TRIBUTES

REMEMBERING MOLLIE H. BEATTIE
(1947-1996)

Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
September 10, 1993 - June 5, 1996

TRIBUTE TO MOLLIE H. BEATTIE

Senator Patrick Leahy

Caring, fairness, honesty, integrity, kindness, perspective, vision—these are the words we've heard repeatedly since Vermont's Mollie Beattie passed away last year. It is rare that a person, especially someone in public life, leaves such a consistent, positive impression on those whom they have touched in life. But, of course, what the country was just finding out about Mollie, we Vermonters already knew.

Mollie Beattie followed a line of great Vermonters who have changed the way we think about how we interact with and view the natural world. From George Perkins Marsh to Frederick Billings to George Aiken, Mollie Beattie added to the legacy of Vermont conservationists who espouse our responsibility to our environment: to be good stewards, to minimize our footprint on the land, and to repair any damage done.

Mollie took this legacy of Vermont-style conservation with her to Washington when she took the reins of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and used it to guide the agency through some of its most difficult times. When Senator Jeffords and I sought Mollie's confirmation to be Director of the Service, many wondered who was this eastern woman coming in to fill a position that was always held not only by men, but often-times men from the West. But Mollie earned their respect and brought to the Agency and to the national environmental debate her understanding of the interdependence of all the species in an ecosystem. As Mollie often argued, this relationship means that you have to look at a system as a whole, if you tinker with any one piece of a system, you going to have to think about the impact on all the other pieces as well.

This philosophy also translated into how Mollie ran the Fish and Wildlife Service. Unlike her predecessors who focused on certain segments of the Agency's constituency, Mollie looked at the Agency's responsibility to a whole range of parties: farmers, developers, scientists, foresters, hunters, anglers and others. Mollie worked with all of these groups as she traveled the country fighting for the survival of the Endangered Species Act, opposing national "takings" legislation and stumping for funding for our national wildlife refuges.

I was honored to recommend her appointment to the President, proud to stand by her side throughout the Senate confirmation process and always willing to fight with her to protect our nation's environment. I first came to know Mollie when she was Commissioner of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. We worked together to launch a forest management demonstration project in Vermont in the early eighties. Working with Mollie while she was Director was always a pleasure. While she was Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, Mollie and I often talked about restoring a sport salmon fishery to the Connecticut River Basin.

I also had the good fortune to work with her in the national fight to protect habitat for our nation's wildlife and waterfowl. Although I had often heard of her passionate devotion to this issue, most experiences I had previously had with her demonstrated your expected Northeastern calm determination. During a joint press conference on the latest in a string of anti-environmental proposals coming out of Congress, Mollie blasted the shortsightedness of the authors of these proposals—highlighting the potential destruction of many wetlands and the resulting closure of the duck hunting season three out of every ten years. Mollie knew how to get people's attention.

Although Mollie will not be with us in the next round of battles over the issues she cared so deeply about, her spirit and commitment to protecting our natural heritage will certainly affect the debate—whether it's because of the changes she brought to the Fish and Wildlife Service, the infusion of energy that she gave to the conservation movement, the partnerships that she helped create with hunting and fishing organizations, or even the courage she demonstrated until the end. These will be with us, guiding us through the discussions over how to protect our natural heritage for future generations.