



Eco-Trailblazer

Generations to come can thank **Richard Anderson** for making it his business to clean up Maine's waters, preserve its forests, teach its citizens to recycle, and get us all to think beyond borders. BY TORI BRITTON & MARK WELLMAN

According to the website www.howmanyofme.com, there are 7,505 Richard Andersons in the United States. But to people familiar with Maine's environmental history, there is only one.

Revisit any of the milestones in Maine's journey from the polluted waters and scarred lands of 50 years ago to the clean, green vistas of today, and you'll find Dick Anderson's footprints.

He made his national debut in the 1960s when he discovered that the pesticide DDT was killing larval salmon in Sebago Lake. He had his hand in the passage of Maine's bottle bill, in starting the Scarborough Marsh Nature Center (from a clam shack), in bringing biomass energy to Maine, and in writing the legislation for the first Land

for Maine's Future bond issue. In 1994, Anderson got the idea to extend the Appalachian Trail into Canada. The International Appalachian Trail has since hopped the Atlantic and now weaves through Western Europe and will soon reach North Africa.

Dick Anderson cares deeply about being ecologically correct, but is not always politically correct, even in environmental circles. He had the audacity to help a group of businessmen create condominiums outside of Baxter State Park, is an enthusiastic supporter of the bottled water industry, and won't eat fish unless it comes from a farm. As conservation commissioner during the Brennan administration, he ruffled feathers when he took 200 cars away from state employees, sold most of them, and created a vehicle



Top: Richard Anderson, left, helped negotiate the cross-border memorandum of understanding that created the Saint Croix International Waterway Commission in 1986. To his right are New Brunswick tourism minister Les Hull, Maine governor Joseph Brennan, and New Brunswick premier Richard Hatfield. Center top: Dick Anderson with Dan Riley, director of the Bureau of Sea Run Fisheries and Habitat (left) and Pat Keliher, chairman of the Coastal Conservation Association of Maine. CCA honored Anderson with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2009.



Center bottom: Anderson with International Appalachian Trail chapter members Rene Kristensen and Hans Gundel, both from Greenland. Mt. Katahdin is in the background. Below: A young Richard Anderson (child in the center of the haywagon) in 1940, at the family's summer home in Washington, Maine.



rental program for use while on state business. He also helped devise the classification system for Maine rivers, create the Saint Croix International Waterway Commission, and has made friends from literally all over the world.

The secret to his lifelong prolificity, he says, is “not that I’m particularly bright, but that I can work harder than most other people.” He can and he does.

You were born in Brockton, Massachusetts, in 1934. Did anything in your youth foreshadow your interest in nature or your stick-to-it-iveness?

I didn’t do a lot of high school stuff. I liked to go fishing, and I decided early on that I wanted to be a biologist.

My father was a food broker; his name was Ernie. I still joke about him with people. Whenever you said, “Oh, I’ll get it done tomorrow,” Ernie’s philosophy was, “You might as well just get it done now.” He worked all the time, all the time.

You graduated from UMaine in 1957 with a degree in wildlife conservation and went to work for the state fish and game department. What did you do there?

In those days, a lot of the lakes and streams hadn’t had any initial surveys, so it was sort of an inventory process. I also was the director of the Sebago Lake Salmon Project. The fishing was pretty bad then. That was how we got into the DDT business. One of us was reading the book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, and we said, “Maybe it’s the DDT that’s killing the salmon,” because at that time everyone sprayed for mosquitoes around Sebago Lake. So we had a few fish tested, and they were way higher than the food and drug standard.

Chuck Sanford [at WGAN] interviewed me, and beforehand I told him, “I’m not going to say whether people should eat the fish or not; that’s not my area of expertise.” At the end of the interview, he

PHOTOS (TOP AND BOTTOM) COURTESY OF RICHARD ANDERSON; (CENTER LEFT) WILL RICHARDSON; (CENTER RIGHT) COURTESY OF THE COASTAL CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

said, “Dick, would *you* eat these fish?” I was sort of stuck, and I said, “No.” It ended up as headlines in the paper and caused a giant stir. The commissioner called me and said, “Anderson, what the hell are you doing?” But after it was in the newspapers and on national television, there was never another drop of DDT sprayed at Sebago Lake.

In 1968, you were hired by what was then a partnership between Maine Audubon and Portland Museum of Natural History. In 1970, the museum building was sold and its contents had to be dispersed. That must have been quite a task.

Taking apart that museum was an unbelievable problem, but I had some great people who worked with me day and night as volunteers trying to find the best home for all the stuff. It’s just like cleaning out your attic, except there were a couple hundred thousand items. I remember, for instance, a sea captain had brought back a shell collection from the Philippines in about 1860. When we talked to people at a museum in the Philippines, they were so excited to have that old collection, which included things that didn’t live there anymore.

The library had 16 tons of books. I eventually convinced Swan Galleries in New York to auction the whole thing. They produced a book that listed every single publication and circulated it around the world. We had 8,500 bird study skins, all collected in Maine. I convinced Al Barden, the ornithologist at the University of Maine, may he rest in peace, to take the collection. He had students working, I think, about 10 years to catalog them.

The two organizations then incorporated as the Maine Audubon Society and moved to its present location at Gilsland Farm. How did you acquire that property?

This is a good story. I love this story. Ed Dana, of Verrill Dana, was on the board, and he said, “Hey, Dick, what about that fellow who owns that piece of land in Falmouth that they just proposed for a subdivision? Maybe he’d be interested in doing something with us.” So I called him up—his name was Morris Freeman—and he agreed to sell the Audubon Society five acres of land anywhere on that 70 acres of property, and we could pick the place, because we wanted to build a solar- and wood-heated building. So we chose the place, got it appraised, and the price was \$25,000. But I didn’t have any money. So I went to Hoddy Hildreth, who was a lawyer. I said, “Hoddy, how about writing the Audubon Society a check for \$25,000 so we can get

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this piece of land, and then when we have a fundraising drive, I’ll give you the money back.” So I got the check, I’m ready to go, and the night before we were going to sign papers, my phone rang at about 9 p.m. It was Mr. Freeman. I thought, aye, yi, yi, he’s changed his mind. He said, “My wife and I were talking, and we decided we’re going to give it to you.” So the next day, I gave Hoddy back his check. Over time the Freemans gave us all the rest of the land. It’s a really spectacular spot.

During your time at Maine Audubon, you led the campaign for passage of the Maine Returnable Beverage Container Law, aka the Bottle Bill, in 1976, one of the first in the nation.

It was a giant project. We upset a lot of people. Angus King was the lobbyist for the environmental people at that time. The first time we tried it, we went nowhere with the legislature. We were sitting around the room before the next session, saying, “How are we going to get this thing passed?” I remember so plainly Angus saying, “I have an idea. There’s this new guy who just got elected to the legislature from Bangor, and he wants to do something. I think we might be able to get him to sponsor the bill.” It was Jock McKernan. McKernan got the bill passed.

Bill Ginn, my great associate at the Audubon Society at the time, put in an enormous amount of time trying to get the bottle bill passed. It was probably the biggest thing the Audubon Society had done up to that time.

The year you turned Maine Audubon over to Bill Ginn, you were hired by a company called Land Reclamation. How did you get involved in that? What did you learn?

A guy named Ladd Heldenbrand, who was on the Audubon board and who I did a lot of hunting and fishing with, said, “I just got a contract to handle the waste at the S. D. Warren paper mill. How would you like to run it?” So one week I was running the Audubon Society, with a staff and a nice office, and the next week I was in a little travel trailer in the backyard of S. D. Warren, trying to figure out how to use a blow torch and a magnet, and to figure out what metal was what and how to sell waste paper. It was kind of

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fun. I had some great guys working with me. We joined an organization called the National Recycling Association and went to the annual meeting and, in four 20-hour days, we learned how to do the scrap business.

During that time, we started doing confidential destruction. Bob Masterson, who ran Bangor Savings Bank, called me up one night and said, “When are you going to get into recycling confidential paper? I just found my cleaning lady going through my wastebasket, and I’m thinking, ‘Should I really be throwing this stuff away?’”

So Heldenbrand and I—and our other partner was Ken Curtis—started a company called Confidential Destruction, which is one of the better names I’ve thought of. We got a front page article in either *The Wall Street Journal* or *The New York Times*, and we had inquiries from everywhere. I think we were the first company in the United States to shred confidential paper and recycle the paper. It was a good opportunity to do an environmentally correct thing and try to earn money by doing it.

In those days, people threw everything away. It’s not like that anymore. There are a lot of young people around right now who have no idea how bad it was 50 years ago. In 1970, every river was a sewer. The entire waste of the city of Portland ran into the bay, totally untreated. Nobody paid much attention to it until the ’60s and ’70s. But anybody under 30 has no idea how bad it was. People in the state of Maine have spent billions of dollars cleaning up the mess we inherited from our ancestors.

From 1981 to 1987, you served as commissioner of the Department of Conservation under Governor Joseph Brennan. What were some of the major projects you got involved with?

Governor Brennan gave me a tremendous opportunity. I had a great time being the commissioner. I figured, man, I’m only going to be commissioner once, I’m going to do some stuff. I have such a long list, I’ll just get through it.

Biomass electric plants: We didn’t have any plants that burned wood chips in Maine in 1980, but there was a lot of interest in it. I, by luck, got to be the front man on wood-fired power plants, and I was pretty fanatic. In 10 years, we built a billion dollars worth of wood-fired power plants

in Maine, and almost every one of them is still operating. I love driving through the town of Stratton. I always drive into that power plant, Stratton Energy. It provides a great market for junk wood, for bark, for waste wood; the people who work there get good pay; and it’s all renewable.

Consolidation of public land: When the paper companies lost Cushing vs. the State of Maine, Dick Berringer and I were able to convince Governor Brennan that it would be better to consolidate all the public lots ... and instead of getting money from the large landowners for the wood that they had cut, we would simply get some land from them. It resulted in a massive improvement of the public land that is owned by all the people of the state of Maine. So there are places like Bigelow, Round Pond, Deboule Mountains—large parcels all over the state of Maine that you can manage for timber harvesting and also manage for recreation. It was spectacular, it was terrific.

In 1987, you then became a partner in Barton, Gingold, Eaton, and Anderson, a consulting firm specializing in governmental relations and environmental permitting. During that time, you also got involved in trying to reintroduce caribou to Baxter State Park, which ultimately failed. What went wrong?

We had radio collars on every animal; we know why they all died. We found them all. The things that didn’t happen—they didn’t go back to Canada, they didn’t get hit by cars, they didn’t get shot by people, they had plenty of food.

We had a problem with a brain worm parasite, and we had a bear problem, because at that time there were dumps in Baxter Park, and there were a lot of bear. It was right after the spruce budworm had killed a lot of trees, and there were a lot of blowdowns, so bears could catch the caribou in that thick brush.

So we learned a lot, we wrote a report; I think we spent \$600,000. Somebody will probably [reintroduce caribou to Maine]. If you had a million dollars, it would be pretty easy to do. But you wouldn’t do it the way that we did. We tried to economize by raising them in pens, which didn’t work out so well, and we caught them by helicopter, which is wicked expensive. All the information and all the reports are at the Maine Historical Society, and all the videos are at Northeast Historic Film in Bucksport.

In 1994, you proposed creating the International Appalachian Trail that now goes through eastern Canada. What inspired this idea? When did you get the idea to jump over the ocean?

A guy named Benton MacKaye thought of the idea of the Appalachian Trail in 1921. He thought of the idea as a way

to get people outdoors, and to connect the states together by using the Appalachian Mountains. Over the next 75 years, people did little pieces of it, and eventually it got to be a 2,200-mile-long trail.

[The idea to extend it] just popped into my head. I remember exactly where I was—I was just going over the Cousins River in Yarmouth, on the interstate, and I thought, holy, jeesh, that's a wicked good idea. How come nobody ever thought of that idea? But I didn't tell anybody except my wife, Patricia, who died a couple years ago.

In about 1994, when Brennan was running for governor, he called me up and said, "What do you think we ought to do for Earth Day?" I said, "Joe, I've got this wicked idea." So Brennan proposed it on the day before Earth Day. We videotaped the news conference; I drove the tape to Canada, gave it to CBC and they played it, and it got on the AP wire.

Neither Brennan nor I were hikers, that wasn't the idea.

It was a philosophical idea, to get people to think beyond borders, to think about the fact that they shared a place on the earth that happened to have the Appalachian Mountains in common. We have some of the trail on the border, so that people get an idea of what it's like to walk on the border, and that the border was made by people like you and me. I love to try to get people to think beyond borders.

Looking back, what accomplishments mean the most to you?

I'm not sure why, whether by luck or coincidence, I've had a lot of great people that I've worked with. I've had such a good time working with fantastic people.

I'm 76 years old, and I work most of the time. I just collected a \$1,000 contribution at noontime for the International Appalachian Trail. Every once in a while, I say, enough of this. I'd like to go hide somewhere for a while. I drive around Nova Scotia and see a little cabin on the water and think, I could live there, just move in there and

*Editor's note:
There's much more to Dick Anderson's interview than can fit on these pages. To hear or download the full audio interview, visit www.maineahead.com.*