

# George Darrow

1924–2015



**I**t would seem George Darrow was a contradiction. He was an oil-field roughneck, a military man, dude rancher, farmer, horse breeder, and petroleum geologist. He was an arts patron, gallery owner, and a passionate conservationist. He was a Republican Montana state legislator and proud co-author of the Montana Environmental Policy Act.

George Darrow – born in Osage, Wyoming, and educated in economics and geology at the University of Michigan, where he played football and wrestled – was an extraordinary Montanan whose contribution to conservation and protection of our shared environment cannot be overstated. A leader of Montana’s Republican Party, George routinely crossed party lines to build the political bridges necessary for protecting Montana’s natural resources and water quality.

In addition to championing Montana’s bedrock environmental law, George was chief sponsor of the Montana Water Policy Act of 1967 and remained a staunch defender of every Montanans’ “right to a clean and healthful environment,” as codified in the Montana Constitution.

Close to his Bigfork home, George worked to conserve Cougar Canyon – a mountainous parcel of state land overlooking Flathead Lake – and advocated for wilderness designation in the Swan Crest. In 1992, George testified before the U.S. House of Representatives

noting, “The entire snow-capped Swan Crest from Columbia Mountain through the Jewel Basin and into the Bob Marshall Wilderness provides the high-quality watershed, recreation and wildlife habitat that underlie the Flathead economy.”

As a Montana Republican legislator – both in the House and the Senate, between 1967 and 1974 – George was at the center of Montana’s foundational legislative efforts on behalf of conservation. And while knowing that the divides between Republicans and Democrats, politicians and the populace, and conservation and resource extraction runs deep, George expressed his views passionately and yet always managed to remain a gentleman and a statesman.

In an era when business and conservation interests seemed incompatible, George rallied the Bigfork Chamber of Commerce to support the Swan Crest Wilderness proposal. When politics demanded an all-or-nothing approach, he chose a path of deliberation and compromise, working to show that conservation paid enormous dividends to Montana businesses.

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