

ALAN HERSHEY REMARKS--DONALD B. JONES AWARD CEREMONY  
MAY 11, 2019

If I deserve this award, it is in large measure because so many of you have, over many years, have inspired, encouraged, guided, and taught me so much. I thank you for that. I've even had the pleasure of working closely with many of you, on the accomplishments for which I am being honored, but they are shared accomplishments. You have my special thanks.

But still, I often reflect on why I throw myself into land preservation and stewardship as I do. It's actually simple-I like being outdoors. The strongest memories, the strongest sensation of my life, have been formed outdoors.

- I remember canoeing the 14 miles of Long Lake in the Adirondacks as a young teenager with my father and brother Steve, the wind filling the improvised sail we had rigged from an old shower curtain.
- I remember sitting for hours beside a remote alpine lake in the Beartooth Mountains of Montana, with nothing but the breeze and the buzz of insects and the call of birds to touch my mind
- I remember kayaking—almost surfing on the white caps—back towards the dock at the cabin built by my parents on Abrams Pond in Maine.
- I remember hiking and skiing with my younger brother Ron in the Giant Mountains in the Sudeten region of Czechoslovakia hard up against the Polish border.
- Sometimes memories are born of stress, not just idyllic experiences. I remember a 3-day hike with my wife Phyllis along the ridges of the Austrian Alps above Schladming. On the last day we were crossing a steep slope of loose rocky scree, on a pencil-thin path above a scary slide. Phyllis noted, "I'm looking forward to remembering this!"
- I remember skiing across the frozen Hardanger Plateau in central Norway, and spotting the profiles of wild reindeer browsing on lichen on the rocks high on the windswept ridges around us.

I could go on with a long list, many in similarly exotic places, but I will mention just one more: the sensations I experience in taking out the garbage at our house in Pennington. We have a long driveway. As I push my little hand truck the 300 feet or so to the street, particularly on a cold fall or winter evening, I notice the expanse of sky and stars, the majesty of the big maple and oak along the driveway, and the crisp clarity of the air.

Adventures in faraway places can make marvelous memories. But in my driveway—and in the woods and meadows and along the streams of central New Jersey there are experiences that can exhilarate, and teach, and stick in our minds. The world is big and exciting, but it is also right here, and it makes me feel alive. I would guess that many of you share that feeling.

Being outdoors expands time for me. A day of hiking, an afternoon on skis, a morning of building trails—these intervals always seem like major episodes of far more than the few hours they actually consume. I think it is because there is such a richness of sensations: the breeze—or the biting wind, the color splash of wildflowers, the smell of rotting leaves, the gurgle of a brook, the calls of birds, the inescapable grace of nature's designs. So much gets packed into an hour outdoors if we just notice. Every moment becomes an event, and life expands.

And being outdoors brings us together. I have led volunteers building trails since 2005—volunteers who have put in 10,000 hours of work. I always tell new volunteers we are not just building trails; we are building community. Working together on a task—building a bridge, moving heavy stones to form a stairway, digging a trail into a hillside—these are expressions of our larger shared vision of how the outdoors can enrich lives. That shared vision builds bonds. Those bonds are as important to me as memories of high ridges in the Rockies or the grandeur of Norwegian fjords.

And of course, the crowd gathered here today reminds me that I don't literally have to be on the trail with you to feel that bond. The outdoors works its magic

by engaging us all in doing right by the planet—and in the process, for each of us in our own ways --- building memories, expanding our lives, and creating bonds. With all of you on my side, and me on yours, we can do wonders together. Thank you so much.