Karl Wickstrom, 82, of Stuart, founder of Florida Sportsman magazine, devoted his life to marine conservation efforts and advocating for recreational anglers' rights. He passed away Monday, June 25, 2018. ED KILLER/TCPALM

Karl Wickstrom, 82, founder of Florida Sportsman magazine, tireless champion of clean water, marine conservation and recreational angler access, passed away Monday night in Stuart. The cause of death has not been determined, but Wickstrom had been diagnosed with congestive heart failure.

He is survived by his wife, Sheila, four children and three grandchildren.

There will be a public memorial service from 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. July 9 at Indian Riverside Park, 1707 N.E. Indian River Drive in Jensen Beach, on the second floor of the Frances Langford Dockside Pavilion, the family announced June 28.

Ink in his blood

Wickstrom was born in 1935 in Rock Island, Illinois. Throughout his life, he championed anglers' rights and marine conservation causes in Florida.

Wickstrom graduated from the University of Florida with a journalism degree and soon began his career as a sports reporter. In 1960, he moved to Miami to work for the Miami Herald as an investigative journalist, winning state and national awards for reporting on corruption in public affairs.

In 1969, he founded Florida Sportsman (first titled Florida and Tropic Sportsman), engaging Vic Dunaway, at the time a well-known outdoors writer at the Miami Herald, to lead editorial efforts at the new magazine.
Florida Sportsman quickly grew to become the leading source for information on Florida's developing boating and fishing interests and the voice of the state's recreational anglers and hunters on issues of access, management and environmental causes. Florida Sportsman will celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2019.

Through the decades as publisher of Florida Sportsman, Wickstrom fought and won a number of legal changes to benefit Florida marine resources and recreational angling, garnering numerous awards along the way.

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Angler advocate

Wickstrom was co-founder of the Florida Conservation Association in 1984, now Coastal Conservation Association. He was a benefactor of many other marine resource organizations, including the Florida Oceanographic Society in Stuart, the Rivers Coalition and the Martin County Anglers Club. The latter named Wickstrom Reef after him.

His magazine voiced the concerns of recreational interests in countless disputes with fishery managers over allocations and access to waters, often winning decisions in the court of public opinion with his editorials in the magazine.

Wickstrom also worked to achieve gamefish status for redfish, ending commercial sale of the species in the state, and fought for the rights of recreational anglers subject to management policies that often favored commercial fishing interests.

"Karl was a great man and an equally great friend," said Ted Forsgren, special adviser to the Coastal Conservation Association.

"He gave an incredible amount of energy to Coastal Conservation Association Florida," Forsgren said. "We went through so many battles over the past 35 years that I can hardly list them."

More: Eve Samples: Karl Wickstrom fought for your water

1994 net ban

The "mother of all fishing wars," as one commercial fishing lobbyist called it, was the 1994 constitutional amendment prohibiting the use of gill and entanglement nets.

Wickstrom launched the Save Our Sealife Initiative and used Florida Sportsman as a platform to end that destructive practice in Florida waters, whose fisheries rebounded dramatically after voters passed the net ban.

"People might be reminded that the chief examples of Wickstrom's legacy are actually written into Florida law," Florida Sportsman Editor Jeff Weakley said, citing the net ban.

"Karl's work has entertained and inspired generations of readers," Weakley said. "His legacy continues to shape the very philosophies and systems that govern the conservation and public use of natural resources."

Clean water

After the net ban victory, Wickstrom turned much of his attention, and his writing in Florida Sportsman, to the fight against the environmental disaster of chronic Lake Okeechobee discharges to the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee rivers.

For decades, he supported the Rivers Coalition and other organizations in the statewide battle for cleaner waters for Florida estuaries and the Everglades.

"In his long history as a writer, editor and conservationist, Karl Wickstrom was a champion for Florida’s waters through several campaigns," said Mark Perry, executive director at the Florida Oceanographic Society in Stuart.

"Karl fought for our northern estuaries to stop the destructive discharges from Lake Okeechobee and send that water south to the Everglades and Florida Bay," Perry said. "He was a tenacious and effective advocate for our waters and I was honored to fight alongside this incredible champion."

**Accomplishments**

Wickstrom's efforts were recognized with myriad publishing and conservation awards:

- **1995:** The American Sportfishing Association named him "1995 Man of the Year" for his work on the net ban.
- **1999:** The Billfish Foundation gave him the John Rybovich Lifetime Achievement Award.
- **2008:** The International Game Fish Association inducted him in its Fishing Hall of Fame.
- **2015:** CCA Florida gave him the Ted Forsgren Conservation Award, with then-chair and presenter Bill Camp saying of Wickstrom, "The net ban. Water quality. Recreational angler access. Sound resource management. Common sense. Karl Wickstrom has been your voice on these concerns and issues. Our voice. It's the voice you want on your side. Unyielding. Passionate. Witty. Smart. Totally awesome."

Wickstrom fiercely took on "everyone from governors to bureaucrats to captains of industry anytime he saw a threat to the future of the resources," said Frank Sargeant, editor of the Fishing Wire and a regular contributor to Florida Sportsman since 1970.
Charlie Crist, Florida's governor from 2006-10 and a current Pinellas County congressman, said no one has done more for the health of Florida fisheries in the past 50 years than Wickstrom, according to an email the magazine sent TCPalm.

"He's a legend and a visionary," Crist wrote, "someone whose journalism informed and created a vibrant community that will continue to defend and expand sustainable fishing practices and the protection of our environment for decades to come."