

The Legacy of Joseph W. Penfold

By Mike Penfold and Kit Muller

Note: The Great American Outdoors Act, P.L. 116-152, was signed into law on August 4, 2020 and provides for permanent funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) at \$900 million a year. The Act also established a National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund of up to \$1.9 billion a year for five years to provide needed maintenance of facilities and infrastructure in our national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, public lands, recreation areas, and American Indian schools. We are reminded of the legacy of the important recreation and conservation work that Joseph W. Penfold did in the 1950's, 60's and 70's, leading up to the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission Report in January 1962 and passage of the LWCF Act in 1965. Mike Penfold, former Forest Supervisor, BLM State Director and BLM Assistant Director, reflects on the life of his father Joseph W. Penfold that laid the foundations for these conservation efforts.

- (1) Your father, Joseph W. Penfold, was active in the conservation movement in the 1950's, 60's and 70's. How did he get involved in the conservation movement and what were some of the positions he held?**

My Dad served with the United States Merchant Marine and with the Office of Price Administration in Denver during World War II. After the war, he served with the United Nations Regional Relief Agency in China as a field representative. In 1949 he joined the staff of the Izaak Walton League of America as its Western regional representative in Colorado. And in 1957 he moved to Washington, D.C., to be the Izaak Walton League's Washington representative and conservation director, a position he occupied until he retired.

- (2) Some of the Monitor's readers may be unfamiliar with the Izaak Walton League of America. What role did the League play in the early days of the conservation movement?**

A book by William Philpott *Vacationland: Tourism and Environment in the Colorado High Country* does a pretty good job of describing the early days of the conservation movement in Colorado: "In the 1940's the Izaak Walton League of America (IWLA) had more members and more pull with policy makers than any other outdoor group. In Colorado its brand of conservation played especially well. Colorado's outdoor leisure scene was largely middle-class and casual, and so was the Izaak Walton League; it resembled in historian Stephen Fox's words, 'a Rotary club that liked to go fishing....' It did not hurt that the League's primary focus -fishing- was also Colorado signature sport in those days before the ski boom. Yet the League's vision went well beyond one pastime. Its magazine, *Outdoor America*, ran not just fishing stories but stories on camping, bird watching, and woman's outdoor activity, evoked less a cult of fishermen than an entire recreational lifestyle. "League members called themselves 'Ike's. They also called themselves 'defenders of soil, woods, waters, and wildlife' and strode forth to fight for the natural elements of their recreational world. This struck a chord in Colorado, a state with a long history of sportsmen appointing themselves enforcers of conservation

principles. . . .Colorado even became a breeding ground for Izaak Walton leaders, most notably William (Bill) Voigt Jr., who rose from head of the Denver regional office to the national Executive Director, and Voigt's successor in Denver, Joseph Penfold. . . .Still, sportsmen-activists could take the conservation cause only so far. As they faced their first postwar battle, some Colorado Ikes could already see the need to enlist broader popular support."

(3) What were some of his personality characteristics that helped your Dad be successful in his conservation activities?

A few comments about Joe Penfold might be of interest. Around the house, he was a reticent man. He liked to read, and it was always amazing to watch him thumb through books. I asked Mom one time whether he was really reading because he spent such little time on each page. Mom said yes, he was reading and digesting and understanding what he learned.

I found this statement about Dad in Bill Voigt's book *Born With Fists Doubled*: "Joe was not one to speak without thoroughly exploring both pros and cons of an issue. This was an innate trait; I doubt if anyone who knew him at any stage of his adult life could cite any instance when he made a hasty, ill-conceived statement in a serious discussion. Joe's mental processes were quite deliberate, he'd have a debate within himself, chew on the 'for' and 'against' and the in-betweens of the subject, make up his mind, and only then venture an opinion."

(4) Are there other factors that contributed to his success?

As I look back on my Dad's life, I begin to understand what he was able to accomplish was because of the progressive nature and expertise of so many of his friends who were also leaders. It is also clear that he was able to develop a trusting relationship with all of them. The list of people who were my Dad's friends is a Who's Who in the conservation movement during the 1950's, 60's and 70's. That list includes people such as Arthur Carhart, founder of the American wilderness system; Olaus Murie and his wife Mardy, the great naturalist and founder of the Wilderness Society; Sig Olson, defender of the Boundary Waters Canoe area; John Craighead, highly respected wildlife biologist; Howard Zahniser Executive Director of the Wilderness Society; and many stalwarts within the Izaak Walton League, including Frank Gregg. He also established excellent working relationships with people in Congress, such as Congressman John Saylor, Congressman Wayne Aspinall, Senator Frank Church, and others key to sponsoring critical legislation.

(5) What were some of the initial conservation fight's your Dad got involved in after he joined the League?

One of the first battles that Dad ran into, when he joined the League, was an attempt by the Western livestock grazers to take over the grazing lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service. Under their proposal, as described in Bill

Voigt's book, ranchers "would have 15 years in which to decide whether to buy all or how many acres; and they'd pay for the purchase over 30 years with an interest at 1 1/2%. The price would be \$0.09 to \$2.50 an acre."

Ike's in Colorado and Wyoming were outraged by this 'land grab', as they called it, but they felt terrifyingly alone. Even their brother Waltonians seemed uninterested, as most of them lived in the Midwest, far from the scrub lands and forests under threat. So Colorado Waltonians took their case to a wider audience. Voigt, Carhart, Penfold and other devoted Ike's, began feeding the on ground information to Harper's Magazine columnist Bernard DeVoto, (also a friend of Joseph Penfold) who fulminated against the land grab in a series of fiery articles.

Bill Voigt chronicles this in his book, "Now and then one or another livestock Association leader would publish something that seemed to hint that the question of 'ultimate disposal' remaining public domain and National Forest range was about to erupt again. One of these brought a letter by Penfold to Denver's Rocky Mount News, which had asked editorially why it would be so bad to sell some of Colorado's National Forest range to 'people who use it'. Penfold wrote 'A good question, but you have to figure out which users should get it. Grazing is mentioned, so should National Forest lands in Colorado be sold to the 1,300 livestock people who use them, or the 1,253,000 campers and picnickers, 246,000 winter sports enthusiasts, or to the hunters and fishermen, about 450,000 who spent 1,200,050 days last year using the National Forests in the state? What about the downstream water users wholly dependent for their survival upon watershed protection? . . . Colorado furnishes 73% of the water in the upper Colorado River Basin, most of it from public lands. Put any valuation you want on water and it will still total a staggering figure.'" Apparently, the livestock industry did not answer his pertinent questions. What is illustrated in this activity is Dad's desire to have detailed information and data to make conservation arguments. Voigt, Carhart, Penfold, and the Ike's won that battle, and the public lands were saved for time being.

What emerged next was the battle to stop the Bureau of Reclamation's proposed Echo Park Dam in the Dinosaur National Monument. In his book *Vacationland: Tourism and Environment in the Colorado High Country*, William Philpott characterized the fight as follows: "Nationally, the Sierra Club spearheaded the campaign, casting it as a crusade for non-material values -- 'the delights we have clung to, in our civilization, for the good of our soul, even if those delights don't affect the Dow Jones average.' But conservationist based in Colorado, a state that figured to benefit economically from the water storage project, seemed reluctant to stand on such principles. The home state opposition to Echo Park was mostly orchestrated by Art Carhart and his close associate Joe Penfold, the Denver-based Western representative of the IWLA. Both were science minded sportsmen conservationists who hated being tarred and feathered with the "nature lover" brush. So instead of professing their love for pristine wilderness, they stuck their case on environmental values that were much more mainstream in the 1950's Colorado: the cult of casual nature that was gripping the growing numbers of leisure consumers and the Chamber of Commerce dream of making nature pay by packaging it for tourists."

“Carhart and Penfold made a hard facts business case against the dam to ‘stress the loss of...economic value; if Echo Park was flooded. Carhart predicted that a Dinosaur National Monument left un-dammed would generate \$15 million a year in tourist revenue. Penfold, too, pointed out the economic value of recreation, calling it quote a major industry in Colorado, but warned ‘day by day, (water) project by project, we are diminishing the resource values which supported.’ The two men organized the citizens group against the dam and made a point of getting businessmen to lead it, so there would not be (in Carhart’s words) ‘professional nature lovers heading the deal.’”

Another book, *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement*, by Mark W.T. Harvey adds to the story of saving Dinosaur National Monument: “The Sierra Club could hardly have won this battle alone. By 1953, the threat to Echo Park became a major item on the agenda of many conservation organizations, that some of them substantially more powerful in the political arena than the tiny Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, and the Audubon Society. The weight of conservation sentiment came from sportsmen and birdwatchers, not from National Park or wilderness lovers, and that fundamental fact gave great bearing on the success of the campaign and Congress, where most lawmakers saw little reason to listen to wilderness groups. Even Bernard DeVoto suspected the Wilderness Society and the National Parks Association, telling Congressman Eugene McCarthy, “they tend to be starry-eyed and full of nature’s beauty”.

“As the campaign continued to coalesce, the Izaak Walton League proved to be especially important. Under the direction of William Voigt, Jr., Joe Penfold and the IWLA anchored the Echo Park campaign in traditional conservation goals, namely, by looking out for the best ways to ensure good fishing. . . .Penfold had a strong influence among league members in Colorado and in the upper basin. As Western Representative of the Izaak Walton League, with a base of operations in Denver, he lent credibility to the campaign. He understood the West’s keen interest in developing its water, and knew that most people in the upper basin viewed the Colorado River and its tributaries much as a desert traveler reviewed an oasis. Well aware of the political power water interests, Penfold kept abreast of the Colorado River Storage Project (CRSP) and Echo Park and the Denver Post. Easy-going and informal, he was less of a wilderness crusader than an old-style conservationist, ever mindful of the pragmatic aims of the Izaak Walton League for sound water management and good fishing while he did not cultivate the public image of more combative individuals like DeVoto or Dave Brower he shared their conviction about the threat of Echo Park dam to the National Park system, and he was no less devoted to blocking its approval by Congress.”

One episode in this fight to save Dinosaur National Monument was a float trip on the Yampa and Green rivers. Congressman John Saylor a Republican from Pennsylvania and Wayne Aspinall of Colorado, were on the trip. My Dad set the trip up, and Congressman Saylor brought along his young son Phil, who was about my age, probably 13 or 14. I got to go. The trip was an amazing opportunity to see this magnificent canyonlands of the Dinosaur National Monument. Our guide was Bus Hatch, who had also rolled up his sleeves in the fight to save Dinosaur.

Bill Voigt talks about this float trip in his book, *Born With Fists Doubled*: “Penfold arranged that trip. Lasting friendships began as the party drifted down quiet reaches between spectacular canyon walls, and in conversation around the campfire. three men – Aspinall, Saylor, and Penfold took each other’s measure in Dinosaur, and liked what they found. Aspinall was an astute politician who knew his continuation in office depending on what he produced for the West, but if approached in a spirit of reason he could respond to sound arguments well presented. The trip added dimension to Saylor’s establishing conservation stature. The two Congressman had much power over resources in their time. The value of the trip with regard to Dinosaur’s future must not be underestimated.”

The float trip was remarkable. First, it secured Congressman Saylor’s commitment to helping save Dinosaur National Monument. It also secured Congressman Saylor as a significant defender of the public lands and natural environments. It was not a little matter that Congressman Saylor and Joe Penfold developed a close working relationship that would have significant benefits and future accomplishments. It may have been on this trip that Dad secured also a trusting relationship with Congressman Aspinall.

Congressman Aspinall got much of what he wanted in the final authorizations for the Colorado River Storage Project. But he did keep the dam in Dinosaur National Monument and other National Parks and Monuments out of the proposal. He was vital along with Saylor in saving Dinosaur National Monument.

There were many people and organizations involved in keeping the dam out of Dinosaur National Monument. In my opinion, several other things were important outcomes. People such as Howard Zahniser, David Brower, Sierra Club, Charles Callison, Audubon Society, and other vital leaders would positively impact the conservation movement in the future. My Dad got to know most of the national conservation leaders in the United States at that time. It is fair to say that the movers and shakers in the outdoor recreation/environmental movement were fewer in those days. These people tended to get along and work together across different organizations. I think it’s also fair to say that in the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s, there was much more collaboration between political parties than we experience now in 2020. Important legislation could be accomplished in those days.

(6) What were some of the lessons your Dad took from the fight to save Dinosaur?

Before leaving Colorado for Washington DC, my Dad had the idea that there was a need for a better assessment and accounting of outdoor recreation in the United States. The fight to save Dinosaur had taught him that. Little had been done at that point to understand the social and economic benefits of outdoor recreation in cities, parks, across various landscapes and public lands He came up with the idea and started proposing that a national assessment be made of this outdoor recreation arena.

Brent A, Olson wrote in his publication *Paper Trails: The Outdoor Recreation Resource Review Commission and the Rationalization of Recreation Resources*: “Penfold understood landscapes as natural resources amenable to rationalization and

standardization under a system of modern resource management. For Penfold, the quantitative logic of management could most effectively support the preservationist argument. Once quantified as resources, recreational landscapes could be mapped, managed, regulated and developed to the same or similar schemes that regulated more traditional resources such as water and timber. The efficient managers of recreational resources across jurisdictional boundaries was deemed critical to their capacity to be conserved for extended beneficial use....For Penfold and the early advocates for the ORRRC, the link between multiple use and outdoor recreation rested upon rational resource planning and management. Rather than understanding outdoor recreation is incongruent this with the multiple use concept, they simply gave existing recreational uses equal standing under the multiple use umbrella.”

(7) What was your Dad’s role in the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission?

Historians seem to agree that my Dad conceived of a commission to review outdoor recreation on a national level. Working with Frank Gregg, who at the time was with the Colorado Game and Fish Commission, my Dad helped draft the legislation that created the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission. The Commission was established in June 1958 to answer three questions: “What are the recreation wants and needs now and what will they be in the years 1976 and 2000? What are the recreation resources of the Nation available to meet those needs? What policies and programs should be recommended to ensure that the needs of the present and future are adequately and efficiently met.” The Commission was chaired by Laurence S. Rockefeller of New York and was comprised of four representatives from the U.S. Senate, four representatives from the U.S. House of Representatives and commissioners appointed by the President. My Dad was one of the six commissioners appointed by President Kennedy.

Bill Voigt included the following passage in his book, *Born With Fists Doubled*: “Francis Sargent, who later became governor of Massachusetts, wrote me in late 1970’s about Penfold’s work on the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission: ‘Joe probably was the steadiness and most dedicated member of the Commission: he was no ‘Showboat’, and never popped off. He thought things through and, as a result when he had a point to make everyone listened, and usually his views prevailed.’”

(8) The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission submitted its report, *Outdoor Recreation for America*, to President Kennedy in January 1962. What happened as a result of the Commission’s recommendations?

The Commission’s work led to the establishment of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (now a part of the National Park Service) and the enactment of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, the Wilderness Act, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and the National Trails Act. And the organization and structure of the Commission served as a model for the Public Land Law Review Commission of 1970.

As Morris Udall said ,“Joe Penfold was the creative genius and driving force behind the most important and far reaching conservation legislation in American history.”

(9) How has the Land and Water Conservation Fund contributed to conservation in the United States?

The Land and Water Conservation Fund has been used to complete thousands of projects, including projects in cities, large and small, such as ball fields, swimming pools, and trails. Public land management agencies have used the funds to acquire critical public land needed for wildlife habitat, access to public land, and other areas essential for public recreation purposes. In my tenure as a Forest Supervisor of the Jefferson National Forest in Virginia, we were able to acquire thousands of acres of scenic land for the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, dozens of miles of the Appalachian Trail and a large tract of land that was eventually added to the Eastern Wilderness System. Since retiring, I have advocated for the recent acquisition of private property in the Pryor Mountains, Four Dancers Natural Area, and land along the Yellowstone River. These acquisitions would have been impossible without the LWCF.

In Montana, LWCF funding has built swimming pools in small towns, water systems in State Parks, access to public lands and rivers, and acquired properties in wilderness areas. Hundreds of LWCF funded projects have helped build the \$6 billion outdoor industry in Montana.

(10) After passing both houses of Congress with significant bipartisan majorities, the President recently signed the Great American Outdoors Act. What are the major provisions of this Act and why are they significant?

The Great American Outdoors Act will use royalties from offshore oil and natural gas to permanently fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund to the tune of \$900 million a year to invest in conservation and recreation opportunities across the country. It also will use revenues from energy development to provide up to \$1.9 billion a year for five years to a new National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. This Fund will provide needed maintenance for critical facilities and infrastructure in our national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, other public lands, and American Indian schools.