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most beloved nature writers and dedicated wilderness conservationists, Mr. Sigurd Olson. As an architect of the federal government’s protection of wilderness areas, as well as a poetic voice that captured the importance of these pristine sites, Mr. Olson left us and our children a legacy of natural sanctuaries through his ethic by which to better appreciate them.

Mr. President, 1999 marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Sigurd Olson. Over the July recess, I had the opportunity to travel to Northern Minnesota to commemorate and celebrate Sigurd Olson’s life and work. I think it is fitting that the Senate take this opportunity to honor the life of Mr. Olson, who sadly passed away 17 years ago, and to renew our dedication to continue his legacy of wilderness preservation.

Born in Chicago in 1899, Sigurd Olson and his family soon moved to the beautiful Door County Peninsula of Wisconsin. It was there that he formed his life-long love of the outdoors. In high school, he became involved in outdoor recreation. Half a century later, he described what he experienced as a boy along the coast of Green Bay: ‘A school of perch darted in and out of the rocks. They were green and gold and black, and I was fascinated by their beauty. Seagulls wheeled and cried above me. Waves crashed against the pier. I was alone in a wide and lovely place, part of the dark forest through which I had come, and of all the wild sounds and colors and feelings of the place I had found. That day I entered into a life of indecipherable beauty and delight. There I believe I heard the singing wilderness for the first time.

A few years after graduating from the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Olson moved to northeastern Minnesota and traveled and guided for many years in the surrounding millions of acres of lakeland wilderness—what eventually became the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness—and he grew convinced that wilderness provided the experiences that modern society was losing. It was this conviction that formed the basis of both his conservation and his writing careers. As he said at a Sierra Club conference in 1965:

I have discovered in a lifetime of traveling in primitive regions, a lifetime of seeing people living in the wilderness and using it, that there is a hard core of wilderness need in everyone, a core that makes its spiritual values a basic human necessity. There is no hiding it. . . . Unless we can preserve places where the endless spiritual needs of man can be fulfilled and nourished, we will destroy our culture and ourselves.

Olson became an active conservationist in the 1920’s, fighting to keep roads, dams and airplanes out of his “special place” in northeastern Minnesota. He went on to serve as the president of both the National Parks Association and the Wilderness Society. Yet, perhaps his greatest contribution to conservation came during his tenure as an advisor to Secretary of the Interior from 1959 to the early 1970’s, when he helped draft the Wilderness Act, which became law in 1964 and established the U.S. wilderness protection system that still exists today.

While I never knew Sigurd Olson, those who worked with “Sig,” as he was called, were infected by his unwavering commitment to the Boundary Waters and his desire to help people truly understand the meaning and legacy of wilderness.

Central to Olson’s agenda was his persevereance as public advocate for the Boundary Waters, in spite of the sometimes quite open hostility that he faced in taking that stand. Twenty-two years ago on July 8, 1977, a public field hearing was held at Ely High School on Congressman Fraser’s bill that became the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978. Sigurd Olson, then 77 years old, stepped forward to testify in the midst of hises, catcalls and boos from the roughly thousand-person crowd that packed the hearing. Despite the heckling, Olson new why he was there. ‘From the Listening Point cabin: stars to the eventual building of his cabin: first night sleeping there under the stars to the eventual building of his cabin.

Second, Wisconsinites truly appreciate an accomplished outdoor enthusiast turned advocate. That’s a rarity