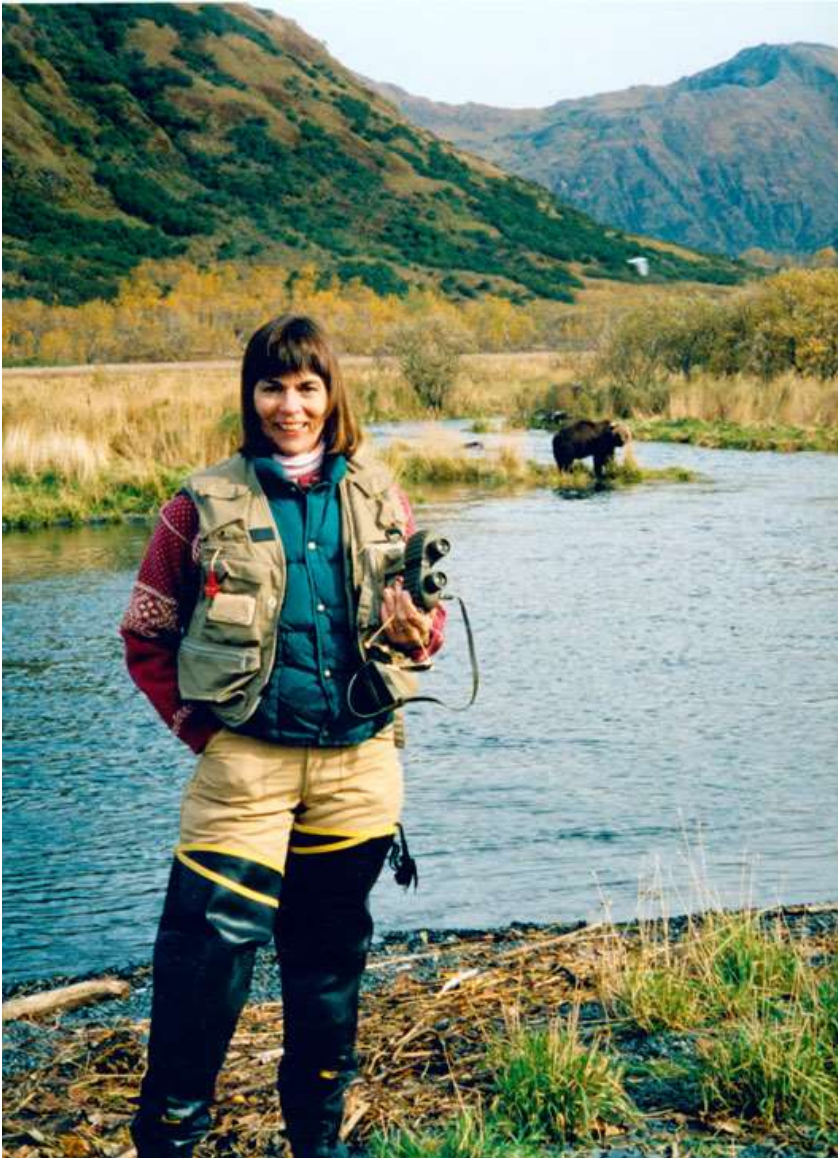


# Mollie Beattie, Headed Wildlife Service

By William Dicke, June 29, 1996



Mollie H. Beattie, director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service passed away at 49 years old in 1996. She left an incredible legacy of appreciation for biodiversity.

A forester by training, Ms. Beattie was the first woman to head the agency. In three years as director, she defended the Endangered Species Act against attacks from many in the opposing party in Congress at the time, and fought efforts to reduce the agency's budget, not always successfully.

"In the Clinton Administration, she was probably the strongest single voice for wildlife conservation," said Rodger Schlickeisen, president of a nonprofit group that works to protect and preserve species.

Ms. Beattie was a strong proponent of the effort to have gray wolves in Yellowstone National Park for the first time since the 1920's. Mr. Schlickeisen said one of his most vivid memories of her was seeing her rub cold water on the belly of a wild wolf at Yellowstone in April to cool it so the animal could be moved to another site for release. Despite the rain in her face, he recalled, she smiled broadly and said, "Any day I can touch a wild wolf is a good day."

As director, she was responsible for the wildlife service's 7,000 employees and an annual

budget for resource management of \$501 million in the current fiscal year, down from \$511 million the previous year. The agency, part of the United States Interior Department, enforces wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act and carries out wetland protection and management.

**Ms. Beattie sought to conserve species by managing entire ecosystems rather than waiting until individual species became endangered and presided over the addition of 15 national wildlife refuges to a system that now has 508 in 1996.**

The agency said that under her direction 140 habitat conservation plans were established and 300 more were being developed. These plans are formal agreements between landowners and the Fish and Wildlife Service that allow the owners to harm individual members of a species listed as endangered or threatened if they take steps to help the species as a whole to recover.

She argued that such plans demonstrated that the Endangered Species Act, under which they are carried out, has the flexibility to conserve species while allowing economic development. In fact, she said, the act "has been one of the

biggest success stories of the conservation movement in America," contending that many myths had been spread about the act's supposedly onerous effects.

Just before her passing, she led efforts to resume the listing of endangered species after a 13-month moratorium imposed by Congress, which sharply cut the agency's money for such listings in the current fiscal year.

Representative Don Young, Republican of Alaska, introduced legislation in the House and Senator Ted Stevens, Republican of Alaska, in the Senate to name an eight-million-acre wilderness in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge after her.

Mollie Beattie was born on April 27, 1947, in Glen Cove, Long Island, New York. She earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy at Marymount College in Tarrytown, N.Y., in 1968 and a master's degree in forestry at the University of Vermont in 1979. She also received a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University in 1991.

She was program director and lands manager for the Windham Foundation, a nonprofit organization that conducts seminars on critical issues facing Vermont, from 1983 to 1985; commissioner of the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation from 1985 to 1989, and deputy secretary of the state's Agency of Natural Resources from 1989 to 1990. She left to become executive director of a public policy institute, the Richard A. Snelling Center for Government in Vermont, before taking her post at the Fish and Wildlife Service.

One of Mollie's most famous quotes:

***"When Americans are asked what the most pressing environmental issues are, they cite pollution issues such as toxic wastes and clean water. Problems like loss of biodiversity, rapid depletion of natural resources and the international problems of population explosion are way down the list. And yet these are the issues that are of greatest importance to the long-term health of our world."***

Source: Mollie Beattie's obituary in the New York Times, June 29, 1996