

Five Valleys Audubon
Philip L. Wright Memorial Research Award
and
Philip L. Wright Endowment

A Brief History
by
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Background

About 1905 or '06 Dr. Morton J. Elrod, a University of Montana professor, founded the Missoula Audubon Society. It was the first Audubon organization in the state, and remained active into the 1940s.

In 1976 Rosemary Schultz asked Philip L. Wright, an ornithologist at the University of Montana, why there was no Audubon affiliate in Missoula. Professor Wright then gathered up some students, and a few other birders he knew, to found the Five Valleys Audubon Society as a chapter of the National Audubon Society. (There was no Montana Audubon at the time.) The chapter goals were stated as:

To promote the conservation of natural resources by:

- Encouraging the enjoyment of wildlife and our natural heritage
- Educating others about wildlife and the need to live in harmony with our natural resources
- Advocating actions that favor wildlife and environmentally sensitive uses of resources
- Supporting research on wildlife and other natural resources

The founding Board of Directors consisted of: Jim Brown, Sid Frissell, Howard McDowell, Ed Schneegas, Michael Sol, and Steve Wisner. The first President was Doug Bonham.

In 1978 the Board members were John Briggs, Jim Brown, Sid Frissell, Cathy Ream, Chris Serveen, and Phil Wright. The President was Mike Sol.

Five Valleys Audubon Society applied to the IRS for tax-exempt status and received that status in June 1979.

In 1980 FVAS, having proved it could carry out the duties of an Audubon chapter, received a charter from the National Audubon Society.

Fifteen years after its founding, FVAS submitted articles of incorporation to the State of Montana on 10 July 1991, under the name of FIVE VALLEYS AUDUBON, INC. Among other things, the articles stated that:

"The affairs of this corporation shall be managed by a board of directors. The initial number of directors that shall comprise the first Board of Directors of the corporation shall be Six (6).

Those directors are as follows:

Jim Dayton, Poody McLaughlin, Pat Dolan, Lynn Tennefoss, Sue Reel, Diane Tidwell"

Jack Tuholske was named as the incorporator.

The articles of incorporation were signed on 15 July 1991 by Mike Cooney, Secretary of State.

Initiating Research Awards

Among the chapter goals was: "To promote the conservation of natural resources by supporting research on wildlife and other natural resources." Accordingly, in 1981 FVAS announced a scholarship program to help people attend natural history classes, workshops, and camps. I have found no record of awards for those purposes. Also in 1981, a program of **Study Grant Awards** was

initiated. Proposals for study funding were submitted to the FVAS Board of Directors, the Board decided which to accept, and granted amounts of \$100, \$200, and \$400 to three University of Montana graduate students. The \$700 came from the FVAS operating budget, and Jim Brown remembers sitting on the Board and wondering if such expenditures would bankrupt the chapter.

In 1984 FVAS revised the Study Grant program, renamed it **Field Biology Research Awards**, and announced the program in the chapter newsletter, with instructions to send applications to Richard L. Hutto, Professor of Zoology at UM. The goal was to support research on wildlife and other natural resources, and FVAS continued to fund awards through the annual budget. In 1987 the chair of the program passed to Roly Redmond who served from 1987 to 1992.

From 1984 to 1991 the **Field Biology Research Awards** program made the following awards:

1984	\$100	Paul Hendricks
	\$100	Mike Kantor
	\$100	Sandy Pletschet
	\$100	Angela de Ruiter
1985	\$0	
1986	\$0	
1987	\$200	Lisa Campbell
1988	\$300	Peter Hurd
	\$200	Christine Paige (O'Gara Award)
1989	\$0	
1990	\$500	Bret Tobalske (O'Gara Award)
	\$300	Fred Tilly
1991	\$0	

Students twice received an "**O'Gara Award**" apparently named for Bart O'Gara, leader of the Montana Cooperative Wildlife Research Unit, but I have no further knowledge of it.

In January 1992 the FVAS Board, with a goal of raising \$10,000 each for research and education, voted to establish a **Research and Education Fund**. I have found no record of any collections or disbursements.

Philip L. Wright Research Awards

In 1992 the **Field Biology Research Award** program was replaced by the **Philip L. Wright Research Award** program and the change was announced in the chapter newsletter. Chairman of the program from 1992 to 1998 was Erick Greene. In those seven years the following amounts were awarded from the FVAS operating budget:

1992	\$300	John Hoffland
	\$500	L.A. Leroux & V.R. Muehle
1993	\$200	Jasmine Mehta
	\$200	Jay Shepherd
	\$150	Lonnie L. Quinlan
1994	\$0	
1995	\$0	
1996	\$500	Anne Orlando
	\$325	David Talman
1997	\$350	Todd Ondick & Nathan Christy
	\$350	Kristen Horst & Robert Sacco
1998	\$266.50	Charla Bitney
	\$150	Jay Cummings

\$350 Thomazs Giermakowski

An Endowment to fund the Awards

Professor Philip L. Wright died on July 16, 1997, and Bill Ballard wrote an obituary for the September 1997 FVAS newsletter. The awards program was mentioned frequently in Board minutes during 1997 and 1998, and in 1998 the Board decided to establish an endowment in Phil Wright's name to provide ongoing funding for the small research grants that had been funded year to year from the FVAS operating budget. The goal was to raise \$20,000 for the endowment, and to use the annual income from that for the awards.

From December 1997 into 2003, the heavy lifting for establishing this new program was done by Rich Fevold. He received permission from Hedwig Wright and Alden Wright to use Phil Wright's name on the endowment. He contacted The Boone and Crocket Club, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, American Journal of Zoology, and other organizations to tell them of the death of Phil Wright, the establishment of an endowment in his name, and to solicit donations.

Here is an example from the AOU *Ornithological Newsletter*, April 1998:

"The Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS) is establishing the Philip L. Wright Research Award Endowment. We invite all friends, colleagues, and former students to contribute to this fund. Professor Wright, who died on 16 July 1997, was widely known for his many contributions to basic research in the fields of mammalogy and ornithology and revered by the many students and colleagues whose lives he touched during his 58 years with the University of Montana. For more than 20 years the FVAS has awarded small (\$100 to \$500) research grants to Montana high school and University of Montana students conducting basic environmental research. Four years ago these grants were designated the "Philip L. Wright Research Awards" to recognize Phil's many contributions to biological research and the Five Valleys Audubon Society. Although small in amount, the awards have been very much appreciated and used effectively by the grantees. At present the funding for these awards is from the Society's operating budget, and the amount available varies from year to year. The establishment of a twenty to twenty-five thousand dollar endowment will ensure a stable income to be used solely for the research grants. If you wish to contribute to this endowment and help ensure that these research grants honoring Phil's memory will be awarded in perpetuity, please make your checks payable to the P.L. Wright Research Award Endowment and send them to Five Valleys Audubon Society, P.O. Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807."

The FVAS newsletter contained an annual appeal for donations. For four years (from December 1998 to November 2001) Rich Fevold sent an annual letter to each FVAS member, and to local businesses, soliciting donations for the endowment. The wording varied from year to year to mention the amount donated the previous year, the status of the endowment, and the number of students receiving grants. Those solicitations brought some \$14,700 into the endowment. The results are shown in a table included as an appendix to this history.

Rich Fevold established two new FVAS accounts—a checking account and an investment account—to handle income and disbursements from the **Philip L. Wright Endowment**. But there was no request made to the IRS for a unique tax ID number or for non-tax status, no formal establishment of a separate foundation, or other organization, to handle the funds.

Rich also wrote to half-a-dozen foundations (in some cases two or three times) seeking donations to the endowment, but without success. That seems to have been due to the Philip L. Wright Endowment not having a unique tax ID number or status separate from FVAS. Therefore, the foundations said they would not contribute to what they considered an operating cost of FVAS.

Funding for **endowment** by public donations and by FVAS budget allocations (see appendix)

Funding for **awards** from endowment and FVAS budget allocation (see appendix)