

Margaret Adams

1920–2005



Though Margaret Adams was a product of 1920s Havre, Montana – where she was raised with her seven siblings and graduated from what is now Montana State University-Northern – it was in Great Falls where she blossomed into an environmental educator and activist.

Margaret was a life-long elementary school teacher and principal. Her legacy lives on in the lives of children she taught, and in the lives of children now benefiting from Great Falls Public School's elementary environmental education program, which she created some 40 years ago. She arrived in Great Falls to teach at Lincoln School during 1957. Shortly afterward, she became one of the early members of the Montana Wilderness Association, later testifying for designation of the Scapegoat and Great Bear Wildernesses. She received the MWA's Brass Lantern Award in 1992 and the Founder's Award in 2000 for her trailblazing work. Yet, after becoming the principal of Lewis and Clark Elementary, Margaret's activism was notably marked by an inquiring bent to understand, learn and share ideas. She would famously insist that fellow board members and visitors research their opinions before taking a stand or offering comment on issues of concern.

That style of learned advocacy enabled her to work with folks who were not natural allies to achieve conservation victories. For example, she co-founded the

Great Falls Conservation Council, which continues to bring together conservation leaders from local nonprofits and governmental resource agencies every few weeks to discuss important regional issues.

She helped found the Upper Missouri River Breaks chapter of the Audubon Society – and served as its president as well as president of Montana Audubon. In 1997, she was named Montana Audubon's Conservationist of the Year. Margaret also helped to create Lewis and Clark Fund, Inc., a nonprofit to further the U.S. Forest Service's Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Interpretive Center at Giant Springs in Great Falls. And, ever the educator, she co-founded Friends of the Library in Great Falls.

Make no mistake, however, Margaret knew well the power of a strong woman's voice. When she was in her 60s, she and similar minded women of her age began taking extended backpacking trips through Montana's wilderness areas. When it came time to testify for wilderness legislation, their presence belied the argument that wilderness was only for the young. And earlier, as a campaign for the Scapegoat Wilderness confronted USFS plans to log the area, a local store owned by Lincoln activist Cecil Garland – an inaugural inductee to the MOHF – was threatened with a boycott. Margaret and her friends would have none of that and drove from Great Falls to Lincoln to stock up from the shelves of Garland's Town and Country store.