

by Mark Madison

# Preserving Our Endangered Heritage



*The magnifying glass used by Rachel Carson during her 17-year career with the Fish and Wildlife Service is a cherished memento of her contributions to wildlife conservation.*

*USFWS photo*

*H*istory, like wildlife, can become endangered through indifference or destruction. With that thought in mind, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) created a Heritage Committee a little more than a year ago to oversee the preservation of our agency's historic role in wildlife management. To this end, the Committee oversaw the creation of archives, the hiring of our agency's first historian, and national campaigns to collect objects, texts, and oral histories from those who shaped our history. Wildlife conservation and endangered species have played a prominent role in these histories.

The FWS has been at the forefront of species protection and reintroduction in recent years, but Heritage Committee discoveries have found this was not always the case. In 1917, for example, Dr. Edward Nelson, the head of our predecessor agency, the Biological Survey, enthusiastically reported, "There is little question that in five years we can destroy most of the gray wolves and greatly reduce the numbers of other predatory animals."

In the ensuing 82 years, the FWS and its predecessors have evolved from the premier predator eradication agency to a conserver of wild things. Charting the changing role of our agency in response to new ideas in wildlife conservation and environmental protection has been a primary objective of Heritage Committee members as they seek to make sense of our tangled environmental legacy. Through examining historical records, we have discovered that some early FWS biologists, such as Olaus Murie, said as early as the 1940's that

the agency should eliminate its predator control efforts and focus on restoration.

The other area in which the Heritage Committee tells the history of endangered species is through displays and interpretation of the work of wildlife law enforcement. The FWS role in wildlife protection began in 1900 with the Lacey Act. Initially restricted to our nation's borders, the agency's enforcement activities have grown to be international in character. The Heritage Committee has traced this change and attempted to chart it through collections of law enforcement objects, oral histories and reports of agents, and weapons and wildlife seized in protection efforts.

As an agency that has been a leader in wildlife conservation, it is important for us to preserve our history, protect it, and understand its context. The Heritage Committee is dedicated to documenting these pioneering efforts and sharing them as a link to the future. The Chair of the Committee is Dale Hall,

Deputy Director of the Service's Southeast Region.

Unusual objects that the Heritage Committee has collected include Rachel Carson's magnifying glass (opposite page) and a signed first-edition of her history-making book, *Silent Spring*. She put the magnifying glass in her desk when she left our agency in 1952. Safeguarded by co-workers through the years, it eventually ended up in the archives as an important symbol of our agency's history.

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*Dr. Madison taught environmental history at Harvard and the University of Melbourne in Australia before becoming the Fish and Wildlife Service's first official historian in 1999. He is at work on a book and videotape chronicling our agency's history.*

*Although she is known most widely for her book *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson also wrote extensively about marine life. Her book *The Sea Around Us* won her the 1952 National Book Award for nonfiction.*

*Photo courtesy of the Rachel Carson Foundation*



*Past Directors of the Fish and Wildlife Service met with current Director Clark on June 25, 1998, at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, West Virginia, to recall major developments during the past four decades.*

*Thanks to the Service's Heritage Committee, NCTC videotaped the interviews, preserving the images and voices of our agency's leaders. John Gottschalk died 15 months after this event.*

*Left to right:*

*Jamie Rappaport Clark, 1997 - Present*

*Spencer H. Smith, December 1970 - August 1973*

*Lynn A. Greenwalt, October 1973 - January 1981*

*John S. Gottschalk, October 1964 - October 1970*

*John F. Turner, 1989 - 1993*

*USFWS photo*

