

Present at the Creation: The Conservation Roots of the LCTHF
by Keith G. Hay

As the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial successfully draws to a close and we begin to focus on the “Third Century,” we must not forget the colorful history that gave birth to the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation some 44 years ago.

This story begins with a legendary conservation leader, cartoonist, and visionary who inspired others to protect and ultimately designate the route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition as a National Historic Trail. His name was Jay Norwood “Ding” Darling and his legacy organization is known as the J. N. “Ding” Darling Foundation. (Ding is a contraction of Darling's last name.)

Darling began his career in 1900 as a cartoonist for the *Sioux City Journal*. In 1906, he moved to the *Des Moines Register* and created a daily editorial cartoon that appeared on the paper's front page. His cartoons on protecting our natural resources appeared in nearly 150 newspapers and earned him two Pulitzer Prizes.

In 1934, in the middle of the Great Depression, he became chief of the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey, which later became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and obtained federal funding to acquire three million acres for wildlife refuges and initiate the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act. He also designed the first duck stamp, which sold for a dollar. Over the years, this program has contributed more than a billion (inflation-adjusted) dollars for the purchase of wildlife refuges and wetland habitat throughout the nation. After 20 months on the job, he returned to Des Moines and resumed his vigorous editorial efforts for natural-resource conservation.

In 1936, he convinced President Roosevelt to convene the first North American Wildlife Conference, which led to the formation of the National Wildlife Federation. He was promptly elected its first president. Darling also played a key role in initiating the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit programs at major universities and in the passage of the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937.

Honoring a dying man's request

Darling retired in 1949. In May of 1961, in failing health, he called an old friend, Sherry Fisher, a fellow member of the Iowa Conservation Commission, and asked him to come to his office. He told Fisher he wanted “to incorporate the Missouri River into a national outdoor recreation and natural resources ribbon along the historic trail of Lewis and Clark.” It would be an “avenue for wildlife.” Fisher recalled that despite his illness, Darling “was bubbling with excitement over the prospect and looked me in the eye and said ‘I can't live to do these things, but I'd like to know if you'd try to do it for me.’” Fisher promised, “I'll try.” And indeed he did!

Although there had been numerous, undocumented efforts over the years by individuals and agencies to commemorate the expedition's route across the nation, none were ever implemented. (In 1948, for example, the National Park Service had suggested a “Lewis and Clark Touring Route.”)

After Darling's death, in February 1962, Fisher brought together family and friends to discuss the best way to honor him by perpetuating his interest in conservation and implementing his proposal for a Lewis and Clark trail. They formed the Darling Foundation, whose charter trustees included former Presidents Eisenhower and Truman as well as educators, publishers, artists, businessmen, and conservationists.

Udall becomes involved

The foundation's first priority was to arrange a meeting with the Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, and his staff to discuss the concept of a "wildlife and recreational ribbon" following the Lewis and Clark trail from St. Louis to the Pacific Coast. Udall was receptive and suggested that the Darling Foundation obtain endorsements for the concept from the 10 states along the trail.

In October of 1962, at the invitation of the Darling Foundation and the Department of the Interior, representatives from the states met in Portland, Oregon, to discuss the proposal. The following month, a second meeting was held in Omaha, with 67 participants, including representatives from state and federal agencies and conservation and historical organizations. Resolutions were passed to endorse the trail proposal and to ask Congress to approve a plan and establish a formal commission to oversee its implementation.

In the fall of 1963, Congress passed a joint resolution (No. 61) approving a Lewis and Clark trail. In August of 1964, Representatives John Kyle and Ben Jensen of Iowa introduced a bill in the House to establish the Lewis and Clark Trail Commission; Senator Jack Miller, also of Iowa, introduced a similar bill in the Senate. These bills were passed, and by authorization of Public Law 88-630 of the 88th Congress, the Lewis and Clark Trail Commission was established for a five-year period. The commission comprised 27 persons, including personnel from the federal agencies involved, four Congressmen, the governors of all trail states, and four members of the Darling Foundation.

The commission held its first meeting in Washington, D.C., on January 4, 1965. Sherry Fisher was elected chairman, a position he held throughout the commission's tenure.

Secretary Udall, meanwhile, had already assigned the new Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (B.O.R.) to initiate the trail study. The B.O.R.'s regional offices in Seattle and Denver conducted a comprehensive investigation in cooperation with the state, federal, and tribal agencies involved. Victor Eklund of the Seattle office was appointed to study the four western states of the trail, and I was appointed to handle the six eastern states out of the B.O.R.'s Denver office. Our mandate called for:

- Inventorying and mapping existing and potential historic, archeological, geologic, fish and wildlife, conservation, and recreation resources, including all travel and access routes within 25 miles of the trail.
- Analyzing present and future demands for such resources.
- Determining the need for new recreational developments, improved management practices, and additional access routes.

- Identifying special problems.
- Recommending a plan for development of the trail.

This was a daunting challenge, and we knew that the study's recommendations would provide a road map for the trail's development for years to come. By November of 1963 the study was underway. We “hit the trail” and began interviewing state officials responsible for parks, geology, archaeology, fish and wildlife, highways, and tourism. Ten federal agencies and 12 tribal nations were also involved in the study.

We located existing L&C historic sites, proposed new ones, and recommended designating Lewis and Clark highways on either side of the trail. All this (and much more) was contained in a report of 121 pages. It listed 896 sites encompassing nearly 2 million acres suitable for outdoor recreation and proposed the creation of a “conservation and recreation ribbon” along the entire expedition route.

The report took two years of study and review to complete. On September 30, 1965, Secretary Udall forwarded the final version, titled *The Lewis and Clark Trail: A Proposal for Development*, to the Lewis and Clark Trail Commission as it was beginning its second meeting, in St. Louis. In his cover letter, Udall observed, “The Lewis and Clark Expedition did not occur in 1804-06 and then become history, instead, it fired a national spirit of adventure which yet persists.”

The commission unanimously passed 13 resolutions expressing its favorable reaction to the report and setting forth specific recommendations for implementing them. These included:

- A continuous, convenient, and attractive highway trail for public use in retracing the route of the Lewis and Clark Expedition from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean.
- A Lewis and Clark Trail symbol to mark the trail throughout its length.
- Facilities along the water route of the Missouri and the Columbia systems for the use of boaters following the historic trail.
- Hiking and horseback trails to follow the expedition's route as closely as possible.
- The acquisition and development by public agencies of major segments of the trail with important historic, wildlife, scenic, and recreation resources.
- Establishment by each of the 10 original trail states of a Lewis and Clark Trail Committee to coordinate trail development.
- Development by each state's Trail Committee of an educational program to inform the public of available resources and enhance public understanding of the trail's importance to American history.

- Acceleration of efforts to control water pollution on the lower Missouri for the enhancement of recreation.
- Assistance to private enterprise to provide lodging, meals, and other services of good quality at moderate rates at intervals along the trail.

All 10 trail states soon established Lewis and Clark committees and designated adjacent highways to be marked by an appropriate trail sign. A year earlier, the Darling Foundation had sponsored a contest for a trail symbol and received several hundred entries. An artist for the *Des Moines Register*, Frank R. "Bob" Davenport, designed the winning symbol—the now iconic and ubiquitous "pointing finger" silhouette. (He also captured the captains in a similar pose in his 1968 painting *Lewis and Clark West to the Pacific*.) By 1969, highway signs bearing this image were erected in every trail state.

Fisher called a third meeting of the commission in Portland, Oregon, on February 14, 1966. State and federal agencies reported on their progress implementing the commission's recommendations. This was also an occasion for commission members to tour Lewis and Clark sites in Washington and Oregon. The visit to Fort Clatsop was led by Governor Mark O. Hatfield.

Five months later, on July 11 and 12, the commission convened in Billings, Montana. Members were brought up to date on continuing state efforts to develop the trail, initiate stewardship measures, and mark official Lewis and Clark Trail highways. New resolutions were also passed, bringing the total to 18. Paramount among the commissioners' concerns was insuring the accuracy of all information collected and interpreted.

On October 6, the commission submitted a 24-page report on its activities and accomplishments to the President and Congress as required by its founding legislation, Public Law 88-630.

By 1969, the commission had largely completed its mandate to stimulate federal, state, and local action to mark and preserve the historic sites and natural areas paralleling the expedition's 2,000 mile route. Its efforts made Ding Darling's vision a permanent reality and fulfilled Sherry Fisher's commitment to his old friend.

With its five-year task completed, the commission published a final report. Among its recommendations were that Illinois be included as the 11th trail state and that a private organization, consisting of representatives of the trail states, be created to continue the goals of the commission.

On June 27, 1970, representatives of nine trail states met in St. Louis and voted to establish and incorporate the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation to carry on the work of the now-expired commission. The newly formed foundation held its first meeting in Bismarck, North Dakota, on November 5 and 6 and elected Dr. E. G. "Frenchy" Chuinard, of Portland, Oregon, as its first president. The board of directors comprised the Lewis and Clark Committee chairmen from the 11 trail states.

The Darling Foundation continued to encourage and support the new foundation, whose goals were in keeping with the principles and vision of the man whose memory it honored. Christopher D. Koss, Darling's grandson and a charter member of the Lewis and Clark Trail Commission, became president of the Darling Foundation and worked tirelessly to fulfill its goals. Under his direction, the Darling Foundation initiated a program of educational grants to students taking courses in conservation and wildlife management at Iowa State University. It also produced materials for teaching conservation education and released a CD-ROM containing 6,800 of Ding Darling's editorial cartoons.

Another initiative was the development of a central research and information data center for conservation, wildlife management, and outdoor recreation. The foundation also played a major role in the creation of the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, near Sanibel Island, Florida. In 1982, The Ding Darling Society, a friends group, was founded to increase visitors' understanding of the refuge's natural history. The Darling Foundation had no paid staff and relied solely on the time and efforts of its trustees. The foundation "sunset" on March 31, 2006, but not before establishing a Ding Darling Conservation Education Fund of some \$700,000. The foundation will live on through this program and its many other worthy initiatives.

The Bureau of Outdoor Recreation continued to study and implement the Lewis and Clark Trail concept during the 1970s. After the bureau was abolished during the Reagan administration by Secretary of the Interior James G. Watt, the National Park Service assumed administrative responsibilities for the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail and prepared a comprehensive management plan.

The foundation's future

During the last fifteen years, we have witnessed a burgeoning interest in the Lewis and Clark Expedition and a renewed sense of the historical and cultural importance of the Lewis and Clark Trail. Even as the expedition's bicentennial draws to a close, people are discussing how we will observe the tercentennial. Thanks to the efforts of its members and affiliated chapters, we can be certain that the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation will continue in its vital role as "Keeper of the Story and Steward of the Trail" for another 100 years.

Foundation member Keith G. Hay is the author of *The Lewis and Clark Columbia River Water Trail Guide* and a founding member and former president of the Oregon Chapter. He lives in Newberg, Oregon, and served as vice president of his state's L&C bicentennial committee. Quotations in this article are drawn from documents of the Department of the Interior and the "Ding" Darling Foundation.

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