

The George Melendez Wright Award for Excellence

RICHARD WEST SELLARS

Dick Sellars began his career with the National Park Service in the mid-1960s as a seasonal ranger-naturalist in Grand Teton National Park. In October 1973 he accepted a position in the Southwest Regional Office in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He spent the remainder of his Park Service career in Santa Fe, although his research, writing, teaching, and other work have, in one way or another, involved virtually the entire National Park System. From 1979 to 1988, Dick oversaw programs in history, archeology, and historic architecture for the Southwest Region, as well as Servicewide programs in underwater archeology.



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Dick's articles on American history and on cultural and natural resource preservation have appeared in numerous publications, among them *The Washington Post*, *Wilderness*, *National Parks*, *Journal of Forestry*, and *Landscape*. He has lectured on preservation philosophy, policy, and practice at many universities and conferences, and for more than a decade conducted two-week courses in historic preservation for National Park Service managers. A keen traveler, he has visited more than 370 of the 390+ units of the National Park System.

Dick's book *Preserving Nature in the National Parks: A History*, published in 1997, set off a chain reaction of events that eventually led the Congress to fund the National Park Service's multi-year Natural Resources Challenge. Current estimates indicate that perhaps as much as \$750 million has been invested in park science and resources management because of this initiative.

Perhaps no book on National Park Service issues has had as profound an effect on agency culture as has *Preserving Nature*. Sellars' analysis clearly shows that the 20th-century NPS was oriented toward development and visitor services and resisted the input of its researchers and scientists. Now, the analyses of these people are routinely sought when park managers are faced with complex resources decisions. Moreover, park interest groups demand more rigorous research before decisions are made; they no longer are content with "this is the way we have always done it here."

As a retired NPS employee who worked in both the 20th and 21st century as a park manager, I can tell you that Dick's book forever changed the way I looked at park science and research. I know many of my colleagues had the same experience.

— nominated by Rick Smith

I would like to thank the George Wright Society Board for this honor of receiving the George Melendez Wright Award for Excellence, and former National Park Service superintendent Richard B. (Rick) Smith for nominating me for the award.

Regarding the book Preserving Nature in the National Parks, I especially thank John E. Cook for his steadfast financial support and all-important political cover (inside and outside the Park Service) throughout the nine-year research, writing, and editing process; and, following publication, Director Robert G. Stanton for his leadership in using the book as a catalyst to bring the Natural Resource Challenge to fruition. I also thank Michael Soukup and Deny Galvin for their very positive, creative response to the book and their determined efforts to make the Natural Resource Challenge a reality.

Much earlier in my career, when I was a seasonal interpretive ranger in Grand Teton National Park, my interest in natural history and ecological systems was greatly enhanced by co-worker Jay Shuler, in a kind of tutorial that continued through Jay's lifetime. Since the mid-1970s, long before Preserving Nature, Dwight Pitcaithley has been a close friend who continues to share ideas on historic preservation and many other related Park Service matters. Dwight and I joined with Jane Scott and others in Santa Fe in a concerted effort to learn about the larger world of the National Park Service—an effort, I am pleased to note, that is still underway, regularly, among the three of us by conference call joined by other close friends. At Mather Training Center, Mike Watson worked with me and many others to preach the gospel of careful, policy-based cultural resource management through eleven training courses that I conducted from the early 1980s to the mid-1990s. Along the way, Bill Brown, Bob Krumenaker, Ron Kerbo, Dave Harmon, and many others have given me friendship, support, and advice for whatever I was doing, from writing a book to having a beer. I thank them all, very much.

But most of all, I thank my wife, Judith Sellars, who during a long drive down Interstate 25 from Cheyenne, Wyoming, to Santa Fe in August 1987 came up with the absurd idea that I write a history of biological management in the National Park System. Judy worked very closely with me in researching, writing, and editing Preserving Nature; and her advice and counsel has been invaluable throughout my Park Service career.

Since leaving the Park Service in March 2008, I have written a second preface and an epilogue for a new edition of Preserving Nature in the National Parks, published in 2009. Currently, I am writing a retrospective on my career—a policy memoir. After that, I plan to finish writing the history of cultural resource management in the National Park System, three chapters of which had been completed and published when I left the Service.

Finally, I want to thank Trucina, Normie, and Merle. Each in your own time: Most of your keyboard entries were deleted, but your smug, furry presence has always made my day.

 **Richard West Sellars**