

Marine Turtle Newsletter

A Tribute to Jack Woody

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When Jack Woody retired from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) earlier this year, sea turtle conservationists said goodbye to a wonderful friend and mentor. As the National Sea Turtle Coordinator for the FWS, Jack was a powerful and tireless force for sea turtle conservation. We will remember him for many things, as champion of the Kemp's ridley, crusader for Turtle Excluder Device (TED) regulations, and outspoken advocate for conservation. But more than this, we will remember Jack for his support, guidance and friendship. During his 32 year service in wildlife conservation, Jack has nurtured and inspired hundreds of conservationists, leaving a legacy that will last for years to come.

It is surprising how few of his colleagues know about Jack's early days in conservation which he says he began as a "wildlife cop". After graduating from the University of California (Humbolt) with a B.S. in Wildlife Management, Jack moved his family to Nevada where he served as a warden/biologist for the state Fish and Game Commission. Nine years later he returned to school to earn an M.S. in Wildlife Management at the University of Nevada and, upon graduation, transferred to Washington D.C. to work for the FWS. The following year the Woodys returned to the West, this time to New Mexico, where Jack spent the next 22 years working for the Service. In 1975 Jack became the first Chief of Endangered Species in that region and in 1980 he was appointed as the first National Sea Turtle Coordinator for FWS. The following short accounts from four colleagues who worked closely with Jack illustrate the influence of his inspiration, hard work and friendship.

Javier Alvarado from Mexico's University of Michoacan writes, "I first met Jack in 1982, walking on Colola Beach, both of us escaping the crowd gathering around Michoacan's Governor who was visiting the field camp. It was my first season to work with sea turtles, and I didn't know what the future had in store for me. As Jack and I walked and talked, he began to share his enthusiasm and concern for sea turtles and for this fledging project in Mexico. Over the past 11 years Jack has continued to provide the guidance and inspiration that has enabled the black turtle project in Michoacan not only to survive, but to grow in many directions. He has listened to and supported new ideas and has always been accessible and enthusiastic. Jack has also been very influential in the establishment of other sea turtle conservation projects in Mexico, providing the technical assistance and financial support necessary for these new projects to take off. I appreciate Jack's helpfulness and great knowledge, his congeniality and his sense of humor. He is to blame for my continuing to work with sea turtles."

Earl Possardt, former Southeastern U. S. Sea Turtle Coordinator for FWS, loved working with Jack and especially appreciated his personality, "My first exposure to Woody's unique character and style was in the early 1980's while I was assigned to the FWS Endangered Species Program in Washington D.C. Woody was on a one-week assignment in the Washington office as the Acting Associate

Director of the endangered species and federal aid programs, a fairly lofty position in the bureaucratic pecking order. A memorandum emanated from Woody's desk indicating he had conducted an inspection of his broom closet and reported his findings; one old sneaker, etc. I was to learn over the next 10 years that while Woody never took himself too seriously (or our agency or some individuals...), he always took his job, the mission of the FWS, and sea turtle conservation very seriously! Woody knew how to effectively work within the bureaucracy, and around it if necessary, like few others I know. The eight years that I worked with Woody were the most rewarding and fun years of my career. While it might embarrass Woody to hear this, it is with deep respect and affection that I think of him. I miss you Jack Woody."

From my own perspective at the Center for Marine Conservation, Jack was a conservationist's dream-come-true. We worked together for four years, and during that time Jack became my best turtle ally and friend. He was always the first one with whom I wanted to share the good news, and the bad. Jack Woody is unlike anyone I've ever known, and must be the most outspoken government employee of all time. Once, in reply to my question about how he managed to keep his job, he laughed and said, "I guess they would rather put up with me on the inside where they can watch me than have to figure out what I'm doing on the outside." My favorite memory is of Jack frustrating a group of Congressmen from the Gulf of Mexico who were interrogating him about TEDs, turtles and head-starting programs. Jack said everything they did not want to hear and as their faces turned red, I realized that his performance was "vintage" Jack Woody. I will always cherish that memory, and I will always cherish our friendship.

Richard Byles, Woody's former assistant and current National Sea Turtle Coordinator for FWS, worked more closely with Jack than anyone else. Rich writes, "Jack Woody has been a great inspiration to me and many others. Working with him behind the scenes has revealed to me a portrait of a real force for change. At once pragmatic, but with a never-wavering aim to reduce the senseless waste of resources, Woody has given me the bottom-line in conservation-you have to work with people of all stripes to achieve your goals. He demonstrated this well by creating action in the slow, cold world of multinational government service. Woody's cheerful and playful nature nicely overlaid an attitude of "Let's make it happen". He worked tirelessly and his extensive contacts always found him approachable. Woody has become for me a model of the route for endangered species recovery. While the job is enormous, Woody could cut through red tape, he wasn't timid about taking chances and he always encouraged people everywhere to stick with their convictions but also to be willing to bend a little for their conservation ends. The retired Woody still embodies all of these characteristics. He is still working for change. He is still our role model. We are all better for calling him friend. We wish him all the best in his pursuits. *Haste luego amigo.*"

As remarkable as Jack's accomplishments for sea turtles have been, his work with wildlife has not been limited to sea turtles and includes thick-billed parrots, raptors (birds of prey), migratory birds, big horned sheep, prong-horned antelope, the Mexican wolf, manatees, and endangered fish. These days Jack works for the Fish and Wildlife Foundation as a part-time consultant, continuing to do many of the same things he did before his retirement. His hobbies include hunting, fishing, gardening, and, in all likelihood, giving grief where it is richly deserved. We all miss you Jack Woody.

Editor's Note: It's a difficult assignment to capsule the career of one as accomplished and as admired as Jack Woody, and we sincerely thank Marydele for accepting the challenge! And on

behalf of a multitude of friends and fans who could not be included in this brief *adieu*, we wish you, Jack, all good things and many very, very happy years.