

MR. KIP KOSS SPEAKS ABOUT
HIS GRANDFATHER, J. N. "DING" DARLING
SUMMER 2003

In 1962, I was overseas in the Air Force. And I was pretty well occupied. It was during what was then known as the Berlin Crisis. I was pretty well occupied, and also in Germany. Immediately after Darling's death, a number of admirers of Darling; some family members, some friends and a lot of folks who had really good credentials in different areas, and who had admired Darling's work formed the Darling Foundation to attempt to continue his work, and to continue his conservation ethic. In particular to finish some projects that Darling had started to one extent or another. They wanted to try and bring those projects to fruition. Although I was an early trustee of the Foundation, I was pretty busy with the Air Force, and then trying to earn a living and raise a family to become involved with the Foundation in more than just a few areas. It wasn't until about twenty years later that my family had pretty well grown up and I was approaching retirement. We needed a new President of the Darling Foundation, and I was it. Within a few years I was able to devote quite a bit of time to the Foundation and its work.

The Foundation itself was rather interesting. The first project it did was to try and consolidate the lands with what is now named the Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, under federal ownership. At the time of Darling's death the key part of the refuge was on leased land. It was leased from the state of Florida. There were parcels of land within the refuge that were owned by others. The Foundation went after consolidating the lands under federal ownership, which was done and done rather successfully. Simultaneously with that, the refuge was renamed the Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

At the time of the consolidation of the lands and a little later when the refuge was renamed after Darling I assumed like many others, I am sure, that the main reason for renaming the refuge after Darling was that he had been an important leader in the FWS and had been at least a part-time resident of Sanibel and Captiva Islands. It was only many years later that I learned that Darling had actually been responsible for preserving the lands as a national wildlife refuge clear back in 1945, as the Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge. It's a fascinating story. I have learned of it over the years. And I believe I've learned most of it from correspondence that is at National Conservation Training Center, which came from people like Clarence Cottum and J. Clark Salyer and others. Darling learned in the early 1940s that the state of Florida, which owned the key lands within what is now the refuge was getting ready to sell the land to developers for something like twenty-five cents an acre. When Darling got interested and put together a group to try and preserve the land, they put in a slightly higher bid. That sort of started off a bidding war. But still, they were talking about less than a dollar an acre. Darling got very busy and contacted people with FWS like J. C. Salyer and Ira Gabrielson. I don't know that he

had a personal relationship with the governor of Florida, who was in fact the landowner, through the State of Florida. But he said that this was not a good idea. His initiative was in fact responsible for saving the land from sale to developers.

I always tread lightly on Darling. As his grandson, I didn't want to make claims for him that might or might not be correct. I always treaded rather lightly on his role in that, but it was in later years that I found out that he was in fact...the refuge wouldn't be there if he hadn't shown the initiative in the early 1940s.

There were several other projects that Darling had in one state of development or another when he died. As I said, the consolidation of the lands of the refuge was the first goal of the Foundation. A close second was Darling's idea of the Lewis and Clark Trail as a "ribbon of conservation across the United States". Darling had analyzed the Lewis and Clark trail as a conservationist might. I think that the first thing was that so much of the trail is along natural flyways, migratory routes. And the second thing was that the great bulk of the land along the trail was in federal ownership of one sort or another. He felt that if it could be tied together as a ribbon of conservation that it would be a wonderful thing. After the Darling Refuge project was completed, the Darling Foundation turned towards the Lewis and Clark Trail idea. They actually succeeded in getting a federal commission established with a five-year term. There were very illustrious commission members. By and large, each state's senior senator or their governor was appointed to the commission. There were some representatives of the Darling Foundation, including myself. The resident of the Darling Foundation was actually the president of the commission. We all started out with high hopes. I was at the time flying around the world with Pan American as a very junior pilot who had very little control of my schedule. I missed a good many of the meetings and really did not have a very good grasp of the progress that the commission was making or perhaps not making. As those of you who are listening who are federal employees you may recognize quickly that whenever legislation is passed establishing a commission like this, there has to be some place within the government to house it. Unfortunately, the commission was housed in the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, which skewed the effort from the very start. Before too long, why, I think the effort was getting off track. Instead of the senior senator showing up for a meeting, or the governor, the director of State Tourism or some such might be representing the Governor or Senator. It really got pretty much lost in the shuffle. There was an accomplishment, which was marking the trail so that somebody can follow it if they want to a family on vacation or a student of the trail, or somebody who wants to know more about it. The trail is well marked. I learned that there are an awful lot of people in those eleven states along the trail who really care a great deal about Lewis and Clark. Some of the historians who are involved, they know what Lewis and Clark had for breakfast every morning, and whether they had a good bowel movement or not! Their knowledge of the details of the expedition is amazing! I was personally very disappointed that this effort of the Darling Foundation, to follow through on Darling's superb idea of a ribbon of conservation across the United States, pretty well came, at least in terms of conservation, to naught. It is a great concept. And I hope that some

time, leadership may evolve somewhere. It would take an awful lot of doing to get it done. It would take real leadership, and a real knowledge of government and an ability to work within the structure to get it done. But I do hope that sometime, somebody somewhere will pick up the idea and run with it.

As I look back on it, when I became president of the Ding Darling Foundation in 1983, I was really pretty grossly ignorant of Darling's work despite the fact that I was his grandson and had been at least peripherally involved in the Darling Foundation for a number of years. Actually, back in 1983 I knew Darling drew the first Federal Duck Stamp, but I was only perhaps faintly aware that he had provided the leadership to get the program established in the first place. It was not his original idea. The idea had been kicking around for many years, of producing a revenue stamp to produce funds for acquiring and preserving habitat. Nobody had made any progress, and as was the case with Darling; he was a real doer. He could get things done. He drove that bill through the Congress and past the President. I don't think the President even knew what was happening until after the fact! There's a little, rather amusing story in Darling's biography by David Lindt that covers this. As far as I know, as the biography presents it, it's absolutely the way it happened. But only in later years have I achieved a real understanding of how clever a program it was as Darling had drafted it and insured that it would be run that way. This is a program that has acquired about five million acres of habitat. The dollars numbers raised by the sales of the federal duck stamp are not really awe inspiring because, my gosh, these were 1935, 1934 and later dollars when you could take yourself out for a fine, fine dinner for a dollar in those days. So the numbers in order to have any significance should really be adjusted for inflation. But the acreage is cold hard facts, and acreage does not suffer from inflation. The fact that this program does not have to go through the Congress every year, it's not dependent on its financing on the good will of the Congress. It's a program that is in place and goes on and on. And the FWS, incidentally, is proscribed from raking off any significant funds. It's pretty unusual in this day and age that every dollar that goes into the purchase of a stamp, goes effectively right through to the purchase of habitat. With time, I've come to appreciate some of these things that Darling did more fully.

I also knew that Darling had been at least a key player in the establishment of the National Wildlife Federation. Again, it's been in later years that I have come to recognize through correspondence and one thing or another and other records, just how key that role was and what driving determination that it required to accomplish this federation of conservation organizations. Darling was its first president. I guess I knew he was the first president, but I really was not aware of the true significance of a number of these things. In the case of the Federation, Darling recognized very early on that one of the problems was that wildlife does not have the vote. It is not a constituency. It has to be represented. It is in fact the hunters and others that make up the bulk of that constituency to represent the wildlife. Darling felt that there were too many conservation organizations in the United States. This was back in the 1930s, so you can imagine what

he'd think now. It was not because they didn't have good purpose, but because he felt that they were not working together. Those of us who have been involved in conservation for any length of time, realize that conservation organizations are about the most provincial groups that you could imagine. They all feel they have their own little niche and they understand the problem better than anybody else. They are fiercely independent. Darling wanted, and it was his goal for the Wildlife Federation, to bring those interests together and speak with one voice in Washington.

I did use the word "hunters" there. I'd just like to make a little comment on that. Hunters, vis-à-vis conservation; there have been times during my association with the conservation movement that I was, let's say nearly put on the defensive by people who were rather incensed to learn that Darling was a hunter as a younger man. It's with experience and more understanding of the conservation movement that I have come to realize that really, a conservation movement I believe sprung from the hunters! These were the folks that were out there. These were the folks that were seeing and recognizing the changes for what they were. They did have the initiative to do something about that. When somebody from the Sierra Club, or whatever, is critical of the hunters, certainly if they are talking about over hunting and that sort of thing, there is some justification. But the hunters and sportsmen and outdoor types should get a lot of credit for the conservation movement as it exists today.

I also learned of other programs that Darling had initiated. Again, it's exciting, I expect to me, to know that he was the one who initiated them. But even more exciting is his ability to recognize a problem or a deficiency and devise a solution for it. When Darling went to Washington in 1934, he was disappointed that there were not more people then in the FWS who had the technical knowledge and experience to deal with some of the problems whether they be in forestry, botany, biology or whatever. There were not too many people who were educated in the disciplines that were necessary to make good decisions and good policy. He was further disappointed because when he did find somebody who knew his stuff, they were frequently poor communicators. They couldn't express themselves well. It was those two frustrations, if you will, plus one other thing, which I'll mention in a moment, which led him to form a cooperative fish and wildlife research program. But even before that, in the early 1930s Darling was appointed the chairman of the Iowa Conservation Commission, as it was known then. The first thing he did was to de-politicize the commission. Up until Darlings appointment most of the members of the commission were buddies of the Governor and not very well versed in what needed to be done. The first order of business for Darling in the early 1930s with the Iowa Conservation Commission was to make sure that the seats, as they became vacant, were filled with people who were talented and knowledgeable in the areas of conservation and conservation needs. The other thing he did, which is really quite significant I think, it that he recognized that they had to have a long range plan. Darling's goal was to have a twenty-five year plan for Iowa's natural resources. He recognized that in order to have a good plan, you've got to have a starting point. You've got to have

some knowledge, or a database of things as they are today. He hired Aldo Leopold to come down to Iowa and inventory Iowa's natural resources. Following that, a twenty-five year conservation plan for the State of Iowa was drawn. It's still around and used as a model today!

Darling put all of these needs that he recognized together and devised the cooperative fish and wildlife research program, which was designed to give young people an education in those disciplines that would be potentially supportive of conservation; and at the same time, develop the knowledge to base wise conservation decisions and policy. The word 'cooperative' comes from Darling's idea that the funding would be one third federal, one third state and one third private. Darling himself, very generously, and he was a very generous person, funded the private third out of his own pocket for the first years of the program. He then prevailed on his friends in the sporting goods industry to provide that funding in the future. This becomes an important story involving the Wildlife Management Institute and a number of other factors. The idea of devising a program to both educate and develop a database at the same time is I think extraordinary. As the listener probably knows, this program has spread from the first unit at Iowa State University in Ames, Iowa basically throughout the entire United States. I think depending on who is counting and in what year you are counting, there are probably fifty or so of those programs in effect right now at schools across the country.

I hope you'll indulge me if I sound like Darling's proud grandson, which I am. But I do think it's justified. As I learn more and more about his contributions in life, I am immensely proud of him. And I am really in awe of his prolific contributions during his entire life. Perhaps the moral of the story is; don't ask me to talk about Darling unless you're ready to have an earful. There are countless stories that are still untold. Most of them are amusing and personal to one extent or another. I would like to mention one more aspect, if I haven't already. And pardon me if I have, but one more aspect of Darling's character and personality; pretty late in his life I think perhaps just a few years before he died he was given still another very prestigious award. He was asked and able to attend to receive this award. He sat there on the stage and listened to the talk. When it became his turn to accept the award, he said, "Giving awards to conservationists is like giving medals to Generals who only lose wars." It was truly a mark of his personality that he never rested on his laurels. He was always looking ahead to the next project or the next thing that was still to do, which had been left undone so far. As Lewis and Clark were about to say, 'he proceeded on'.

One last word is that I know he would be very, very proud and pleased with the National Conservation Training Center. He obviously recognized the need for good education and communications. The Fish and Wildlife Service is spread wide and far and the opportunity to be able to come together and share knowledge is a wonderful thing. I personally have been just immensely pleased with, and proud of the FWS for being about to pull together in one place such a marvelously talented group of people. I have worked

with several individuals on different projects and I just marvel, and am tickled at the quality of the people. I think it's a blessing for the FWS to have that facility. Thanks very much!