

FOREST STEARNS

I FIRST MET FOREST IN 1961. HE HAD BEEN ASSIGNED TO RHINELANDER BY THE FOREST SERVICE FROM VICKSBURG, MS, WHERE HE HAD BEEN DOING ECOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE BOTTOMLAND HARDWOOD FORESTS OF WESTERN MISSISSIPPI. AT THE TIME I WAS WORKING FOR TREES FOR TOMORROW IN MERRILL HELPING PRIVATE NONINDUSTRIAL FOREST LANDOWNERS PRACTICE FORESTRY.

THE FOREST SERVICE EXPERIMENT STATION IN RHINELANDER HAD BEEN DEDICATED IN 1957 AND WAS CALLED THE NORTHERN INSTITUTE OF FOREST GENETICS. FOREST HAD BEEN GIVEN THE MISSION TO EXPLORE PLANT DIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY INTERACTIONS IN THE NORTHERN HARDWOOD AND TAIGA ASSOCIATIONS IN THE NORTHERN LAKE STATES. AT THE TIME FOREST WAS ASSIGNED TO THE INSTITUTE ALMOST ALL OF THE RESEARCH BEING CONDUCTED THERE CONCERNED THE IMPROVEMENT OF PINE, SPRUCE, AND BIRCH. FOREST'S WORK WOULD EXPAND THE RESEARCH HORIZON OF THE INSTITUTE AND MAKE IT MORE OF A COMPLETE FOREST EXPERIMENT STATION.

IN 1968, FOREST WAS RECRUITED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MILWAUKEE BOTANY FACULTY BY DR. RUTH I. WALKER. DR. WALKER WAS WELL KNOWN TO US FORESTERS HAVING ROOTS IN THE MILWAUKEE AREA. IN THE DAYS BEFORE FORESTRY WAS TAUGHT HERE IN WISCONSIN, THOSE OF US WHO WANTED TO STUDY FORESTRY WERE FORCED TO DO SO OUT OF STATE. DR. WALKER HAD DEVELOPED A PRE-FORESTRY PROGRAM AT WHAT WAS THEN THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN EXTENSION IN DOWNTOWN MILWAUKEE. MANY OF US STUDIED THERE UNDER DR. WALKER BEFORE TRANSFERING TO A FORESTRY SCHOOL. FOREST WOULD TAKE DR. WALKER'S

*Testimonial given by Colleague Roy Lukes at the Induction Ceremony
on April 12th, 2003.*

PLACE AS HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BOTANY AFTER SHE RETIRED. DR. WALKER CHOSE HER SUCCESSOR WELL. HOWEVER, I THINK THERE MAY HAVE BEEN HUNDREDS OF US AROUND THE STATE WHO WOULD ASK FOREST HOW DR. WALKER WAS AND WHAT SHE WAS DOING.

IN THE MID-'70s I WAS APPOINTED TO THE SCIENTIFIC AREAS PRESERVATION COUNCIL FOREST WAS THE COUNCIL CHAIR. THE COUNCIL ADVISED THE DNR ON THE ACQUISITION OF TRACTS OF LAND TO PROTECT REPRESENTATIVE NATIVE BIOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES FOR USE IN TEACHING AND RESEARCH. LANDS WERE ALSO ACQUIRED WHEN THEY CONTAINED GEOLOGICAL OR RELICTS OF NATIVE ACTIVITY. IT WAS DURING THE MORE THAN A DOZEN YEARS THAT WE SERVED ON THE COUNCIL TOGETHER THAT I CAME TO KNOW FOREST BETTER. HERE, FOREST USED HIS KNOWLEDGE OF PRE-SETTLEMENT VEGETATIVE COMPOSITION, SKILL IN RECOGNIZING THE VALUE OF EVERY TRACT THE COUNCIL APPROVED FOR ACQUISITION, AND HIS EXPERIENCE AS A FIELD BOTANIST-ECOLOGIST . HE WAS ALSO AN IMPRESSIVE AND SKILLED ADVOCATE FOR THE COUNCIL AND THE BUREAU OF ENDANGERED RESOURCES. HE WOULD TAKE VOLUMINOUS NOTES IN LARGE PENMANSHIP ON NUMEROUS SHEETS OF YELLOW LEGAL PAPER DURING TIMES WHEN I COULDN'T THINK OF A SINGLE THING TO TAKE A NOTE ABOUT!!

THE COUNCIL CHANGED ITS NAME TO THE NATURAL AREAS PRESERVATION COUNCIL BECAUSE MONEY FOR LAND ACQUISITION WAS ALWAYS IN SHORT SUPPLY AND FEDERAL DOLLARS BECAME AVAILABLE FOR THE ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION OF NATURAL AREAS, BUT NONE FOR SCIENTIFIC AREAS.

I COULD TELL YOU ABOUT THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL AND REGALE YOU WITH STATISTICS OF ITS ACCOMPLISHMENTS UNDER FOREST'S LEADERSHIP BUT I REALLY MOST ENJOYED THE COUNCIL'S FIELD TRIPS; WALKING IN THE WOODS WITH FOREST. A BOTANIST AND A FORESTER; ECOLOGIST AND ECONOMIST; SCIENTIST AND MANAGER; TALKING ABOUT HOW WE VIEWED THE SAME ECOSYSTEM. BOTH WITH LOVE OF AND DEEP RESPECT FOR THE HERITAGE WE IN WISCONSIN POSSESS.

I MISS FOREST STEARNS: SCHOLAR, SCIENTIST, TEACHER, ECOLOGIST, LEADER, COLLEAGUE, FRIEND AND A VERY NICE MAN.