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## BOOK REVIEWS: FORCE OF NATURE: GEORGE FELL, FOUNDER OF THE NATURAL AREAS MOVEMENT. Arthur Melville Pearson.

James R. Herkert

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## BOOK REVIEWS

### **FORCE OF NATURE: GEORGE FELL, FOUNDER OF THE NATURAL AREAS MOVEMENT.**

Arthur Melville Pearson. 2017. University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin, USA. 216 pages. \$26.95 (cloth). ISBN: 978-0-299-31230-5.

Arthur Melville Pearson's *Force of Nature* is a book that tells two very interesting and intertwined stories. One is a story of how perseverance and determination can drive an individual to accomplish great things. And the other is a story of how the modern day natural areas movement came to be. Fortunately for those interested in conservation and natural areas protection, those two stories were combined in the life of George Fell (1916-1994). In Fell's home state of Illinois, where his impact is widely known, his name is synonymous with conservation. In other places where his impact is less well known, it should be.

Many people might know that Fell was one of the founders of The Nature Conservancy in 1951. However, Pearson goes back beyond 1951 and traces the path that ultimately led to the establishment of the world's largest conservation organization. Ultimately, The Nature Conservancy grew out of the Ecological Society of America (ESA). The ESA was founded in 1915 and two years later formed a Committee on Preservation of Natural Areas for Ecological Study, headed by Victor Shelford. Over time, Shelford and his colleagues increasingly sought to advocate for conservation, which caused a great divide within the organization regarding the roles of science versus advocacy. This all came to a head in 1946 when the Society passed a resolution that prevented committees from taking direct preservation action. In response, Shelford and his colleagues broke off from ESA and formed the Ecologists' Union in an effort to further their preservation efforts. However, it was not until Shelford invited George Fell to become involved that the Union's preservation efforts would get traction. Fell's 1949 "Memorandum Concerning Establishment of a Nature Protection 'Foundation,' 'Trust,' or 'Association'" would set the Ecologists' Union on its course to ultimately become The Nature Conservancy. Fell went on to become the Conservancy's first Vice President, and his vision and work in those early years of the organization set the stage for The Nature Conservancy to become the conservation giant it has become. The early years for the organization were not easy, and had it not been for Fell's determination, the organization might not be around today. But, that determination came with a cost: Fell's unyielding vision that the organization

needed a very methodical framework within which to operate conflicted with others who preferred a much more flexible and opportunistic approach to land protection. In the end, Fell left the organization and returned to Illinois where he set his sights on the development and passage of the Illinois Natural Areas Preservation Act by the Illinois legislature (1962). The Act established the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission as an independent unit of state government whose primary responsibility was to identify and protect natural areas through dedication as State Nature Preserves, the highest form of land protection in the state. The Act was the first of its kind in the nation and has served as a model for many other states.

Among Fell's other accomplishments is being a founding member and officer of the Natural Areas Association and the founder of the Natural Lands Institute, a regional land trust that protects land in Illinois and southern Wisconsin. The Natural Areas Association recognizes Fell's contributions to natural areas and their protection by naming their highest award after him—an award given to individuals for exceptional accomplishments in the natural areas profession.

*Force of Nature* is a great read for anyone interested in natural areas and their preservation and also anyone interested in the history of modern day conservation organizations. The book also provides some insight into the politics and management of nonprofit organizations, especially in those critical formative years.

The biography also provides a thorough treatment of Fell's life and does a good job in providing an understanding of how his upbringing helped to shape his views and drive to protect natural areas. The book also does a nice job of detailing how Fell's wife Barbara shared the same drive to achieve success and the tremendous sacrifices the couple made to achieve their ultimate dream.

Pearson's closing comments on Fell help put his conservation legacy in great perspective: "At a time when there were few models sufficient to the task at hand, Fell had the persistence to build new, innovative institutions. The very act of building those institutions galvanized a lot of people, offering them mechanisms within which to focus and realize their own conservation passions. The fact that Fell was not the one to nurture the institutions he built to maturity ultimately is immaterial. George Fell was a stone, a rock, a force of nature, whose legacy lives with us still: in the institutions he built, in the people he inspired, in the natural lands he loved and protected forever." (page 168)—James R. Herkert, *Executive Director, Illinois Audubon Society, 2315 Clear Lake Avenue, Springfield, Illinois, USA, 62703.*