UC SANTA BARBARA

THE Current

April 9, 2015
Jessica Fenton

All Creatures Great and Small

What do the Aleutian Canadian goose, the Western gray wolf and the American crocodile have in common? Once listed among the world's endangered species, all are thriving today as a result of the Endangered Species Act, a piece of environmental legislation put forth by former U.S Rep. Paul Norton "Pete" McCloskey and passed by Congress in 1973.

The Endangered Species Act came out of earlier legislation, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which was signed into law in 1970. That same year, UC Santa Barbara began its own green revolution by establishing the Environmental Studies Program.

In recognition of the program's founding 45 years ago, McCloskey will give a talk at 12:30 p.m. Saturday, April 25. The lecture will take place in the Bren Hall Courtyard. It is free and open to the public.

"I last made a speech at UCSB in 1971 when I was leading an effort against the Vietnam War and my son, Peter, was a student there," said McCloskey, who served in the House of Representatives from 1967 to 1983. His district included the San Francisco Bay Area. "All the landmark environmental legislative achievements between 1970 and 1994 are under dire threat today of emasculation if the Republicans in Congress have their way. Luckily the members from the California coast have stayed in the environmental camp."

Marc McGinnes, professor emeritus of environmental studies and founder of the Santa Barbara-based nonprofit Environmental Defense Center, described McCloskey as a mentor who redirected his career through a single phone call. “I was living in San Francisco at the time and he knew I was unsatisfied with my previous field of law,” McGinnes recalled. “He asked if I had heard about the oil spill in Santa Barbara; I was not yet an environmentalist at the time. McCloskey knew that I had family in Santa Barbara and he urged me to join them because big things were happening there and a whole new field of law was opening up.”

At the time, McCloskey was working on NEPA, the first piece of federal legislation designed to preserve and enhance the natural environment. A “look before you leap” bill, according to the U.S. Department of Energy, NEPA requires federal agencies to consider the environmental impacts of their proposed actions and to find reasonable alternatives, when necessary.

McCloskey continued to advance the concept of environmentalism by hosting the inaugural Earth Day celebration on April 22, 1970. According to the Earth Day Network, 20 million people participated in events around the U.S. That celebration is often credited with having launched the modern environmental movement. Nearly half a century later, Earth Day is the largest civic event in the world and the network consists of 22,000 partners from 192 countries.

Employing the momentum from Earth Day, McCloskey co-authored the Endangered Species Act and helped pass the Clean Air Act in 1970 and the Clean Water Act (CWA) two years later.

Carla D’Antonio, a professor in UCSB’s Department of Ecology, Evolution and Marine Biology, noted that McCloskey’s leadership extended far beyond the environment. “He was an outspoken maverick Republican who for decades stood almost alone in his party against the Vietnam War,” she said. “And he was an advocate for civil rights as well for honesty in government.

“So, long before his leadership with the founding of Earth Day, co-authorship of the Endangered Species Act and his support for other important environmental legislation, he was a brave voice for change,” D’Antonio went on. “He has continued to influence politics for decades as a novel environmentalist and humanist.”

At 87, McCloskey continues to fight for environmental rights. Recently, he helped defend California’s Coastal Act in a case that resulted in the granting of public

access to Martins Beach in San Mateo County. The case had been litigated on behalf of the Surfrider Foundation, a coastal protection organization.

“He is a hero,” McGinnes said of McCloskey, describing his mentor’s courage, determination and leadership. “He is a hero of mine, that’s for sure.”

For more information about McCloskey’s talk, contact Alysha Risch at arisch@es.ucsb.edu or (805) 893-2986.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.