



THE FOUNDERS
A TRIBUTE TO PAT KARNS AND AL ELSEY

By Vince Chricton

Patrick D. Karns, 73, son of the late Patrick and Ruby Karns, of Salem, Oregon died on 27 December, 2009. He attended Northwestern College and Michigan State earning a B.S., worked early on as a wildlife biologist for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, and spent most of his career with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, first in Ely and then Grand Rapids where he was Group Leader of the Research Unit. He was married to Ruth Meyer and they made their retirement home in Salem, Oregon. In addition to his many years of moose and deer research, Pat enjoyed trains, flying kites, and travel. He is survived by his wife, Ruth, daughters, Kathleen Lederle, Mary Elizabeth Brennan, and Bridget Rossman, son Patrick B. Karns, and a number of grandchildren. Pat was an annual attendee of both North American and International Moose Conferences until his last years when severe health issues finally prevented his active participation. He chaired

conferences, participated on and organized ad hoc committees, and was a regular presenter until his last meeting in Whitefish, Montana, 2007. Pat will be remembered for his dry sense of humor even in failing health, his love of family, life, dancing, dedication to wildlife, and his consummate professionalism to help anyone within or outside his jurisdiction.

Charles Allan (Al) Elsey, former Regional Biologist for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, passed away on 28 November, 2009 at the age of 92 in Burnaby, British Columbia. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Margaret, their three daughters, eight grandchildren, and two great grandchildren; he was a quiet, thoughtful, and much loved father. His sense of humor delighted all, even in his years of failing health. Al completed Normal School (teacher's training) and briefly taught in one-room schoolhouses in rural Saskatchewan. He subsequently enrolled at the University of Saskatchewan where he

completed a M.S. in Fisheries Biology, and then worked 37 years for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (formerly Department of Lands and Forests), both in small communities in Northern Ontario and for 17 years as a Regional Biologist in Thunder Bay. Al was also a recognized leader in the figure skating world where he volunteered countless hours, both as a member and president of the Port Arthur Figure Skating Club and as a competition judge. He chaired the local organizing committee for the 1988 National Championships, effectively demonstrating that local support could make such events financially viable in small communities.

Pat Karns was well recognized in the field of wildlife management and research during his 34-year career with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. He made an indelible mark on deer and moose population management, playing a major role in recovering Minnesota's deer herd in the 1970s, establishing Minnesota's first moose hunt in 1971, and aiding in management of Manitoba's caribou. His research skills and leadership resulted in the reorganization of research in the Minnesota Conservation Department, and Pat was appointed Group Leader of the newly formed Forest Wildlife Populations and Research Group in 1968. Pat moved to the Carlos Avery Wildlife Area near Forest Lake in 1971, where his research focused on deer and moose physiology. Pat's interest in physiology and wildlife diseases led to the collection of age, sex, morphometric, reproductive, and physiological data during the first and subsequent moose hunts in Minnesota. Recognizing the need for effective planning, he focused his late professional years on developing "Long Range Management Plans" for fish and wildlife populations and their habitats. Pat authored and co-authored dozens of professional and popular articles receiving numerous accolades.

Al Elsey was known internationally for his leadership in wildlife conservation.

Though he was highly valued for his management and leadership skills, his first love was fieldwork. Some of his early research involved the Aurora trout in numerous lakes in the Swastika area of Ontario. In the early 1960s he moved from Swastika to be a District Biologist in Fort Francis; subsequent "professionalizing" within the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests dictated that all biologists be elevated to Fish and Wildlife Supervisor, thus, Al moved to Thunder Bay in 1963 as Supervisor of the Port Arthur District. Like many true leaders, he spent much of his career as a mentor, guiding both young biologists and programs. In his waning years, some of his favorite memories were of his work with First Nation Communities in the far north. Al was from a professional generation with few women, however, as a true pioneer and leader, he recognized the value of women in the workplace, hiring and supporting many female biologists and conservation officers, and likewise encouraging his daughters to pursue careers of their choice.

Pat Karns and Al Elsey were truly the founders and impetus of the North American Moose Conference, which was spawned from a series of their phone calls in the early 1960s. Al was big on interagency cooperation and arranged their initial meeting to discuss moose, after which our annual conferences began.

Their first formal meeting was in Fort Francis, Ontario, and with their interest sparked by Randolph Peterson's book The North American Moose, early discussions were pretty basic – what did North American biologists know about moose? Thus, the first official moose meeting was arranged and held in St. Paul, Minnesota on March 7, 1963 and again in March 1964. To ensure Pat's continued participation and interest, Al went so far as to grant Pat a free Ontario moose hunting license! The initial agendas changed little: how to count/estimate a moose population, the impact of hunting on populations, and "moose sickness" or brainworm. Subsequent meetings

were in Winnipeg, Edmonton, Alaska, Kamloops, Saskatoon, and the 8th in Thunder Bay in 1972. Early on it was unclear whether to call it a workshop or conference. Pat insisted it be a workshop as such terminology would make it easier for more to attend; henceforth, it was the “North American Moose Conference and Workshop.” Not surprisingly, both were the first recipients of the Distinguished Moose Biologist Award given at the annual conference in 1981 in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

I urge you to read Pat’s 2000 paper “Reminiscences and a Bit of Moose Conference History” in *ALCES* in which he documents the history of the moose group that began as a special interest group within the Great Lakes Deer Group and Northeastern Chapter of the Wildlife Society in the early 1960s. Pat ended his 2000 paper with this note he received from Al on May 3, 1999:

“It is wonderful to know that moose still get the associated scientists together. Such a magnificent animal deserves it. Congratulations, keep up the good work.”

The North American and International Moose Conferences, the scientific journal *ALCES*, the “moose bible” *Ecology and Management of the North American Moose*, the Distinguished Moose Biologist Award, the Order of Alces, student awards, senior travel grant, and the camaraderie and professionalism found at the annual conferences are all part of the rich history and heritage of Pat Karns and Al Elsey. Our work reflects their lives as scientists, pioneers, consummate professionals, and gentlemen. Their legacy is the foundation of modern-day moose management in North America. All moose biologists share in the responsibility of protecting their legacy.