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## A Tribute to Stewart Udall

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**Stewart Lee Udall (1920-2010)**

**By Brent Blackwelder**

**President Emeritus, Friends of the Earth**

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One of the great conservation leaders of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Stewart Udall, died on March 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at his home in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Stewart Udall served in Congress, representing the Tucson, Arizona area from 1954 to 1960 and then as Secretary of the Interior from 1962 to 1969 under President Kennedy and President Johnson. Under Udall's leadership, over 3.8 million acres of our nation were protected as national parks, monuments, wildlife refuges, and scenic rivers.

In the words of former Clinton administration Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt, "Stewart Udall, more than any other single person, was responsible for reviving the national commitment to conservation and environmental preservation."

Having known Stewart for four decades, I remember what a remarkable human being he was. I especially recall some of the extraordinary and courageous efforts he made to save rivers. He stood up and said no to dams in the Grand Canyon, reminding people of Teddy Roosevelt's admonition: "Man cannot improve upon it; leave it alone."

Working with John and Frank Craighead of Wyoming, Stewart crucially advocated for the creation of the National Wild and Scenic River System to protect our nation's most outstanding rivers from dam building and commercial development. The passage of this law in 1968 designated 8 rivers initially for the System and established a mechanism for adding more. Today, over 250 of our magnificent rivers are part of the System. No other nation on Earth has done as much to safeguard its river heritage.

Stewart Udall's adherence to bipartisanship to protect the environment serves as a dramatic contrast to the venomous partisanship that today characterizes the House and Senate Republican leaders. Stewart and his brother Rep. Morris Udall (1922-1998) worked with the Republican leaders of their day to solve problems and together, the bipartisan combination set milestones in conserving land, water, and wildlife.

Throughout his life, Stewart Udall recognized the most harmful environmental health problems in the U.S. and did something about them. Growing up in the Southwest, Stewart knew of the health problems suffered by uranium miners, Native Americans, and ranchers who were exposed to the radiation from mining and bomb testing. He represented victims' groups and helped obtain recognition of the problem and compensation for those impacted.

At a time when the chemical industry was assiduously mounting a meretricious campaign against Rachel Carson and her book *Silent Spring* that detailed the dangers of pesticides, Stewart came to her defense.

Stewart Udall remained mentally sharp throughout his long life. At the swearing in of his son, Tom, as U.S. Senator of New Mexico, I spoke with Stewart about his recommendations. During the reception, I noticed that President Obama's Secretary of Interior, Ken Salazar, went with Stewart to a corner of the large room, speaking for almost half an hour. When Salazar was leaving the reception, I asked him whether he had received his marching orders. He pulled out his pad to reveal the copious notes he had just taken.

Stewart paid a tribute to the founder of Friends of the Earth, saying, "Thank God for David Brower. He makes the rest of us seem reasonable." Udall recognized that without strong environmental advocates pointing to the True North, elected and appointed officials will be pushed toward lowest common denominators.

Stewart Udall set the model, so let us hope that our elected and appointed leaders follow in his footsteps.

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