

BUSTER BIRD MADE HIS MARK AS A FLOAT PLANE OPERATOR

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Buster Bird has seen and done a great many things in his 89 years, but will best be remembered for his flying. His float plane service was well-established when I arrived on the scene in 1958.

Brother Hody gave Buster a ride in his plane and started the ball rolling. Hody and some other locals had formed a flying club and Hody borrowed \$500 from C. J. Strife to buy a plane. When he asked Mr. Strife if he wanted him to sign any papers for the loan, he received the typical stock answer: "If your word is no good, your paper isn't either."

Buster's difficulty in mastering the controls when Hody let him try flying for the first time insured his success. He was so "damn mad at myself I decided I was going to learn, no matter what."

The rest soon became history and Buster started the present business on Sixth Lake. Much of the early business was flying hunting and fishing parties into the back country. With plenty of both fish and game in those days and all state-owned lakes legal access points, business was brisk.

Much of that has changed with present regulations prohibiting landing on all of the wilderness areas. Today, it's shank's mare or nothing, with much of the area either being under-utilized or not used at all.

Fish stocking was another area that cannot be duplicated by any other means. Many of the same lakes have been successfully limed by air. In the winter, shoveling remote camp roofs and transporting building supplies were viable options.

Buster and many of the other operators used their planes to trap or transport other trappers and their equipment to their bases. This was a service Bus provided for me on a couple of occasions.

Many of the larger landowners found similar uses for the float plane in the operation of their private preserves.

I became acquainted with Bus through my work as a forest ranger. Fire detection was most often the activity that brought the float plane operators and the ranger force together. This was usually an adjunct to their regular activities and a free service to the state and public. On those occasions when

suitable water was available in close enough proximity to the fire, the real benefits were derived. The planes saved both time and money ferrying heavy equipment and men to the fire scene.

Search and rescue brought the operators and all state and local emergency units together. The assistance, usually free, was donated to help lost and injured people. Innumerable people have been spared hours and days of pain, suffering, and even death, because of this dedication. In my experience, every request for help was answered willingly with no questions asked as to whether remuneration was forthcoming or not.

To make a long story short, the public has derived untold benefit over the years from the float plane operators. In my humble opinion, the benefits far outweigh the very limited and questionable benefits derived from denying access to many of our otherwise unutilized resources.