

Obituary: Jim Walker recalled as a fighter for the environment

[Jeff Bell](#) / Times Colonist

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Jim Walker on his 70th birthday. Walker died June 20, 2017. Photograph By Via McCall Gardens

Jim Walker was revered by colleagues in the provincial government and beyond for his efforts to preserve natural areas around B.C., and he was equally beloved in his own Fairfield neighbourhood.

When neighbours heard about his death last week at the age of 75, several of them gathered outside his house, intent on telling his visiting sister about his kindness and decency.

“There were 20 people out there and they started talking about everything that Jim did,” said Nancy Wilkin, a longtime co-worker in the Ministry of Environment, where she succeeded him as assistant deputy minister.

Walker’s sister was just amazed, Wilkin said. “She had no idea.”

Wilkin said there was nothing Walker wouldn’t do for the people who lived around him.

“If it snowed, they immediately had groceries because some of them couldn’t get out,” she said.

“He was always taking care of neighbours. If ever you lost a family member, he would show up at your door and he would have a baked ham, scalloped potatoes and pie or ginger cookies.”

Wilkin said Walker made a huge impression on her. “Great mentor, leader and the best friend anyone could ever have,” said Wilkin, who called Walker the father of habitat protection in B.C.

“You think about Clayoquot Sound and you think about the Muskwa-Kechika [in northern B.C.] and you think of the Forest Practices Code, the Wildlife Act and the inclusion of Wildlife Management Areas, the B.C. Trust for Public Lands that used to exist, riparian areas for fish-bearing streams.”

Environmental activist Vicky Husband, who became close friends with Walker over the years, said his death is “a tremendous loss” that is being felt throughout the environmental community.

“He was a highly intelligent man and had a wonderful sense of how things were,” Husband said. “He was a very strong player for wildlife and for the environment. He really cared about it.”

In all, Walker spent 28 years in public service, starting at Nanaimo’s biological station as a fisheries biologist.

He didn’t slow down after retirement in 2001, Wilkin said, serving as a volunteer director for the Nature Trust of B.C. from 2002 to 2012. Fifty-seven properties made up of about 6,880 hectares were acquired during his time there.

Wilkin said Walker took on other duties, as well.

“His most recent accomplishment and success was as chairman of the Marmot Recovery Foundation,” she said. “He’s the reason that the marmots are not extirpated.

“He was vigilant in going to government and to the forest industry to make sure the money was there every year.”

The foundation’s work included the breeding program for marmots on Mount Washington, Wilkin said.

In a 2013 submission to the Vancouver Sun, Walker said his interest in conservation stemmed from his “idyllic, storybook boyhood on the famous Miramichi River in New Brunswick, fly fishing for Atlantic salmon.”

He bemoaned what he saw as a lack of exposure to nature for many.

“If this early intimacy and connection with nature is absent, will people still have an appreciation of the natural world?” he wrote. “Probably not.”

Walker did his post-secondary studies in his home province, receiving an undergraduate degree in biology from Mount Allison University and a master’s degree from the University of New Brunswick

He is survived by his sister, his brother and their families.

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