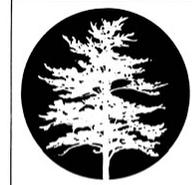


Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame



John Thomas Curtis

Inducted 2013



WISCONSIN
CONSERVATION
HALL OF FAME

“John Curtis elucidated the ecology of Wisconsin more than has been done with any other state. In doing so, he developed and promoted community ecology and many of the methods for investigating natural communities that remain in use. The work of Curtis had profound influence on the science of ecology, and on management and protection of natural areas in Wisconsin.” — Alan Haney and Donald Waller

Awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1942 and again in 1956 .

Chairman of the Wisconsin State Board for Preservation of Scientific Areas, precursor to the state Natural Areas Commission, from 1952-1955.

Author of *The Vegetation of Wisconsin: An Ordination of Plant Communities* (1959) .

Established the nature of the prairie-forest border in Wisconsin and gave recognition to the "tension zone" where the interaction of climate, soil type, and fire create a dynamic transition.

The sub-discipline of restoration ecology has largely grown from Curtis' early work on community ecology.

John Thomas Curtis

1913-1961

John Curtis was born in Waukesha 20 September 1913. He received an A.B. from Carroll College in 1934 and a Ph.D. in botany from UW-Madison in 1937. He remained at Madison and progressed from Instructor to Assistant Professor (1940), to Associate Professor (1945) to Professor (1951). He was awarded a Guggenheim Fellow in 1942 and again in 1956. He was a strong promoter for protection of examples of natural ecosystems and was chairman of the Wisconsin State Board for Preservation of Scientific Areas, precursor to the state Natural Areas Commission, from 1952-1955. Wisconsin now has over 300 state natural areas. During his tenure at Madison, 39 students completed Ph.D.'s, many of them advancing to become distinguished ecologists in their own right.

John Curtis is arguably best known for his seminal book, *The Vegetation of Wisconsin: An Ordination of Plant Communities* (1959). This book assembled a remarkably complete picture of the state's plant communities and their relation to environmental variables based on data that he and his students collected from more than 1000 sites. In addition to detailed descriptions and interpretations of the natural communities of Wisconsin, this book presents convincing support for the idea that plant species respond in separate and continuous ways to underlying gradients in environmental conditions. Curtis became famous for this "continuum" concept of ecological gradients and for pioneering new statistical methods to investigate community structure and these responses. His work also established the nature of the prairie-forest border in Wisconsin and gave recognition to the "tension zone" where the interaction of cli-

Facts
About
John Thomas Curtis

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**About Wisconsin's
Conservation Hall of Fame**
www.wchf.org

Location:

Schmeckle Reserve
Stevens Point, Wis.

Attractions:

Displays, information on Wisconsin's conservation history and leaders. Schmeckle Reserve, owned by the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, provides hiking and wildlife viewing opportunities.

Purpose:

To educate and inspire people with information about how resource conservation has shaped our environment and our lives.

Hours:

M-F, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Sat: Noon - 4 p.m.
Sun: Noon - 4 p.m.

Support:

The Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame is funded solely by contributions. Donations are tax deductible and may be sent to:

WCHF Foundation Inc.
Schmeckle Reserve
UW-Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481
715-346-4992

Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame
Honoring our state's rich conservation history

John Thomas Curtis

(continued)

mate, soil type, and fire create a dynamic transition. The data he and his students carefully archived are also providing a valuable baseline for tracking patterns of ecological change in the 21st century.

At Madison, Curtis picked up on the idea for the Arboretum that was begun by Aldo Leopold. Building on the goal of restoring representative natural communities on cropland near campus, he championed the concept of community restoration rather than collections of species as is more typical of arboretums. Indeed, it was Curtis who did much to shift the focus of ecological research from species (autecology) to communities (synecology), and established UW-Madison as leading school of ecology. The sub-discipline of restoration ecology has largely grown from Curtis' early work on community ecology. Among his specific contributions, Curtis did research on prescribed fire as a tool to restore prairie. Prescribed fire is now one of the most widely employed approaches in ecological management. Madison continues to be a center for restoration ecology.

John Curtis elucidated the ecology of Wisconsin more than has been done with any other state. In doing so, he developed and promoted community ecology and many of the methods for investigating natural communities that remain in use. Continuation of the work at the Arboretum begun by Aldo Leopold gave rise to the sub-discipline of restoration ecology and the importance of protection of unique natural reference areas. The work of Curtis had profound influence on the science of ecology, and on management and protection of natural areas in Wisconsin.