

Harley MacKenzie – This Was Your Life Induction Speech by Don Last, 1988

Slide 1 "There is one thing that is very certain, we cannot up-set ... the works of the Almighty and expect to continue to have the natural resources that we originally had when this earth was first created".

These are the words of Harley W. MacKenzie delivered during an address to the Georgia Wildlife Federation in 1938 while he was serving as the Director of the Wisconsin Conservation Department. It was this philosophy which provided the framework for the actions in the interests of fish, game, and other resource management which H. W. MacKenzie carried out in a distinguished 30 plus years of public service in this state.

Slide 2 It was his leadership during the formative stages of modern natural resources management which ultimately resulted in the Poynette Game Farm being renamed the MacKenzie Environmental Center in 1971. Coincidentally, The Harley W. MacKenzie story begins in Poynette, the small community in Columbia County where he was born in 1888 and to which his parents had immigrated from Scotland some years earlier.

Slide 3 His career in natural resources management started in 1910. Headquartered in Antigo, he served first as a seasonal warden and then as a full-time warden from 1917-25 for sixteen north-eastern Wisconsin counties.

Slide 4 In 1925 he became Wisconsin's first Chief Warden for the Conservation Department. MacKenzie was the father of a professional conservation warden work force in the state. Under his leadership: criteria relating to training and physical stature were established; a retirement system for wardens was promoted; the first warden's manual was developed; the first warden uniforms were issued; and a program to reward warden efficiency was established.

Slide 5 In this photograph taken in the line of duty about 1928 in Superior, MacKenzie proudly poses in his uniform on the left with a distinguished group of tourists. In the front row are members of the first Conservation Commission Committees including A. w. Ickes, William Mauthe, and Haskell Noyes. In the front center of the photograph is then President and Mrs. Calvin Coolidge. No doubt this trip with MacKenzie gave "Silent Cal" something to talk about upon his return to Washington.

Slide 6 With the advent of the depression era, people were desperate for food and shelter. Government resources were strained to their limits. But these were equally rough times for those persons doing the conservation warden work. This photograph reportedly was taken during a fact-finding mission near Ladysmith following the shooting of a Conservation Department warden.

Slide 7 In 1934, MacKenzie became the Director of the Conservation Department. Along with the Commissioners seated around this table, he shared responsibility for the development of natural resource development and protection. In so doing, he helped organize the Conservation Congress as an advisory council on department plans and policy.

Slide 8 During his Directorship, a variety of game operations were consolidated at the Department's Conservation Center and Game Farm near Poynette. MacKenzie is shown here working with the Department's Game Division Supervisor and Superintendent of the Game and Fur Farm. Perhaps it was on this day that these three gentlemen originated the sportsman's license program which today is still a popular program with hunters and fishers.

MacKenzie was more than a talker and listener. He was a good writer. He took personal responsibility for the content of the Wisconsin Conservation Bulletin.

Slide 9 His natural resources interest extended as well into the forestry area. He helped with the initiation of a Forestry mill tax as a source of resource management and protection revenue. He helped create ranger stations which had a significant role in the control of forest fires. Here MacKenzie is pictured at the Forestry Headquarters near Trout Lake. Among the Department personnel which was part of this gathering was a young Ernie Swift who in 1947 became the agency head.

Slide 10 The list of MacKenzie accomplishments does not end there. He helped acquire property in the Northern Kettle Moraine and Horicon Marsh area. He was involved with the development of some of Wisconsin's basic water law.

Slide 11 Long before the start of environmental protection responsibilities of the latter Department of Natural Resources, he threatened a lawsuit against a paper mill following a massive fish kill which forced them to clean up the operation. He encouraged the development of fish hatcheries. He hired the first biologists and began the first federally-aided projects in the state for wildlife research and management.

Slide 12 MacKenzie had an interest in public service and public policy at all levels of government. At the local level he served on the Columbia County Board of Supervisors and as President of the Village of Poynette. Besides his Conservation Department connections in state government, he was a member of the state planning board and geographic board.

Slide 13 In addition, he was the Second President of the Association of Midwest Game Committee. Besides MacKenzie and Swift, in this 1950 meeting are Conservation Department heads from Minnesota, Missouri, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He was also an active member of the Executive Committee of the International Association of Game, Fish, and Conservation Commissioners.

Slide 14 One of the areas nearest and dearest to H. W. MacKenzie was his appreciation of and promotion of conservation education. Those who understood MacKenzie's zeal in this area helped push the establishment of the MacKenzie Environmental Center. In 1971, then Governor Patrick Lucey came to honor Poynette's favorite son, now 82 years of age, and to dedicate the state facility to his name. Said Lucey that day, "Before the environmental movement grew to its present height of public concern, you were planning for the future of Wisconsin's resources."

Slide 15 MacKenzie had a vision that day. His vision was of a center that would welcome countless visitors to enjoy and to learn about the outdoors and its many natural resources. Today 100,000 visitors to the center each year find self-guided trails suitable for the elderly or the handicapped, a conservation museum, a wildlife exhibit, a logging museum, an arboretum, and a resident center for overnight visitors.

Slide 16 In the years following his retirement from the Conservation Department MacKenzie was honored by many groups and organizations including the Milwaukee Sentinel Conservation Award, Legislative Citation, Wisconsin Outdoor Communicator's Association, and the Natural Resources Board.

Harley W. MacKenzie died on September 27, 1979.

Wisconsin is a better place for the life and times of Harley w. MacKenzie, a pioneer conservationist whose ideas and initiatives have left their mark on resource management agencies and programs not only in our state but which have made our state a national leader in programs to preserve and protect our natural resources.

The Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame Foundation is indeed proud and privileged to induct Harley w. MacKenzie.