

Founding Father

Stewart L. Udall, who died on March 20 at the age of 90, was one of the prime movers of the modern environmental movement, building a firm legal and policy foundation

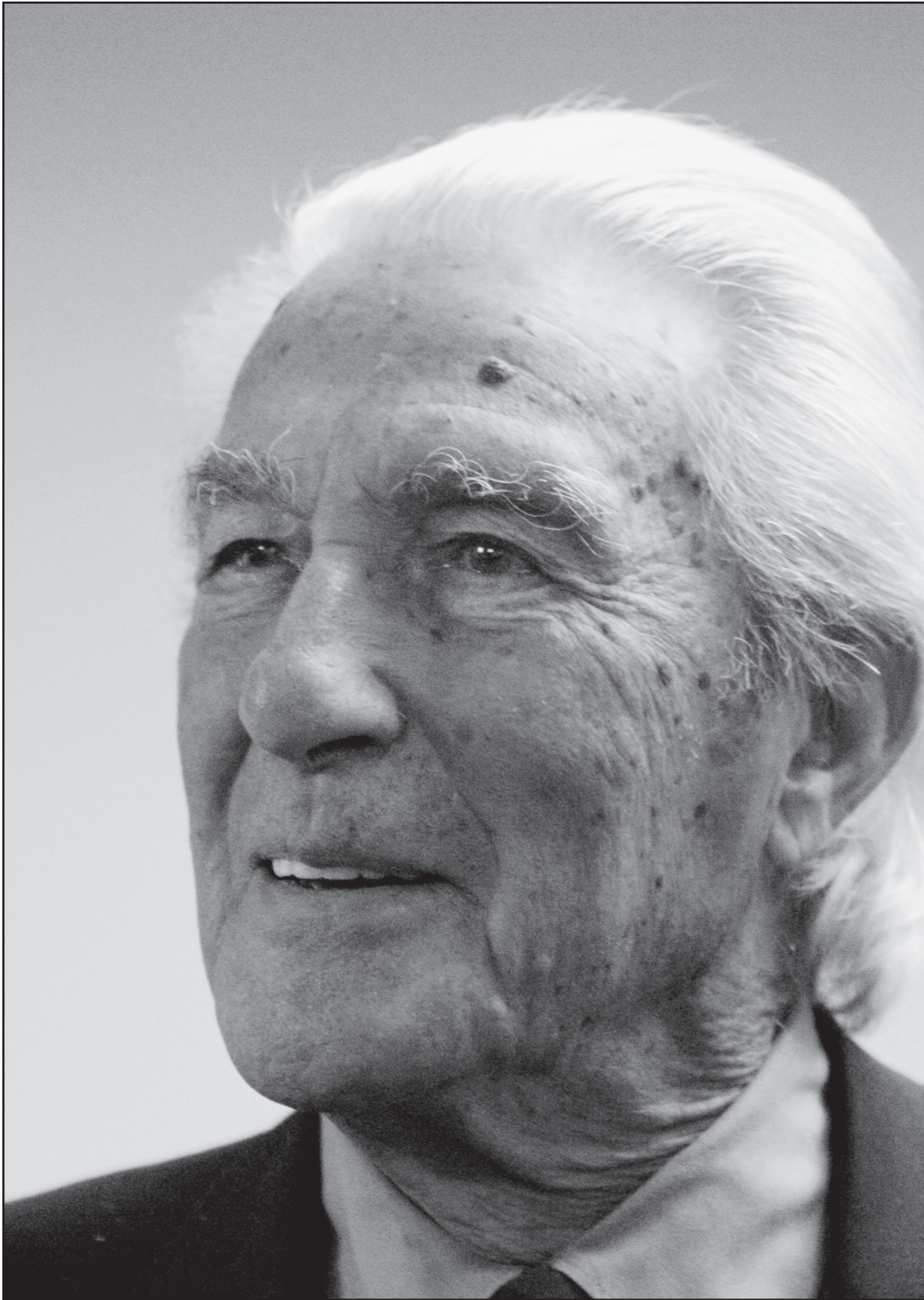
Before the first Earth Day, before the vast outpouring of legislation whose implementation and administration is our profession's daily bread and butter, Stewart L. Udall came to Washington and changed the way the nation views its environmental heritage and the ability of government to preserve it, helping to make all that followed both natural and necessary.

Following three terms as a U.S. representative from his native Arizona, during which time he served on the House interior committee, he was named secretary of the interior by President John F. Kennedy in 1961. During the eight years that followed, continuing in the administration of President Lyndon Johnson, he championed measures that forever changed the country's view of the federal role in conservation, preservation, and pollution prevention. He also helped to safeguard millions of acres of federal land as national parks, seashores, and wilderness areas.

As President Obama put it on learning of Udall's death on March 20, he "left an indelible mark on this nation and inspired countless Americans who will continue his fight for clean air, clean water, and to maintain our many natural resources." Or as one of his successors at the Department of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, put it, "Stewart Udall, more than any other single person, was responsible for reviving the national commitment to conservation and environmental preservation."

"That was a wonderful time," Udall said recently of his tenure at the Department of the Interior, "and it carried through into the Nixon administration, into the Ford administration, into the Carter administration," embracing the 30 years of progress from the natural resources laws of the 1960s, to the NEPA to CERCLA legislative burst in the 1970s, and to their strengthening amendments in the 1980s. "I don't remember a big fight between the Republicans and Democrats in the Nixon administration or under President Ford and so on," he said. "There was a consensus that the country needed more conservation projects of the kind we were proposing."

Udall played a critical role in forming that consensus. In recent years, however, according to his son Tom, now a Democratic senator from New Mexico, the senior Udall often lamented the change in tone in Washington that has stalled environmental progress, including the end of bipartisan support for pollution and natural resources legislation. In his latter years he became a fierce critic of President George



W. Bush. "The Bush administration, determined to ransack public lands for the last meager pockets of petroleum, has turned my old department into a servile, single-minded adjunct of the Energy Department," he said.

Stewart Lee Udall was born in 1920, the scion of a family already famous. His father was Arizona Supreme Court justice Levi S. Udall and his grandfather had founded the Mormon community in which he grew up, St. Johns. But his early life was not one of privilege, observed the *Arizona Star*. "I grew up on the tail of the frontier. I plowed fields with horses and worked as a hired hand in high school for 50 cents a day," he told the newspaper.

Udall interrupted his studies at University of Arizona for service in the military during World War II, when he was a tail gunner on B-24 bombers in the Italian theater, and as a Mormon missionary, returning to finish his bachelor's degree. He played as a guard on the university's basketball team that went to the National Invitational Tournament, the sport's championship of the time. He continued on to a law degree at Arizona, then he and his brother Morris, who would succeed him in Congress, where he established his own environmental legacy, formed a firm in Tucson.

During Udall's six years in Congress he became a civil rights champion and fought for home rule for the District of Columbia, both unpopular measures but ones to which he was deeply committed. In 1960 he campaigned for candidate John F. Kennedy, helping to secure Arizona for the senator from Massachusetts.

When Udall joined the Kennedy administration in 1961, he persuaded the new president to call a White House conference on conservation, the first since the Theodore Roosevelt administration. During his tenure, Udall declared, "nature will take precedence over the needs of the modern man." A fan of Rachel Carson, whose 1962 book *Silent Spring* launched the contemporary concern about pollution, Udall responded with his own book, *The Quiet Crisis*, a year later. Like the Carson book, it became a bestseller. In his book, he called for a nationwide "land conscience" to preserve America's wild places. "We cannot afford an America where expedience tramples upon esthetics and development decisions are made with an eye only on the present."

During his tenure at Interior, he launched a full-court press against untrammelled development, scoring numerous victories. He helped to secure passage

of the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, and early legislation to combat air and water pollution and preserve endangered species. At Interior, he was instrumental in the fight to preserve the Grand Canyon from a series of dam projects that would have flooded much of the natural wonder. He was not afraid to buck the powers that be. "My own people from Arizona were desperate to build those dams," he told National Public Radio in 1996. "Some of them still dislike me."

Udall was responsible for the acquisition of 3.85 million acres to the federal estate, including four national parks, six national monuments, nine national recreation areas, 20 historic sites, 50 wildlife refuges, and eight national seashores. "From the Cape Cod seashore in Massachusetts to the untamed wilds of Alaska, Mr. Udall left a monumental legacy as a guardian of America's natural beauty," the *New York Times* declared. He persuaded Lyndon Johnson to make the environment a key part of the Great Society, and worked with Lady Bird Johnson on the Keep America Beautiful program. He was a staunch friend of the First Lady, who helped to smooth his passage from the Kennedy administration to her husband's cabinet despite differences between the two men. As an indication of his wide-ranging influence and concern, Udall is credited with integrating the Washington Redskins, the last holdout of the formerly all-white National Football League, whose stadium was on leased National Park Service land.

Udall left public service in 1969 but remained active in his favorite causes for the rest of his life. Along with other members of his family, he championed the cause of atomic weapons workers and citizens exposed to radiation from weapons manufacturing and above-ground testing. He won the case in 1984, but it was overturned on appeal. He then turned to his friends in Congress, including Republican Orrin Hatch of Utah and Democrat Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, to secure passage of the Radiation Exposure and Compensation Act of 1990, which was signed by President George H. W. Bush. In addition to compensation for the afflicted, the law formally apologized to those who were "subjected to increased risk of injury and disease to serve the national security interests of the United States."

Stewart Udall and Morris Udall received the ELI Award for career achievement in advancing environmental law, policy, and management in 1992. Mo Udall died in 1998. Stewart's son Tom Udall, now the junior senator from New Mexico, and Mo's son Mark Udall, now the junior senator from Utah, received the Award in 2009. — **S.R.D.**