

Ernie Swift

1897 - 1968

Birth: September 15, 1897 in Tracy, Minnesota.

Family: Wife Goldie; son, two daughters.

Education: 1919 Attends one semester at University of Minnesota.

Career:

- 1926 - Selected as conservation warden and forest ranger in Forest County, WI
- 1928 - Supervises law enforcement program in Sawyer County
- 1935 - Deputy Director at Wisconsin Conservation Department
- 1943 - Assistant Director at Wisconsin Conservation Department
- 1947 - Director at Wisconsin Conservation Department
- 1954 - Assistant Director of U.S. Fish and Game Department
- 1955 - Executive Director of National Wildlife Federation
- 1960 - Resigns as Director, but continues to act as conservation advisor and forestry liaison officer. Resides in Rice Lake until his death.

Professional Accomplishments:

Grandparents were of Scotch, Irish, and English ancestry from Massachusetts, New York, and Vermont. They migrated to Wisconsin in the 1850's, settling in Sauk and Richland Counties. Mother was born in Sauk County and father in Richland County. Both parents attended Ripon College, and father was graduated from there after which he taught school for 35 years in Wisconsin, South Dakota, and Minnesota. He was Superintendent of Schools for twenty-five years at Tracy, Minnesota. In 1913 father purchased a farm in northern Wisconsin near Hayward. This farm was sold in 1922, after both parents had passed away.

- 1897 - September 15 - Ernest Fremont Swift born in Tracy, Minnesota
- 1917 - October 24 - Enlists in U.S. Army. Serves stateside at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, and also in North and South Carolina; assigned to 48th Infantry Machine Gun Company at Newport News, Virginia, as the Sargeant in the Headquarters platoon.
- 1919 - March 3 - Honorably discharged.

Attends University of Minnesota part of one semester, but withdrew because of health. Returns to Hayward, Wisconsin, doing work as a guide and dealing in real estate and wood products.

- 1926 - June 3 - After a civil service exam, selected as a conservation warden. Serves as both warden and forest ranger for first two years.
- 1928 - January - Placed in charge of the state's law enforcement program. Supervises forest fire cases and game surveys and handles both deer and beaver damage complaints. On special assignment, specializes on fur bootleggers in northern counties.

"Open Season" Incident

Young Warden Swift

Follows three fishermen to a secluded stream where fishing is not allowed. The lawbreakers are members of a Chicago gang vacationing in the northwoods. One pulls a gun on Swift, but Swift, undaunted, confiscates fishing gear and orders three to appear in court the next morning. Two days later arrests gang leader, Joe Soltis, for poaching. As the story goes, Swift became the target of a Chicago assassination squad. One day, a black Packard glided to a stop in front of Swift's modest home in Hayward. The house was empty, though. Swift had been tipped off in advance and was hiding a safe distance away.

Swift's experience inspired "Open Season," a television show hosted by Jack Webb and directed by William Conrad. The program was part of a series featuring stories from Time Magazine. James Best played the part of Ernie Swift.

- 1930 - First recipient of Haskell Noyes Conservation Award for service as a Conservation Warden.
- 1935 - February to November - Transferred to main office in Madison as Supervisor of Fur Farms. Conducts surveys on fur-bearing animals in the wild and of licensed fur farms and shooting preserves; recommends new areas for licensing and handles all confiscated furs.
 - November - Promoted to Deputy Conservation Director. Duties involve general administration of programs in law enforcement, game management, and forest protection. Drafts all game management and forestry regulations passed by the Conservation Commission.
- 1943 - Promoted to Assistant Director. Supervises state forests and parks, several forest tree nurseries, intensive forest fire protection on 12,000,000 acres, and activities of technical foresters working with farmers, private industry and on county forests.
- 1947 - Named Conservation Director. Carries out policies established by six-member Conservation Commission through activity programs of ten major divisions. Under Swift's leadership, Wisconsin becomes one of first states to bring biologists into conservation department. Begins professional and personal relationship with Aldo Leopold, then a University of Wisconsin ecologist.
- 1954 - Serves as Assistant Director of Fish and Wildlife Service in Washington, D.C. Responsible for wildlife activities of service. Quits after 18 months; appalled at bureaucratic trade-offs he finds there.
- 1955 - Executive Director of National Wildlife Federation, nation's largest private conservation organization.
- 1959 - Received Aldo Leopold Award.
- 1960 - Resigns but continues to serve Federation as conservation advisor and forestry liaison officer.
- 1968 - July 24 - Dies of heart attack in Rice Lake, Wisconsin.

Leadership Positions:

Second Vice President of the International Association of Game, Fish and Conservation Commissioners (1953-54), past Chairman of the Executive Committee and previously member of their Committee on Extending International Significance; American Fisheries Society Committee on National-State Relations (1951-52); Society of American Foresters, past Chairman of Forest-Wildlife Management Committee; Chairman of National Waterfowl Council (1953-54) and representative from

Mississippi Flyway Council; past President of the Association of Midwest Fish and Game Commissioners (1935-39 and 1949-50); Executive-Secretary of the Wisconsin Geographic Board; and Vice Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee of State Agencies (Wisconsin).

Awards:

Recipient of over 20 awards and citations including:

Haskell Noyes Conservation Warden Efficiency Award, 1930

Aldo Leopold Medal, 1959

Gold Medallion (first ever given in conservation field) from Wisconsin Exposition Department, 1966

Publications:

Regular contributor for National Wildlife and Conservation News. Author of A Conservation Saga. Numerous articles in Wisconsin Conservation Bulletin, including "The Next Hundred Years" and "Report to the People of Wisconsin on Progress in Conservation Education."