiscal matters, legislators have the opportunity to introduce bills to respond to issues brought to their attention by individual citizens in their districts. Thus began the involvement of Louisiana State Senator Robert J. Barham of Oak Ridge in conserving the state's native box turtles. When Barham was approached by Bastrop residents and amateur herpetologists Martha Ann Messinger and George M. Patton, he was not aware of the decline of Louisiana's 3 native box turtles or the complete lack of laws and rules to provide for their management and protect them from extinction. Working with these two constituents and the Louisiana Wildlife Federation, Barham introduced legislation to prohibit the sale of box turtles and limit the harvest and possession of wild box turtles for personal pets.

According to Senator Barham, the "turtle bill" took on a life of its own as dozens of letters and e-mails poured in to legislators and the governor, not only from Louisiana citizens, but from people all over the country and other parts of the world. The bill became the conservation highlight of the legislative session, ultimately passing without dissent. Even Governor Foster, not much on ceremony, took the time to schedule a photo session when he signed the bill, Act 81 of the 1999 Regular Session, in the company of Barham, Messinger, Patton and LWF President Kathy Wascom.

Act 81 will have far reaching impact on box turtles in other states as well as Louisiana, as it will no longer be possible to smuggle box turtles out of states where commercial harvest is illegal under the ruse that they originated in Louisiana. From January 1995 through December 1998 a total of 29,896 box turtles were collected for the pet trade and shipped from Louisiana, most to die within the first year of capture. This law will ensure that future generations of Louisiana's children will be able to take a walk in the woods and view box turtles in their native habitat. This is the first time that Louisiana has ever afforded statutory protection for a kind of turtle, and Senator Barham's enthusiastic support in steering the bill through the legislative process was greatly responsible for its successful enactment into law.

As a member of the Senate Natural Resources Committee, Barham has been a strong supporter of conservation initiatives. In addition to the box turtle legislation, Senator Barham has sponsored bills to facilitate the establishment of the Black Bayou Lake Wildlife Refuge near Monroe. When not in Baton Rouge making laws, he practices conservation on the forest and farmland his family owns in North Louisiana.