

March 11, 2019

To: Senate Committee on Service Veterans and Emergency Preparedness

From: Mike McArthur, Oregon Geographic Names Board Member

In Support of SCR 23:

"By Bill Monroe | For The Oregonian/OregonLive March 12, 2018

Surrounded by family and in control as always, Tom McAllister left the trailhead shortly before noon Monday -- on his greatest adventure.

His giant footprints will forever mark trails across Oregon, ocean swells to snow-capped peaks, glassy lakes to whitewater rivers, and all the sage, pine and marshes in between. Tom spent all of his 91 years (and 10 months) watching, measuring and interpreting the world around him.

And his boundless energy explaining the natural order to readers of the Oregon Journal and The Oregonian.

You don't want to hear as much about our personal kinship. That we share Scottish roots, were both born in Emmanuel Hospital on the 6th day of the month (Tom on May 6, 1926); that our fathers were both dentistry graduates of the old North Pacific College (now the School of Dentistry at OHSU); that we're both U.S. Navy South Pacific war veterans (he was a WW II pharmacist's mate tending Marines and sailors); that we both graduated from Oregon State University ("College" when Tom attended post-war under the same GI Bill) with courses in fish and wildlife (his major, my minor); or that we became close friends even before The Oregonian merged with the Oregon Journal in 1983.

But if you've ever stood on the rim of a high-desert canyon hunting chukar, you're in Tom's tread. He was in on the first transplants from the Mid-East (Asia, not America) in 1951. You're on his trail across the High Cascades if you've ever fished remote lakes for brook and rainbow trout he helped carry there by horseback while working for the Oregon Game Commission.

If you remember the late George Pasero, Oregon Journal sports editor and later Oregonian columnist, you'll thank him for hiring Tom in 1953 with the observation: "A new consciousness of the outdoor values of a state such as this has arisen among many groups, sportsmen's clubs, chambers of commerce and conservationists."

"It changed my life!" Tom said emphatically last week.

Tom stood grinning behind Gov. Tom McCall when he signed into law the Rogue River as one of the nation's first Wild and Scenic waterways.

Belong to The Nature Conservancy? Tom was a charter member of the Oregon Chapter. Flyfishers Club of Oregon? Yup, he was there at the beginning. Izaak Walton League? Audubon Society of Portland? It's a rich resume.

Hunt deer or elk from a spike camp after hiking in with everything on your back? Tom wrote about that and even included a photo from time to time of a four-point buck splayed out on the skinning pole.

Look closely at a state map with the knowledge that many, perhaps most, of the names of buttes, mountains, streams, villages, canyons, springs and trails came under Tom McAllister's scrutiny at one time or another as a long-time member and past-president of the Oregon Geographic Names Board.

If questions arose, Tom was among the first to either offer his first-hand observations of the issue or to travel at his own expense to gain some.

He stood resolutely in the glow of gratitude from virtually all of Oregon's Native American councils for his work in honoring their heritage and languages.

Tom's insatiable curiosity was a magnet, pulling us with him as he watched, listened, evaluated and wrote - as much about the songbirds in a copse (one of his favorite words) of aspen as the buck or bull elk bedded beneath the shimmering golden leaves and winter-white bark.

As a "lad" (also a favorite term for the inveterate Scot), he spent weekends at his parents' seaside cabin, seeking the sources of bird songs and sifting through the sands of Nehalem spit for remnant beeswax ballast, left there by a shipwrecked Spanish galleon.

In the South Pacific during WWII, tending to Marines and sailors, Tom's keen interest in the natural world nearly did him in on the Island of Guam. During an off-duty excursion to a cliff to watch birds, he took friendly fire from distant Marines, who thought he was one of the many leftover Japanese soldiers popping in and out of hidden caves. Tom dropped into the ocean and swam to a safe beach.

Although well-known across the region and nation, Tom was fiercely devoted to Oregon. Governors sought his counsel and when Tom was recuperating from critical injuries suffered in a traffic accident, President Gerald Ford just happened to also be at Emmanuel Hospital, dedicating a new wing. They met and Ford tossed his schedule out the window to hear Tom McAllister stories about the state's natural history.

"He was, above all else, a pragmatist," said son Scott McAllister. "He was among the last of the original naturalists standing between urbanization and the Oregon wilderness."

Jeff Wohler, retired sports editor and our former boss, once thanked Tom for getting him outdoors and explaining Tom's primary newsroom axiom: "Establish your absence."

"If you see us here, we aren't doing our jobs," he told Jeff.

"It was important for me to see how you were received by readers," Wohler replied. "I learned through that experience that you two were far and away the most often-read sportswriters we had."

Hike in peace, old friend. You've established your presence."