

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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DR. IRA N. GABRIELSON - 'MR. CONSERVATION'

Dr. Ira N. Gabrielson, 87, the first director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who died September 7 in Virginia was a pioneer in both the national and international conservation movements whose contributions were monumental.

"This giant in the field of wildlife conservation was an innovator of many of the practices and philosophies in use today," Lynn A. Greenwalt, current Director of the Interior Department agency said.

"I can think of no one individual who did more to advance the cause of wildlife conservation or the profession of those who practice it.

"Through his leadership as the first director of the Service, he was instrumental in adding millions of acres to the National Wildlife Refuge System, working for Federal Aid to the States for use in fish and wildlife restoration, and in building up populations of migratory waterfowl which had reached dangerous lows in the mid 1930's. He established the Service's first regional office program so that the government could be more responsive to the needs of fish and wildlife on the ground."

Dr. Gabrielson was the author or coauthor of 10 books on birds and wildlife management, many of them still considered classics in the field.

In 1912 he graduated from Morningside College in Iowa and began his lifelong wildlife conservation career as a high school teacher. Three years later, he joined the Bureau of Biological Survey, predecessor to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and for 20 years conducted and supervised a wide range of programs, mainly in the West. In 1935 he was appointed the Director of the Bureau.

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When the Bureau was transferred in 1939 from the Agriculture Department to Interior along with the Bureau of Fisheries from the Department of Commerce, he became the first director of the merged agency, renamed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

During World War II, he was deputy coordinator of fisheries and was a delegate to the first International Whaling Conference.

In 1945 he retired from government to become President of the Wildlife Management Institute, a post he held for the next 15 years and later became chairman of its board. He helped to found the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, helped to organize the World Wildlife Fund (U.S.) and served as its president for many years. Dr. Gabrielson was a well-known authority on many aspects of wildlife management and served on various governmental advisory boards. His efforts received the highest awards of the Department of the Interior, National Audubon Society, Wildlife Society, American Forestry Association, and other conservation groups in addition to bringing him a number of honorary degrees.

His family wishes that expressions of sympathy be donated to the Wildlife Management Institute for the Ira N. Gabrielson Memorial Fund, 709 Wire Building, 1000 Vermont Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20005.

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