

Doris Milner

1920 – 2007



Doris Milner was a volunteer wilderness advocate from western Montana with an impressive list of conservation accomplishments.

Doris spent her life advocating for the preservation of wilderness, including the Scapegoat, Great Bear and Frank Church Wilderness Areas.

She was successful in her efforts at preserving the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness with the passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964 and she helped add the Magruder Corridor to the Selway-Bitterroot in 1980.

She was a life-long member of the Montana Wilderness Association and also served as its president. In 1978, Doris was named one of 10 citizen conservationists of the year by the American Motors Corporation.

“Milner represented conservation efforts at the citizen level, paralleling the work of Sen. Church at the national level,” said former Darby District Ranger Dave Campbell.

Doris was born in Maryland but moved with her husband, Kelsey Milner, to Hamilton, Montana in 1951. Doris loved her new home, the valley and its people, and especially the natural beauty of the surrounding areas.

Then in the early 1960s, she spotted a bulldozer near a favorite camping spot in the Magruder Corridor and learned the United States Forest Service had planned a timber sale along the Selway River.

The threat spurred Doris into the role of citizen conservationist—a role she would play for more than 40 years. “All I knew was I was mad,” she told National Public Radio in 2004. “That’s all I knew—and I was going to do something about it.”

Doris joined with ex-Forest Service Supervisor G.M. “Brandy” Brandborg to form the Save the Upper Selway Committee. They organized opposition to permanent development of the then-recently declassified Magruder Corridor on the Selway River in Idaho, a pristine and unique 100-mile stretch of wild river country.

Joining Idaho Sen. Frank Church and Montana Sen. Lee Metcalf, among others, Doris helped expand the wilderness to include the Magruder Corridor and secure designation of the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness.

Doris served as Montana Wilderness Association council president from 1973 to 1975 and was an inspiration for then up-and-coming conservationists like Montana Wilderness Association’s longtime conservation director, John Gatchell.

“I still remember her voice, impressing on me to have credibility in all my dealings,” Gatchell said. “She’s really the reason I’m involved and still working for Montana wilderness.”

Writer and friend Dale Burk said it should be remembered that Milner had all her accomplishments at a time when women weren’t usually accepted in leadership roles.

“Her perseverance was epic, an essential quality in a situation where timing is at play,” Burk said. “But she also based her stand upon a very scientific analysis of the law of nature and the law of the land. That set her aside from other activists.”

But it wasn’t her informed view of the environment and the need for wilderness that helped win over potential adversaries, according to Trout Unlimited spokesman Marshall Bloom.

“I can sum up her philosophy of environmental protection in three words: integrity, respect and modesty,” Bloom said.