

Warren P. Knowles

1908-1993

Like many Wisconsin environmentalists, Warren P. Knowles developed a love of nature while growing up in the woods and streams of his childhood home. He was born in River Falls in 1908, and learned to fly-fish at an early age on the Kinnickinnic River. He joined the River Falls Rod and Gun Club and later became its president. This was only the beginning of an active life devoted to Wisconsin; its resources and people.

Knowles received his bachelors degree at Carleton college and then attended the University of Wisconsin Law School, where he graduated in 1933. Following graduation, he moved to New Richmond where he joined a law firm and became active in the Willow River Rod and Gun Club. This club worked to increase wildlife in the area and provide wildlife habitat. Knowles became president of the organization which raised pheasants and planted crops for their food and shelter, developed a trout rearing hatchery near Star Prairie on the Willow River, and helped plant fingerling walleye in farm ponds in the spring to sein out to stock lakes in the fall.

In 1937, Knowles was a member of the County Board and organized various clubs to plant hedge rows along the roads, which provided cover for wildlife and a natural snow fence on highways. His public leadership continued in 1940, when he was elected to the State Senate, where he actively helped reorganize the Conservation Commission and became involved with many reforestation and conservation programs. Knowles became Lt. Governor in 1955, and Governor in 1965. He supported the Outdoor Action Plan (ORAP) which was initiated in 1961. When it became clear that additional revenue was needed to meet the land acquisition and management goals of the act, Knowles appointed a committee to study funding options. In 1969, a levy was designated to finance the purchase of land for parks, playgrounds, and green belts. This promotion of conservation, anti-pollution, and ORAP legislation earned him a Special Citation Award in 1970 by the Wisconsin Academy of Science, Art, and Letters.

Knowles contributed to conservation policy and legislation in 1969 by signing a \$200,000,000 bond issue which provided matching

funds for cities and villages to develop water treatment programs, in order to reduce pollution in Wisconsin's rivers and streams. In addition, \$54 million of these funds were to be used to purchase land for conservation purposes. Knowles also served on the Natural Resources Study Commission, which initiated a 10-year, \$250 million bonding proposal to carry out additional land purchases and conservation programs. That proposal was enacted in 1989. Knowles was active in developing laws to enforce President Nixon's national Clean Water Act on a statewide level.

Knowles was involved in a wide range of natural resources. In addition to his concern for clean water and wildlife habitat, he was concerned with human habitat and quality of life, and studied ways to balance human interests with conservation. When Knowles stepped down after three terms as governor, he became chair of the State Land Use Committee. The committee recommended ways to reduce urban sprawl through careful regional planning. A man always looking toward the future, Knowles became involved in a study commission called ORAP 2000, which worked on an environmental program for the year 2000. He also chaired a study committee on state tourism, understanding that, while tourism is important for the economy, it must be monitored for its impact on the environment. Knowles' concern for the human animal is evident in his involvement with many civic and educational organizations as well. He has received awards from the Madison Rotary Club, US Chamber of Commerce, WI Alumni Association, numerous veterans' organizations, and others.

The list of Warren Knowles' accomplishments seems never-ending, and his contributions to the environment have earned him many awards and honors. He has been an active member of the Nature Conservancy Board for over 10 years, and received an Outstanding Achievement Award from them in 1990. He joined the board on Ice Age Park and Trail in 1985, and participated actively in the development of the trail. He has been a member of Ducks Unlimited, Grouse Unlimited, the Prairie Chicken Society, and the Natural Resources Foundation for many years. He received the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation Award in 1977. Knowles State Forest, extending from St. Croix Falls to Danbury, was named after Warren Knowles as an honor by the Wisconsin State Legislature and the Department of Natural Resources. In 1992, the College of Natural Resources at the University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point, named Knowles "Environmentalist of the Year."