

A Look Back ... David Hickok

Called a scientist, maverick and visionary, David Hickok led the team that mapped Alaska and became one of the architects of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980 that designated many of the refuges, parks and wilderness areas in Alaska.

As a teenager, Hickok dreamed of going to the U.S. Naval Academy. But he was a champion gymnast who broke his back at age 16, so he limped to the New York State College of Forestry at Syracuse University and spent his career outdoors, often using a cane. His U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service career began in 1950 at Missisquoi National Wildlife Refuge in Vermont. He worked at several other refuges before he landed in Washington, DC, as assistant chief of resources. He wrote the public land order for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and recommended expansion of refuge roads on the Kenai Peninsula. Little did he know then how big a role he would play in the future of Alaska public lands.

Part of that role was convincing the Service that Alaska was important. He recalled during an oral interview that he repeatedly reminded Service colleagues that “the Dust Bowl is over! There was much more in this world than just ducks.”

After the 1964 Alaska earthquake, President Lyndon Johnson appointed Hickok to the Federal Field Committee that produced a massive study on “Alaska Natives and the Land.” By now, Hickok had left the Service but not Alaska. He directed the Alaska Sea Grant Program and created the Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The work of Hickok and his team, including writer and filmmaker Nan Elliott, is credited with providing the scientific information needed to make valuable land use designations in Alaska.

Hickok was known for his talent for transferring knowledge among Alaska Native cultures and others. He made sure, for example, that ANILCA provided for the harvest of traditional subsistence resources in wilderness areas. Hickok “understood the idea of wilderness,” wrote Stephen Haycox, a University of Alaska history professor.

When Hickok died in 2011, Elliott wrote: “Thank you for a life ferociously and generously lived.”

CAPTION:

David Hickok (1924-2011), left, had an outsize role in Alaska public lands management during and after his U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service career. With him above in 1972 is Jacob Adams of the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, which today governs nearly five million acres and has 12,000 Inupiat Eskimo shareholders representing eight villages in Alaska’s remote Arctic Slope region of Alaska. (Arctic Environmental Information and Data Center)