



# Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame Foundation, Inc.

*Celebrating, Advancing and Sharing Wisconsin's Conservation Legacy*

## Arlen Christenson

(1934 - )

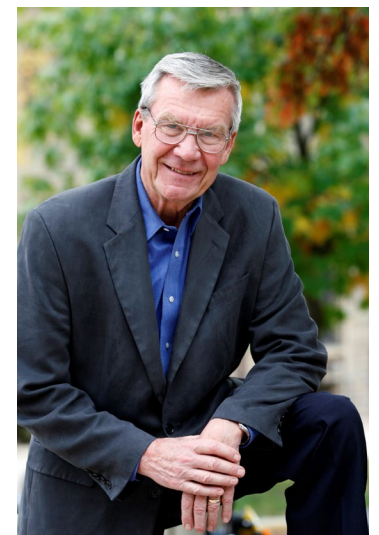
Inducted 2022

A visionary whose contributions innovated new and more effective legal protections for our natural resources and helped the public stay engaged in democratic processes, Professor Arlen Christenson exercised his intellect and leadership over six decades of formative years of environmental advocacy in Wisconsin (1960s–2010s). He was a highly respected University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School Professor who specialized in environmental, land use, local government, and administrative law from 1963 until 2000, when he was granted emeritus status. Professor Christenson inspired generations of environmental lawyers and created the organizational structures where those lawyers can continue to advocate for public rights to counter well-organized economic self-interests.

Arlen Christenson played a key role in shaping the Public Intervenor's Office during its most formative and effective years. In 1975, he authored a report commissioned by the Center for Public Representation on the Public Intervenor, which convinced Attorney General Bronson LaFollette to implement a variety of his recommendations to empower the attorneys' abilities to protect public rights in natural resources. Republican and Democratic attorneys general appointed and reappointed him to advise the Public Intervenor's Office from 1975 until the office was abolished in 1995. He ensured they were effective conservation advocates that improved state and sometimes national policy. He then went on to do the same for Midwest Environmental Advocates as a founding board member until taking emeritus status, helping grow the state's first non-profit environmental law center into a powerhouse of lawyers with a 20-year track record and bright future (1999–2021). He similarly played a major role in land use policy as founding board member of 1,000 Friends of Wisconsin when that organization launched in 1989.

Born and raised in the beautiful farmland and forests of Amery, Wisconsin, Arlen Christenson served in the U.S. Navy (1952–1954). Professor Christenson is a product of the University of Wisconsin System. He earned a Bachelor of Science from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls (1958) and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School (1960). After practicing law in Minneapolis with the law firm of Larson, Loevenger, Lindquist, Freeman and Fraser, he joined the Law School faculty in 1963. He held a variety of leadership positions within the University of Wisconsin-Madison, including Assistant to the Chancellor (Legal

Advisor) (1969–1971), Associate Dean of the Law School (1972–1974), and Co-Director of the Center for Public Representation (1974–75, 1977). Dedicated to academic research and its application, he took a leave of absence from academia to engage in public service as Wisconsin's Deputy Attorney General (1966–1968) and Executive Assistant Attorney General (1968–1969).



**Arlen Christenson**

*Circa 2000. Photo courtesy of UW-Madison.*

*“Those who pollute our water and air, dam streams for development, and take other actions that diminish public rights in water and other natural resources usually have a substantial economic stake in the outcome of administrative and court proceedings. They are represented by lawyers and experts. In contrast, the beneficiaries of public rights are diffuse, often unorganized, and have only small economic stakes as individuals. Without more legal support, public rights will ordinarily go unrepresented.” – Arlen Christenson*



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He married Judy Christenson in 1965; they have been active lifetime Lutherans. Surrounded by the diverse ecology of Madison's Arboretum, they raised two children and have six grandchildren. Since 1975, they have enjoyed time at their cabin on a small lake near Clam Lake, Wisconsin, surrounded by Chequamegon National Forest.

Professor Christenson inspired and mentored countless law students through his classroom teaching and supervision of their clinical work with the Public Intervenor's Office and Midwest Environmental Advocates. As a result, students contributed to environmental protection and his legacy lives on through the hundreds of lawyers throughout the country educated in environmental protection law who are carrying the torch forward to advance public rights in natural resources.

### Awards

- Lifetime Achievement Alumni Award, UW-River Falls (2018)
- Wisconsin Stewardship Network Award
- Wisconsin Idea Award for applying academic research to natural resource policy development and implementation (March 1994)
- Listed in Who's Who of "Outstanding Young Men in America" (1972)

*"Arlen dedicated his career to ensuring public rights in Wisconsin's natural resources had strong legal representation, first through his leadership in the Public Intervenor's Office, and then Midwest Environmental Advocates." - Melissa K. Scanlan*