

Editorial: Stewart Udall was a true hero of the West

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An ethic of protecting public lands is a great American idea – as Ken Burns' recent series on the national parks showed. Now comes along a reminder of what is possible with vision, energy and persistence.

Stewart Udall, who was interior secretary during the presidencies of John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson (1961 to 1969), launched a new era of conservation in the 1960s. He died Saturday at 90.

His legacy remains with us. During his tenure, the nation gained four national parks – including Redwood National Park on California's north coast. It also gained national seashores, including Point Reyes north of San Francisco. Add to that new national monuments, national recreation areas, national lakeshores and national wildlife refuges.

But Udall's legacy is much more than that:

- Wilderness Act of 1964. Udall believed "wilderness, like the national park system, was an American idea."
- Land & Water Conservation Fund Act of 1964. This created, for the first time, a continuing source of funds to buy land.
- Water Quality Act of 1965. Udall insisted there was no "divine right" to dump wastes into lakes or streams "because the industry provides jobs." He argued that "pollution control is a normal part of the cost of doing business."
- Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968. Udall championed this as a counterbalance to the drive to build dams, a lesson learned in the controversy over damming the Grand Canyon.
- National Trails System Act of 1968. The Pacific Crest Trail was one of the first.

In describing the nation's parks, Udall said that the idea "will flourish only if it is constantly restated and made relevant to the values esteemed by future generations." He called upon a new generation to take up the mantle of a "new conservationism." His active life provides the inspiration for a new generation.

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