

# Remembering Ted Sudia, Co-founder of the George Wright Society

TED SUDIA, WHO ROSE TO THE POSITION OF CHIEF SCIENTIST WITH THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE (NPS), died at the age of 89 on April 15, 2015, at his home in Pittsburgh. Ted was a key figure in the history of the George Wright Society, having co-founded (along with Robert M. Linn) our organization in 1980. He was one of the most influential of the Society's leaders during its earliest years.

Theodore William Sudia was born on October 10, 1925, in Ambridge, Pennsylvania, the youngest of the eight children of Paraskeva and Frank Sudia. A lifelong supporter of the Boy Scouts, Ted received the Eagle Scout Award in 1938. He served in the US Navy during World War II as a radar operator on a minesweeper in the Pacific. After graduating from Kent State University in Ohio, he received his master's and doctorate from Ohio State University in plant ecology/plant physiology. Among other positions, Ted was a professor at Winona State Teachers' College and at St. Mary's College in Minnesota and then professor at the University in Minnesota, as well as working at the American Institute for Biological Sciences. He then joined the federal government, where he had a 25-year career with NPS that ended with his retirement in 1995.



In the Park Service, many of those who worked under him saw Ted as a mentor and a friend, “a brilliant and visionary leader of the National Park Service Science program,” “a visionary, way ahead of the rest,” a “staunch defender of applying scientific principles to the understanding and management of the world’s natural resources, especially those managed by the U.S. National Park Service.” At the same time, his forceful personality and fast thinking could frustrate

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people who disagreed with him, but no one questioned his passion or his ability to generate new ideas, which, as one colleague recalled, “flowed like water from him.”

Ted’s accomplishments with the National Park Service were many. Here is a partial list:

- With his endorsement, NPS funded a 1975 study by The Nature Conservancy on how to bolster natural area preservation efforts nationwide. This was followed by a three-volume cataloging of ongoing natural area preservation activity at the federal, state, and private levels. Ted and staff drafted legislation to bolster natural area preservation nationwide.
- He helped start what is now the INFINITY Science Center, a NASA facility in Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi. This was part of a first attempt to make a cadre of scientists available to the parks as consultants. He also had NPS staff seeking out satellite imagery for potential use in managing national parks, and was one of the first to press for biological inventories of the parks, reform of collecting permits, and a scientific photograph library.
- Ted oversaw the production by staff members of the 1980 *State of the Parks Report*, a remarkably candid analysis of the problems facing the parks. It has turned out to be a classic in the government environmental literature.
- After extensive planning and thought, he organized the NPS science program into eight divisions: natural resources, social science, natural history, research evaluation, air and water resources, appropriate technology, science information, and environmental education. These topics are an indication of what Ted thought most important and represent the culmination of his thinking on how science in the Park Service should be carried out.
- He got NPS Director Ronald Walker to approve a science policy, making it a bedrock of NPS activity.
- He oversaw the writing of a research grade manual outlining NPS policy in this area.
- Ted was a strong and persuasive advocate of NPS involvement in international science activities. With his support, the agency worked with the US Agency for International Development to produce publications on management and sustainable use of arid lands, coastal zones, humid tropics, case studies, project designs and guidelines, and a *Natural Resources Technical Bulletin*. This helped USAID in its increasing involvement with natural resource management and conservation at a time when that organi-



zation had very few personnel involved in this field.

- Ted supported the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee by arranging for a colleague to serve as its first chairperson.
- He was on the cutting edge of thinking and writing about urban ecosystems, and wrote a series of pamphlets on the subject. He even had one staff person investigate the possibility of using urban rooftops in Washington, DC, and elsewhere as breeding areas for rare species.
- He suggested that NPS put all its old planning studies online for the public to use; this was part of the impetus for the large collection of NPS-related materials that is now available on the Web.
- Against considerable political opposition, Ted supported the publication in 1984 by the Department of the Interior/NPS of Margery Oldfield's *The Value of Conserving Genetic Resources*. The book is now considered a classic in the genetic resources conservation field.
- Ted was a long-time supporter of and advisor to the well-respected journal *Park Science* and helped ensure its continuation during times when politics threatened to undermine it.

In 1980, he and Bob Linn created the George Wright Society in response to what they saw as a critical need for an independent professional association to advocate for the application of the best knowledge and scholarship from relevant areas of the sciences and humanities on behalf of parks, protected areas, and cultural sites around the world. Ted served on the initial GWS Board of Directors from 1980 through 1982 and helped imbue his adventurous intellect into the Society's "DNA."



Here is an example from a paper he wrote for *The George Wright Forum* in 1982, titled “Domestic Tranquility and the National Park System: A Context for Human Ecology.” In it, he develops an argument that links the creation of national parks in America with several of the nation’s foundational ideas, as expressed in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution:

Taken together, then, we have four penetrating concepts, with the highest of ethical and moral considerations: the “pursuit of happiness” concept from the Declaration of Independence; “domestic tranquility” from the Preamble to the Constitution; the “wilderness pleasuring ground” maintained in its natural state, in the [1872] Yellowstone legislation; and “parks maintained unimpaired for the benefit and enjoyment of future generations” from the National Park [Service] Act of 1916. Taking all four together we have the basis for the establishment, growth, enhancement, protection, and preservation of the National Heritage.

Insofar as our national growth and development have been true to these concepts, they have been an outgrowth of the very genetics—the “seed instructions”—laid down by the founding fathers at the nation’s conception and birth.

The concepts nest, ecologically. Pursuit of happiness relates to individuals, domestic tranquility relates to communities, and the pleasuring grounds in their natural state relates to the environment. Governments are instituted among men to establish unalienable rights, in viable communities, guided by an environmental ethic.

Ted was exceptional in making these kinds of connections, and in his ability to see emerging trends and imagine how they might be applicable to the protection of parks, protected areas, and cultural sites. He was involved in other publishing projects as well. For example, to provide an outlet for his many ideas that spanned science, philosophy, and government, Ted initiated a mini-journal called “We the People.”

In recognition of his vision and many accomplishments, in 2002 Ted was named co-winner of the Society’s highest award, the George Melendez Wright Award for Excellence.

Ted was preceded in death by his wife, Cecelia Elson Sudia; a daughter, Norah Sudia Davies; and by several siblings. He is survived by a son, Frank Sudia; a daughter, Rachael Sudia (Keith) Boivin; a sister, Dorothy Evancho; and by many grandchildren, nieces, and nephews.