

NOMINATION OF GERI BERGEN FOR THE 2019 F.H. RAYMOND AWARD

The Sacramento-Tahoe Chapter of the California Region of the Society of American Forester's nominates the late Geri Bergen for the 2019 Raymond Award.

Geri, who passed away on October 12, 2018 at the age of 88 at home in Nevada City, where she resided since her retirement in 1994 as the Deputy Director of the Environmental Coordination Staff of the Forest Service in Washington, D.C.

One of the most important criteria for selection as the recipient of the Raymond Award is one's volunteer participation; above what is required as part of a person's or organizations paid position, as well as the achievements reached as a paid professional; with emphasis on the past five years. Geri more than qualifies both on her career accomplishments and volunteer efforts and participation. Supporting documentation included with this package is a copy of the Sacramento-Tahoe's SAF Chapter's 2012 E-Newsletter, the Nevada County Land Trust's 2011 announcement of her selection for the Lifetime of Conservation Leadership Award, and copies of her obituaries, summarizing her life.

Geri was a graduate of UC Berkeley's School of Forestry and later received a Master's Degree in Botany. Previously she graduated from Secretarial School in New York, and attended the University of Nevada, Reno for about two years majoring in Forestry. As a single mother, she supported herself there dealing blackjack at a local casino. She also attended Oakland City College where she completed all the needed Forestry prerequisites. In 1960 she attended the required Summer Camp in Meadow Valley, where she was the only female with 40 males, and was housed with the teaching assistants. Later she found out that Dean Vaux had to get approval from the Dean of Women Students to allow her to attend camp.

After working part time at the Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station in Berkeley, while pursuing a PhD in tree physiology and then genetics, she decided to change emphasis and support her children who were then in junior high school by working part time at UCB doing research and writing up histories for Whitaker's and Blodgett Forests. In 1967 she was offered a position with the Information and Education Staff of the Forest Service's Region 5 Office in San Francisco. In 1972 she was offered the Environmental Coordinator position, shortly after the National Environmental Policy Act was passed. Looking for new challenges she applied for and was offered the Deputy Forest Supervisor position on the Tahoe National Forest under Forest Supervisor Bob Lancaster. Her husband was working in the Bay Area, so they agreed to set up two homes and split their time between them.

In 1984 Bob retired, and in 1985 Regional Forester Zane Smith appointed Geri as the first woman Forest Supervisor in the Forest Service. She served in that position until 1990 when she was appointed as the Deputy Staff Director for Environmental Coordination, where she served until her retirement from the USFS in 1994; after which she moved back to Nevada City.

Among her firsts was apparently being the first female Registered Professional Forester, served on the Professional Foresters Licensing Committee, the first woman elected as a Fellow in the SAF, and one of the first two women to be elected to the SAF Council in 1989.

While living in the Bay Area, Geri was active in the Save San Francisco Bay, People for Open Space, West Contra Costa Conservation League, Richmond Recreation and Parks Commission, and the Richmond Citizens Planning Association.

Following her return to Nevada City in 1994 she became active in a number activities including the Sacramento-Tahoe Chapter of the Society of American Foresters, the Nevada County Land Trust (now the Bear Yuba Land Trust), where she was a Board member and President; served on the SAF Working Group on Land Use Planning and Design, California Alumni Foresters, National Active and Retired Federal Employees Association, Northern Mines Business and Professional Women, Soroptimist International of Nevada City, and volunteered as a Defensible Space Advisor for the Fire Safe Council of Nevada County, and other local social and community groups.

GERI VANDERVEER BERGEN

August 24, 1930 - October 12, 2018

Gerri Vanderver Bergen, forester, conservationist and dedicated volunteer, passed away peacefully in her home in early October. A loving Mother, daughter, sister and grandmother, Gerri lived a full life that brought her a successful career in forestry, many "firsts" as a woman, a host of personal accomplishments, loving relationships, and accolades for her conservation efforts and her work as a volunteer for conservation and land-use groups.

Gerri wanted to leave the world a better place than how she found it and this she did.

Born in Brooklyn, NY, in 1930, Gerri lived much of her young life in the quaint town of Nutley, NJ. Some of her favorite childhood memories were from her visits to the Poconos and Catskill mountains, where she loved the smell of the woods after a summer rain.

Following high school, Gerri attended and graduated from secretarial school in New York (because girls weren't supposed to go to college, which she had wanted to do). At age 19, she married and moved with her first husband to Seattle, where she developed an affinity for the great forests and national parks of the Pacific Northwest.

Three children and several years later, Gerri decided to move to Reno and pursue a career in forestry because it related to all the things she had become interested in in the Northwest. She studied at the University of Nevada, Reno and supported herself as a blackjack dealer at a local casino.

She selected the University of California at Berkeley to complete her forestry studies because it was one of the few schools in the nation that allowed women in the forestry program. Gerri was the first woman to attend the department's required Summer Camp and had to live with the camp employees rather than her fellow students, who were all men. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry with highest honors in 1962 and went on to complete two years of graduate study before receiving a Master of Arts degree in Botany in 1965. One of Gerri's greatest personal accomplishments was being one of four runners-up (out of 2500 students) to the coveted University Medal.

Though her final degree was in Botany (which proved very useful over the years), Gerri really wanted to be a practicing conservationist and so began working and volunteering to accomplish that goal. As well as being active in many local San Francisco Bay Area conservation and land-use planning groups (Save San Francisco Bay, People for Open Space, West Contra Costa County Conservation League, Richmond Recreation and Parks Commission, Richmond Citizen's Planning Association) she began her forestry career.

She held positions as a Research Forester for the Pacific Southwest Forest and Range Experiment Station; Junior Specialist at the School of Forestry; Public Information Officer for the USDA Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Regional Office (a community outreach position that she expanded and refined); and as the region's first Regional Environmental Coordinator at the same office, where she developed and led implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) among California's national forests.

In 1978, Gerri was ready for a change and was reassigned to the Tahoe National Forest, headquartered in Nevada City, to take the position of Deputy Forest Supervisor and become the first woman line officer in the Forest Service. In 1985, she was promoted to Forest Supervisor for the Tahoe National Forest and became the first woman forest supervisor in the nation. Gerri was very proud of her work on the Tahoe, where she was responsible for managing the human, financial, and natural resources and improvements on the 80,000-acre national forest. She also provided executive leadership for the development of the Tahoe Land Management Plan.

In 1990, Gerri accepted a promotion to the post of Deputy Director, Environmental Coordination Staff, in the Washington, D.C. headquarters of the Forest Service. Gerri retired in 1994 and moved back to Nevada City and the forest area that she loved.

Geri did not stop her conservation focus upon retirement. Rather she went head-on into a host of volunteer positions and became more active in volunteer groups that she was already associated with. She became familiar with the Nevada County Land Trust (now the Bear Yuba Land Trust) and became a member, then headed up a committee and was invited to join the board. She was an active board participant for 10 years and president in 2003, where she was deeply involved in accepting land trust ownership of the 1905 North Star House in Grass Valley. Geri was a Registered Professional Forester in California and served on the Professional Foresters Examining Committee of the State Board of Forestry for six years. She was a member of the Society of American Foresters (SAF), where she became the first woman to be elected Fellow, and served on the SAF Council and the SAF Working Group on Land Use Planning and Design. She was also a very active member of the California Alumni Foresters, National Active and Retired Federal Employees (NARFE), Northern Mines Business and Professional Women (BPW), Soroptimist International of Nevada City and other social and community groups. Geri loved being outdoors in her forested yard, tending to the plants and trees and watching the birds and squirrels nosh on her provided treats; walking her dog, Jenna, along the canals; joining in the festivities always happening in Nevada City; learning about and identifying native plants; watching the weather patterns in her area; visiting with her children; and participating in the activities of several social groups.

Geri is deeply loved and will be greatly missed by her three children - Bob Eldridge (and wife Cheryl) of Colfax, Kathy Schermerhorn (and husband John) of Walnut Creek and Marcia Eldridge of Crockett - as well as her brother John Bergen (and wife Sharon) of New Hope, PA, her grandchildren and great-grandchild and her many nieces and nephews.

If desired, donations in Geri's name may be made to the Bear Yuba Land Trust or Hospice of the Foothills.

A Celebration of Geri's Life will be held at the North Star House, 12075 Auburn Rd., Grass Valley, CA on Friday, November 9 at 2pm. All who wish to honor and celebrate Geri, her life and the lady that she was, are invited to attend. Please RSVP by phone or text to [REDACTED].

