

Special thank you's

- Ed Brick**
■ herbicide & carrier
- David Calhoon & Laurie Noll**
■ complete set of topographic maps of Vernon County in memory of Ray Calhoon
- Susan Canon**
■ electric typewriter for new Baraboo office
- Dan Dodge**
■ chipper/spreader
- Cheryl Frazier**
■ Field guide to Birds East of the Rockies
■ Bayfield County plat book
- John C. Hopkins**
■ scythe and hand sickle
- Jerry Kobus**
■ sickle, scythe, pots, pans for Lulu Lake
- Gunda Korsts**
■ 1981 Toyota truck for stewardship
- Steve Larson**
■ couch for Lulu Lake
- Dr. Shirley Peterson**
■ scythe and sickle
- Ron Slavin**
■ floor tile, glue and personal labor for new flooring at Lakeview Lodge at Lulu Lake
- John Stoelting**
■ camcorder
- Dr. Lou Strayer**
■ scythe for southern Wisconsin prairie management
- Peg Watrous**
■ pack can for herbicide work
- Laura Wilfer**
■ riding lawnmower

In Memory

Paul J. Olson, Chairman

*Wisconsin Nature
Conservancy*

1961-1977

When, in 1960, the Wisconsin Chapter of TNC was in the making, we searched for an effective chairman to get us off the ground. Paul Olson, the principal of Midvale School in Madison, was suggested as an ideal person. He had a reputation not only as an environmental Pied Piper with school children and teenagers, but as a pragmatic implementer of educational innovations. The great success of the Madison School Forest teaching program near Verona, the campaign to save the rare and special Prairie Chicken from extinction, his service on the Wisconsin Conservation Commission, all were linked to his energies and environmental vision.

At the first official annual TNC meeting up in Door County in 1961, Paul accepted the chairmanship and henceforth gave himself to building a local organization with a devotion and intensity of purpose that were remarkable considering his many other and varied full-time duties.

The progress of the Wisconsin Nature Conservancy, from a handful (35) of rather hapless idealists in 1960 to nearly 2,000 members by 1977, when Paul stepped down, to nearly 19,000 well-organized members today, is truly remarkable. With Paul at the helm, the chapter successfully completed its first project in 1961 when it protected 40 acres at Abraham's Woods and raised the then incredibly large sum of \$12,000 to buy the land.

Those of you who were not around in the "good old days"—let me remind you that TNC was swaddled and nursed in Paul's small home study on Mineral Point Road in Madison. Folding and stapling newsletters, licking stamps and sealing envelopes, writing thousands of addresses, sometimes with friends or his loyal helpmate and life's companion Alice, but often alone—it was his stubborn doggedness, born of a deep emotional involvement with nature preservation, and his no-nonsense grit and drive seasoned with subdued charisma that made people flock to help him accomplish our



Paul J. Olson

goals. Polio made him a cripple on crutches, but to us he was a hero with wings.

While Paul had no formal training as an ecologist, his own continual engagement with nature gave him an intuitive, profound, biological understanding many a professional might well envy and an abiding love of wild nature, of the beauty and perfection of living things. Combined with a deep compassion for

children, it all produced in this man a well-spring of enormous emotional drive, power and unity.

His editorials in the Wisconsin Chapter's newsletter were philosophical gems, simply cut and lovingly polished. Reminiscent of the writings of his spiritual mentor, Aldo Leopold, they were, on the face of it, only progress reports, prideful ones, to be sure, to advertise our efforts. But more, they were messages to stir our sense of responsibility, our social responsibility, to future generations. They reveal Paul Olson's mainsprings which motivated his whole life, his public service, and his environmental visions: a deeply moral, almost religious, commitment to the children of today and tomorrow, and to the natural world which they must have to be happy and healthy.

Paul's committed, incessant concern for the welfare of the Wisconsin Nature Conservancy, his admonitions, pleadings, reprimands and praise, made him a father figure of a sort, who taught us that, in the final analysis, without concrete action, without physically taking hold of wild lands and preserving them, all our love of nature is but hollow impotence. But love in action generates respect, understanding, and response. He taught us to be good lovers of nature, not by words but by the simple action of buying wild lands, and thus preserving nature in perpetuity. In this insanely destructive, increasingly de-natured world Paul Olson left us a constructive legacy to be treasured forever.

Hugh H. Iltis