

MOUNTAINS

Terry Maddox leaves enduring legacy



Word from the Smokies
Steve Kemp
Guest columnist

The holiday spirit was tinged with sadness for many longtime park friends and supporters upon hearing that retired Great Smoky Mountains Association executive director Terry Maddox had died peacefully in his sleep on Dec. 21. He was 73 years old.

The forward-thinking and tenacious Maddox led Great Smoky Mountains Association for nearly 26 years through unprecedented growth until his retirement in December 2015. The construction of the new Oconaluftee Visitor Center, the reintroduction of elk and river otters, and scores of award-winning books are just a few of the many contributions made to Great Smoky Mountains National Park under Maddox's leadership. His legacy includes thriving relationships with the National Park Service and its nonprofit partners, as well as with the Public Lands Alliance.

"Terry had a special reverence for the national park," recalled former park Superintendent Dale Ditmanson, "and his goal was to help the park accomplish its highest priorities."

Maddox grew up in "little Elizabeth City, North Carolina." As a typical, semi-feral boy of the 1950s, one of his passions was capturing the reptiles and amphibians that thrived in the "Great Dismal Swamp" just beyond the family's backyard. His collecting inevitably spawned the establishment of the dynamic and not-entirely contained Maddox reptile garden and snake farm. His mother's reaction to the overflowing terrariums and frog ponds that soon dominated her home likely led to a second crucial aspect of Maddox's younger days: "My mother made sure we boys were in church pretty much whenever their doors were unlocked."

Another of Maddox's coming of age stories involved riding his bicycle and being harassed by a pack of free-ranging neighborhood curs. Rather than punishing the undisciplined mutts, Maddox elected to pursue an engineering solution. He designed and built an inverted bicycle that elevated his ankles several feet above the pavement, safely beyond the reach of the astonished canines.

Maddox also fondly recalled his unfettered days spent at the family's rustic



During the 2011 dedication of the new Oconaluftee Visitor Center, Terry Maddox, far left, shakes the hand of former park Superintendent Dale Ditmanson, while longtime GSMA Board of Directors Chair Barbara Muhlbeier hands over signed papers transferring ownership of the building from GSMA to Great Smoky Mountains National Park. PROVIDED BY GREAT SMOKY MOUNTAINS ASSOCIATION

cottage on North Carolina's Outer Banks. From sunup to sunset, the all-but-naked young Maddox pursued shells, sea turtles, and crabs along the beaches and dunes, assuring his dermatologist of a long and prosperous career.

Maddox's discipline and hard work in high school led to acceptance and a scholarship at his dream college – the prestigious University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. If Maddox was aware of the existence of any other institutions of higher learning, then or throughout his career, no one ever witnessed the acknowledgement. In fact, he once claimed that the mere presence in GSMA's office of a coffee mug with the logo of a rival central North Carolina college (rhymes with 'Luke') was causing his allergies to flare up.

Upon graduation, Maddox landed a job with UNC's administration, and later, a position at Agnes Scott College. Only the lure of the Great Smoky Mountains (Salamander Capital of the World!) could derail his college administrator career path. Among hundreds of applicants for GSMA's executive director position, Maddox impressed the board of directors with his optimism, even temper, attention to detail, ethical standards, and love for the Smokies. He had just turned 40, and it marked the last

time he had to fill out a job application.

"He wasn't afraid to take on a huge project and do something that no one had done before," said long-time GSMA Board of Directors Chair Barbara Muhlbeier, recalling Maddox's involvement with the creation of Oconaluftee Visitor Center. GSMA's "first" was to build "a visitor center inside a national park, totally funded by a park partner, and supervised by the park partner." Upon completion, GSMA turned the keys of the \$3 million facility over to the National Park Service.

In 2013, the federal government shut down for two and a half weeks at the worst possible time: October. Maddox responded by becoming a local and regional celebrity starring in daily video spots in which he highlighted the frustration of the hundreds of thousands of would-be visitors who were being denied their opportunity to enjoy the Smokies. "Maddox was not given to anger or placing blame," said William A. Hart, GSMA board chair during the crisis.

Terry Maddox's unprecedented quarter-of-a-century tenure as executive director of GSMA will enhance everyone's enjoyment of the Smokies for decades to come. His true monuments do not reside in a cemetery, they pop-

ulate and encircle our favorite national park. His presence will continue to be felt in the North Carolina visitor centers at Oconaluftee, Clingmans Dome and Bryson City, the Twin Creeks Science and Education Center near Gatlinburg and the Collections Preservation Center in Townsend, Tennessee, the expanded GSMA offices, the theater space at Sugarlands Visitor Center, and GSMA's legacy fund – all long-range projects that benefited from Maddox's involvement. We will remember him every time we see books like "Hiking Trails of the Smokies" and "The Great Smoky Mountain Salamander Ball," Smokies Life magazine, and scores of other park projects he supported with characteristic zeal, including the launch of the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory and the park's historic 75th anniversary celebration.

Longtime GSMA illustrator and graphic artist Lisa Horstman said it best and most succinctly: "He made the Smokies a better place."

Steve Kemp worked closely with Terry Maddox for 25 years of his three-decade tenure as the director of interpretive products and services at Great Smoky Mountains Association, the educational nonprofit park partner which provides this column. Reach the author at Steve@GSMAAssoc.org.

North Carolina auditor faces hit-and-run, traffic charges

ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH – North Carolina's elected state auditor has a court date next week after she was cited for misdemeanor hit-and-run and another traffic-related charge when police said she hit a parked car while driving on a Raleigh road.

Beth Wood, 68, was cited Dec. 12 for a collision that occurred four days before that resulted only in property damage to the parked sedan, according to a Wake County court citation. Raleigh police accused Wood of hit-and-run – leaving the scene and property damage – and for an unsafe movement infraction, court records show.

Wood's court appearance is Jan. 26 in Wake District Court. Someone without a previous criminal record would face no active jail time for a hit-and-run misdemeanor but could face probation. An unsafe movement count can be punishable by a fine.

Lane Rosen, a spokesperson for the

state auditor's office, said Thursday that Wood had no comment on the charges, which were first reported by Axios Raleigh.

Wood, a Democrat, was elected in 2008. She has been reelected three times, most recently in 2020. She previously worked in the auditor's office and state treasurer's office.

According to the citation, the collision happened about 9 p.m. Dec. 8 on South Salisbury Street. Wake County District Attorney Lorrin Freeman said Raleigh police conducted an investigation.

The charging officer says there was probable cause to believe that Wood operated a Toyota at the scene of a collision in which she knew she was involved and failed to provide her name, address and other information, the citation says. It also appears Wood operated a vehicle while "failing to see before turning from a direct line that such movement could be made in safety," the citation reads.

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