

## *R.W. Peterson, Leader on Environment, Dies at 94*

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By Douglas Martin

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Russell W. Peterson, who helped develop Dacron as a DuPont research scientist before becoming a champion of environmentalism as governor of Delaware, a White House adviser and president of the National Audubon Society, died Monday at his home in Wilmington, Del. He was 94.

He suffered a stroke a few hours before he died, his daughter, Elin P. Sullivan, said.

Mr. Peterson, who had a Ph.D. in chemistry, worked for 26 years for the DuPont Company, rising to lead its research and development division, before entering politics after working with a citizens' group for prison reform.

As a one-term Republican governor from 1969 to 1973, he ignored the opposition of DuPont and other companies and pushed through a law to protect the state's coastline from industrial development.

The immediate victim of Governor Peterson's Coastal Zone Act was the Shell Oil Company, which was stopped from building a \$200 million refinery. He rallied environmentalists by wearing a lapel button saying "To hell with Shell."

He took a more nuanced approach when Maurice H. Stans, secretary of commerce in the Nixon administration, summoned him to Washington to complain that the coastal protection law threatened the nation's prosperity and security. Mr. Peterson answered with a dozen ways the heavy industries in question might achieve their purposes without destroying Delaware's 28 miles of relatively clean coast.

His answers were apparently persuasive enough that President Richard M. Nixon appointed him chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, a post he continued to hold under President Gerald R. Ford after Nixon resigned.

Mr. Peterson helped lead a task force whose work contributed to the global phase-out of chlorofluorocarbons, the organic chemicals widely used as refrigerants that contribute to depletion of the ozone. The best-known fluorocarbon is Freon, a DuPont product.

In addition to being the president's principal adviser on environmental policy, Mr. Peterson helped shape the extensive environmental reviews, known as environmental impact statements, that were mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1970.

As president of the National Audubon Society from 1979 to 1985, Mr. Peterson vigorously fought President Ronald Reagan's efforts to weaken enforcement of environmental regulations to help business. When Reagan said conservationists would not be happy until the White House was a "bird's nest," Mr. Peterson snapped back that it was already "a cuckoo's nest."



Russell W. Peterson in 1979 led the National Audubon Society. He had been a Delaware governor and a White House adviser. Joyce Dopkeen/The New York Times

Mr. Peterson pushed Audubon well beyond its traditional mission of protecting wildlife into newer environmental battles like population control, energy policy and curbing toxic chemicals. He hired more scientists, established an environmental curriculum for elementary schools and recruited Ted Turner to finance a film series, “The World of Audubon,” which used narrators like Robert Redford.

Mr. Peterson endorsed Jimmy Carter for president in 1980 and became a Democrat himself in 1996. His many roles in the environmental movement included being president of the International Council for Bird Preservation, now BirdLife International, and chairman of the Center on the Long-Term Biological Consequences of Nuclear War.

In a 1993 speech, Mr. Carter said, “Every time something wonderful has happened when I was president and since then in the field of environmental quality in this country or on a global basis, Russ Peterson has been intimately involved in it.”

Russell Wilbur Peterson, the eighth of nine children of a Swedish immigrant bartender and barber, was born on Oct. 3, 1916, in Portage, Wis. Unlike his brothers who dropped out of school, he was determined to get an education, and he worked as a dishwasher in the chemistry laboratory of the University of Wisconsin to pay his tuition.

After completing his doctorate in 1942, he accepted a job with DuPont in Wilmington. He was \$5,000 in debt to doctors and hospitals because his wife, the former Lillian Turner, had been seriously ill. Within five years, he had paid his bills and was climbing the ranks of DuPont, where he helped develop products like Dacron polyester fiber and nylon carpet yarn. He became director of research and development in 1963.

As governor, his first act was to order the National Guard to withdraw from Wilmington, where it had been since riots after the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination in April 1968. Mr. Peterson said the troops had bred “fear and suspicion and hate” among black people.

Mr. Peterson reorganized Delaware’s government, eliminating more than 100 commissions and boards; appointed the first blacks to the Delaware State Police; and eased restrictions on abortion. He was defeated after announcing an unexpected tax increase in the middle of his 1972 re-election campaign.

His interest in birding preceded his appointment as president of the Audubon Society in 1979. He had begun bird-watching after he took his young son to the Everglades 25 years earlier and they saw 75 kinds of birds in one day. By the time he took the Audubon job, he had identified nearly 1,000, a fine number for almost any birder.

Mr. Peterson's wife of 57 years, Lillian, died in 1994. In addition to their daughter Elin, he is survived by their sons, R. Glen and Peter J.; another daughter, Kristin P. Havill; 17 grandchildren; and 16 great-grandchildren. He is also survived by his wife of 15 years, the former June Jenkins.

Mr. Peterson was eloquent in discussing ambiguity and risk in setting government policies, pointing out, for example, that China eliminated sparrows, only to experience an unexpected increase in crop-eating insects.

But one law he demanded as governor permitted no parsing: under Russell Peterson's insistent leadership, Delaware in 1972 became the last state to outlaw the punishment of flogging.