

Florida owes a huge debt to Nat Reed

OUR VIEW

Treasure Coast Newspapers Editorial Board

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On July 11, Florida lost a lion.

Eight days earlier, Nathaniel Pryor Reed, 84, fell while fishing in Canada and hit his head. The Hobe Sound resident spent a week in a coma before his family took him off life support. He died Wednesday, 11 days short of what would have been his 85th birthday.

It was an immense blow to the environmental causes Reed championed throughout his remarkable life, both as a private citizen and a government official.

Anyone who cares at all about Florida's fragile ecosystems owes Reed a debt of gratitude for his efforts to help protect them. After Reed died, Florida Sen. Bill Nelson proposed naming the planned reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee for Reed.

It's an entirely fitting gesture — even if it's nowhere near enough. To measure the impact of the man former Florida Gov. LeRoy Collins once called “one of our country's greatest conservation-ists,” one must consider what Florida would have looked like *without* Reed. Reed, who grew up wealthy in Hobe Sound and Connecticut, had a profound respect for our natural world. A staunch Republican, he campaigned for Claude Kirk Jr., who in 1966 became Florida's first Republican governor since Reconstruction. Reed advised Kirk on environmental issues — famously, for a salary of \$1 per year — and, among other accomplishments, convinced Kirk to end the practice of flushing untreated sewage into the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1969, Reed also convinced Kirk to drop his support for what would have been the nation's largest airport north of Everglades National Park. The project would have devastated the Everglades and Big Cypress Swamp. Kirk and Reed then convinced then-President Richard Nixon to halt federal funding, killing the project.

Reed then helped lead the charge to put Big Cypress into the National Parks system.

The Everglades continues to struggle against a host of environmental challenges. But think about its condition now had that airport been built.

Reed was an advocate for government buying and preserving land, and played a role in the purchase of 22 state parks.

He later served as a deputy secretary of the Department of the Interior for presidents Nixon and Gerald Ford. During that period, he co-wrote the Endangered Species Act, which protected the Florida panther, manatee, Key deer and the American alligator.

How many of them would be left without Reed's efforts?

Reed also worked to pass the Clean Water Act and preserved more than 80 million acres of Alaska.

Later, he founded the advocacy group 1,000 Friends of Florida to act as a check on development, was vice chairman of the Everglades Foundation and served in similar capacities with other environmental groups.

He publicly warred with Florida's sugar industry. And right until the end he remained a staunch advocate for our waterways, penning guest columns for this publication and supporting the reservoir south of Lake Okeechobee.

Looking around at Florida's myriad environmental problems, it is tempting to conclude that however fierce a warrior Reed and others might have been, ultimately they lost. Development continues to gobble up huge swaths of Florida land, our coastal regions are fouled with red tide and blue-green algae, our springs are imperiled, and more.

But the fight, as Reed knew, must go on.

Indeed, that might be the only way those of us indebted to his efforts can ever try to repay him. By continuing to advocate for cleaner water, a revitalized Everglades and land preservation, Reed's spirit — and his beloved Florida — can live on.

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