

NORTH COUNTRY NOTEBOOK

by George Vukelich

A new film, "The Last River," was premiered last month in Oshkosh for Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall, and the screening prompted Senator Gaylord Nelson to remark that "there's a million dollars worth of talent in Wisconsin for this kind of conservation film work." The Senator had specific reference to photographers Professor Walter Meives, Director of the University of Wisconsin Photo Lab, and Martin Hanson of Mellen, and to the narrator, Professor Karl Schmidt of the University of Wisconsin, who also produced the film.

Shot on the Wolf River by the UW Television Center, the film bases its narration upon the works of Sigurd Olson, world-famous ecologist and author of *The Singing Wilderness* and *Listening Point*.

Even to sample the sound track at random is to experience the finest, most poetic mind of conservation philosophy in our time: the words of Sigurd Olson, spoken extemporaneously at his beloved "Listening Point" to producer Schmidt.

"... The rivers have become harnessed, probably more swiftly — more controlled and tamed — probably more than any other feature of our environment. That's why it's important to establish a national Wild Rivers system so that future generations can still see what a wild river is like. If we don't, industry will sooner or later harness every bit of wild river that's left. And with the coming in of atomic power, there seems to be less and less reason for putting up great concrete dams over the rivers. In fact, I think the day is going to come when the concrete dam which we spend billions of dollars upon across America will be looked upon as ancient as the pyramids of Egypt — and future generations may wonder why we built those things..."

"The values that wilderness holds are not measured by ordinary standards, certainly not the monetary. These values are in the realm of the intangible, the imponderable, values that affect the emotions, the contentment, and the happiness of people. These values have always been there in wilderness and they always will be. But to try to put a price tag on them is very difficult. You can't put a price tag on silence — on beauty — on sunrises and moonrises — clean water, the rapids of rivers, bird songs, any more than you can put a price tag on an heirloom. There are certain things that cannot be bought and these values of wilderness are in that category.

"Wilderness experience has a terrific impact on humans. In a sense, it's a sort of coming home. Wilderness experience molded us as a race. All of our past history is tied up with wilderness and I think even today, among those farthest removed from it, wilderness has an impact. We are children of the earth, our roots go way down into the wilderness. Our subconscious is full of wilderness experience and if you're to believe the authorities on the human mind, man lives probably in the upper fifth of his consciousness. The basic four-fifths hold the history of the race and all past experience. A man comes home to this great basic experience of wilderness and if he stays in the wilderness awhile, he feels as though this is the normal sort of thing and the city life that he came from is the abnormal... Probably the greatest impact of wilderness is the seeing terrain, country, mountains, lakes, forests, rivers, whatever they may be — *unchanged* for the first time. There's been so much change, there's been so much *remodelling* of our environment that to actually find country where the old beauty has not been destroyed gives a person a terrific lift of spirit. I think of the old adage they have in the North: 'It's easier to take a man out of the bush, than to take the bush out of the man.' Well, that's true. And the bush is in all of us. And it's pretty hard to eliminate it."



The excerpts above are taken from the sound track of "The Last River." What we quote next was not used in the film, and producer Schmidt sadly remembers the cutting. "We only had a half-hour film. To put it another way, we had a ton of material, and we could only pack out half of it. Something had to be left behind." The Olson excerpt that was jettisoned is probably the best definition of "multiple use" ever framed, and *Wisconsin Tales and Trails* is proud to pack it out now. Said Sig Olson:

"'Multiple use' is a good concept, but there's been a great deal of misunderstanding regarding it. The general concept of multiple use, that land should be used for all purposes, is good. But the difficulty has been that people feel that all uses should be on every acre. When you look at a national forest or a national park, the entire area — all the different uses — compose a 'multiple use' program. It does not mean, necessarily, that everything should apply to every single part of this area. Perhaps the easy way to explain it would be to look at a house. A house is a structure with many uses. All of the uses of the house, together, make up what is called 'multiple use.'

You have a kitchen where the food is prepared.

You have a dining room where the food is eaten.

You have a living room where you listen to music and where you have your books.

You may have an office, a study where your papers are kept and where you write your letters.

You have bedrooms where you sleep.

And you have a bathroom for certain purposes.

"If the concept of 'multiple use' is that *all* uses should be in *every* room, then you would cook in the bathroom, you would have your record player in there, you would eat in your bedroom, you would perform *all* of your activities in every room (that together comprise multiple use). All of the uses together make a harmonious, well-balanced, adjusted complex. But the fallacy of 'multiple use' — that all uses must be in every single place — is epitomized by what would happen in your house if you tried to develop all uses in every particular room."

A 16 mm. print of "The Last River" film is available for showing from Karl Schmidt, UW Television Center, Madison, Wisconsin.

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Merry Christmas. To your canoe from ours.