Some Thoughts on Jim Posewitz, Conservation Giant
By Dale Burk of Stevensville, Montana
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In coming to the task of writing a commentary about my late friend, the conservation giant Jim Posewitz, one's thoughts are immediately hamstrung by the fact that in thinking about Jim Posewitz you can only deal in superlatives. He, indeed, was that sort of person. There was nothing mediocre or ordinary about him; whatever he did, it was done to the utmost level of insight, of knowledge, of conviction, and, yes, personal dedication and satisfaction plus a sense of being involved in a shared mission..

And yet when you came to relate to him on a personal level, you never got the sense that he thought of himself in that same elevated manner even though any time he spoke on any issue you knew you were dealing with someone who was the consummate professional in every dimension of his being. In other words, what you saw was what you got. Jim Posewitz was the real thing! You never got from him anything other than the best that he could do, which, of course, was light years beyond what most of us could have accomplished.

Now I must confess at the outset that over the years Jim and I played a game of forced politeness with each other in one regard: he, after all, came to Montana from Wisconsin originally not only to study at a college in Bozeman to become a fisheries biologist but also to play football for the MSU Bobcats. And he was good at it: All-American end and defensive linebacker on the Bobcat team that won the national football championship in his senior year! Wow, even as a UM Grizzly myself, I had to be impressed with that.

And I remember very clearly the one word he used to describe the *modus operandi*, the elan, if you will, of that team: commitment to a goal, tenacity. It was a trait of positive commitment that Jim would demonstrate as a centerpiece to his own inner being all his life: tenacity. Commit to something and stick to it, even when it, on occasion, hurt to do so. Just be there! Get something done!

Which brings me back to the notion of dealing in superlatives. Whatever he set out to do, Jim was motivated by an intense inner conviction that what he did mattered, that it was important, and that he would stick with whatever assignment was in front of him with – that word again – the tenacity to see things through whatever it took to get the right thing done. And examples from his career as a biologist and leader within the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks or his second career in his so-called retirement years as *the* – yes, *the* – philosophical and practical leader of the conservation movement in Montana are profound.

To wit, consider please just these few: list his recognized accomplishments:

- A long and storied career with Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks. From his first position as a fisheries biologist, he rose to that, in 1969, of the first and only administrator of FWP's Ecological Services Division, after which he served as Special Assistant to the Direction of FWP.
- Under his leadership, major accomplishments included the development of in-stream flows for fish and wildlife in Montana's streams and rivers, and passage of the Montana Water Use Act in 1973, which was critical to Montana's fisheries resources, improvement of Montana's Strip and Underground Mine Reclamation standards that are still in use today, and his advocacy over the years for Montanans to develop inclusive, philosophically and scientifically sound approaches to conservation issues.
- Through his steadfast leadership and his writing, including several major books, he was a driving force articulating the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation that defines wildlife as a public trust.

- Among many state and national awards received by Jim, three of the most prominent are his being named the National Conservationist of the Year in 2015 by the National Wildlife Federation and his induction into the Montana Outdoor Hall of Fame in 2016, plus the Alumni Blue& Gold Award from Montana State University "for distinguished services which have contributed to the benefit of mankind."

Now add to those the unspoken but, at least to those of us who have stayed conversant with the conservation ethic in Montana over the past generation, the countless upon countless of times involving one issue or another across the state – water quality protection, streamflow protection, strip mining issues, wilderness, quality wildlife habitat, citizen involvement at all levels of government, the development of and involvement of young people in conservation issues, our outdoor heritage in America, etc. – Jim Posewitz was there to help get things done, either to lead or to help you in your efforts.. And he was that kind of leader! Help get things done. Working with you, with people all over this state, to encourage, to support, to educate, to enable, to enlist you to share in the effort to do what was right for our natural environment. Show up and be counted. Be tenacious. Be as best you could the superlative kind of volunteer he was!

Two crowning examples of his great vision in this regard must be mentioned: one, it was through his vision and leadership that a program to recognize and honor those whose contributions to Montana's natural world, the environment that sustains us and all life, should be given special recognition through the establishing of the Montana Outdoor Hall of Fame Program. In 2013 that program was instituted under the auspices of the Montana Historical Society and the Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation and other groups – and though he should have been in the initial class of those inducted into that Hall of Fame, like he often said the "pool of those who should be recognized is historically so deep that many among us will have to wait for their turn to become an inductee." He was formally inducted in the second class of that program. Then Jim must be also given credit for joining with seven other of us "old-time Montana conservationists" in the establishment of a group whose sole purpose is to inform, educate and motivate conservation activism in Montana, the Montana Conservation Elders. Yes, when the eight of us "old folks" met in Smoke Elser's barn up Rattlesnake Creek out of Missoula in 2018 to talk over the founding of the MCE, once again, as it seemed as had always been the case when it concerned environmental/conservation activism in Montana, Jim Posewitz was there to lead the discussion and make sure we would be a group that reached out to all Montanans, but in particular be active in terms of the education of our youth in regard to such matters. And in which, as you might guess, the word "tenacious" came up. And our ears rung with this admonition from Jim: either create the MCE with a framework within which it could get something positive done or don't bother forming it at all!

And that's one reason why it has been so gratifying to see, in the wake of Jim's recent death, that his legacy as both a constant presence and a philosophical leader in the conservation field is both known of and celebrated by fellow Montanans across the state. It's a legacy I know he was aware of, and in which he took great pride. And, not coincidentally but purposefully, we who walked side-by-side with him these many, many years could only marvel, across the time he was granted to be among us, that we were privileged to share with him the joys of the battle for good things. And to have, on many occasions, let him know that we appreciated and cherished him as a person, as a friend, as a fellow fighter for the natural world and all the aspects of life found within it. He was a giant among us and all we have to do to honor his legacy is to continue his work. Jim Posewitz' legacy is alive and well everywhere you look in, or at, this place called

Montana. It bespeaks the legacy of a superlative person who I cherished as a friend and colleague, and whose name was Jim Posewitz!

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