

View from

Listening Point

Newsletter of the **Listening Point Foundation, Inc.**

Volume XXII, No. 2 | Fall/Winter 2019 | www.listeningpointfoundation.org

Dedicated to preserving Listening Point and advancing Sigurd Olson's wilderness philosophy.

The End of an Era

David Backes

I have only a handful of photos of Robert K. Olson. Neither he nor Vonnie really liked having their picture taken. But on July 26, 1997, about three weeks before my biography of his dad came out, I brought my family to meet them on our way up to Ely. And they loved Judi and the kids as they did me, and we posed for pics before saying goodbye until next time.

And now it is another goodbye. Bob died this past June in Hayward, Wis. at the age of 93. It is the end of an era, as he was the last of Sigurd Olson's immediate family. My wife and I were visiting family in western Wisconsin when I got the call. It wasn't a shock, as he was 93 and in poor health. It still came as a surprise, though, and it took a couple of days before I felt I could write about it and post the news on my Singing Wilderness Blog Facebook page. I just read it again, and the tears still come. Maybe they will for a long time. But here's the key part:

Bob lived a remarkable life, with a long career as a diplomat for the U.S. Foreign Service during the Cold War, with posts in Benghazi, Beirut, Vietnam, Paris, Ottawa and Rome. Retiring in 1976, he and Vonnie settled in at his mother's childhood home, the Uhrenholdt Farm. Not that Bob was fully retired, not by any means. He spent a couple of years at Oxford University and then a couple of more decades involved with international education.

I met them in the middle of that. In the summer of 1992, as I was partway through my research for the biography, Bob and Vonnie invited me to come visit them at the Farm. I had exchanged letters with them a number of times, and had met Vonnie once up at Ely, but this was my first time meeting Bob.

I was nervous! To this day I still remember the first letter he sent to me in the fall of 1990, after I wrote to him that I would be writing his father's biography. It was a warm letter, but one part made me wonder what I was getting into: "Concerns and reservations? None about the author. None about the subject. Possibly some about various unhappy episodes of family life and for SFO himself. Tell all? Paper them over? Here be dragons and I would advise you to gang warily."

When I pulled into their gravel driveway in the summer of 1992, I wondered if I was walking into the dragon's lair. You must realize that Bob could be quite prickly and stubborn. But that first visit was a smashing success, and over the years I stayed there many times.



Celebrating the life of Robert K. Olson
December 23, 1925 - June 22, 2019
Founder of Listening Point Foundation

And I honestly believe those visits did more than just bring us close. (Close enough that when my mother died, they were the first people I called.) I think they were healing for Bob. He had lived this amazing life, but always felt second fiddle to his dad, and didn't think his father understood or showed much interest in his work.

After Vonnie went upstairs to bed--usually around 9 p.m.--Bob and I would have a little whiskey and talk. The first several years, it was about his dad and family life, and there were moments of resentment. But with every visit those moments lessened, until by the time the biography was published in 1997 he seemed to fully embrace his dad's legacy without any sense of personal diminishment. I think this healing made it possible for him and Vonnie to launch the Listening Point Foundation in 1998.

I still kept visiting once or twice a year. Bob and I still talked about Sig a bit, and more about the Foundation, but after 9 p.m. when we poured our nightcaps, we usually focused on solving the world's problems. And I think Bob would agree that the world has done a lousy job of listening!

continued on page 4

Endings and Beginnings

By Douglas Wood, President

In the world of nature, beginnings and endings are not quite as formal—not as definitive—as they seem to be in our human world. They happen, to be sure. All the time.

In my two woods—one by the Mississippi and one on an island in Rainy Lake—we have had several major windstorms and blow-downs in the last few years. I am still cleaning up. I know many folks in the Ely area have experienced the same trauma. In our family, there were tears for many tall old friends lost. We know that the woods we knew will never be the same in our lifetimes.

And yet, the forest goes on. Full of beginnings and endings, growth and rebirth, in every season, every day. Broken trees make home for woodpeckers and chickadees. Hollow logs shelter raccoons and other creatures. New spaces in the canopy mean new light for young seedlings. Something is always ending. Something is always being born.

In our family, we lost both sets of parents in the last few years. This past spring we lost a beloved, favorite pet, our buddy, Scooter. In each case, the loss felt terribly final, accompanied by much grief. The loss of friends that are valued and loved always feels that way. And undoubtedly should. We care, we love, and therefore we grieve.

But our family goes on, with new births and arrivals—newest granddaughter Sofie was born in January, bringing new joy and light and life, with promises and hopes for the future, new meanings and wonders for the present. Beginnings are like that, even as we acknowledge the reality of endings.

In our Listening Point family we have recently experienced endings as well. Our great friend and founder, Bob Olson, who hatched and launched the whole idea of a Listening Point Foundation dedicated to his father's legacy, passed away this summer. Bob was a force of nature, and in many ways needed to be to find his way through life as Sig Olson's son. Things were not always easy being Sig's second son, having his own interests and desires that his dad—involved in a life of literary pursuits and sometimes desperate conservation battles—didn't always seem to appreciate or understand. Yet when the time came later in life to establish a lasting legacy, Bob came home to create something wonderful in his dad's name and image. We never know from whence new beginnings will come. David Backes does a marvelous job in this issue of memorializing Bob.

At LPF we also recently said so long to our long-time Executive Director, Alanna Dore. No, she's not gone, of course! In fact Alanna is still working with the Foundation in her especially skilled capacity as an archivist. But it was hard to imagine the transition—the end of Alanna's tenure as the face and in many ways beating heart of the organization. What would come next? Who could possibly step in and do that job? But we found—well, actually Alanna found—Steffi O'Brien. And on we go with Steffi, with new and youthful energy and commitment and shared and evolving visions for the future. Beginnings are like that.

And now we enjoy another new beginning—LPF's new role as caretaker/owner of a beautiful little piece of the Earth's crust known as Gusty Island, as iconic and picturesque an example of a pine-clad piece of the Canadian Shield as one could find anywhere in the North Country. Much discussion and soul-searching went into the decision to accept the property. Could we really manage the extra care, the responsibility? Did it fit our mission and our vision? In the end, the question, "What would Sig do?" if presented such an opportunity to protect and nurture a natural gem nearly in view of his beloved rocky point may have carried the day. Gusty Island is now a natural extension of all we are about at Listening Point, and at the Listening Point Foundation. There will be decisions, announcements, and initiatives to come in the future. For now, we are enjoying the new idea—the responsibility and promise—of having beautiful Gusty Island in our care. Beginnings are like that.

And so we go in life. Continuing on, just like the forest. Storms come. Rains fall and winds blow. Sunsets and sunrises follow one upon the other. Things end and things begin, and we mark their passing and arrival. All the while simply trying to do our best on the journey, enjoying beauty along the way. Thanks for sharing the journey with us.



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"If we can somehow retain places where we can always sense the mystery of the unknown, our lives will be richer."

— Sigurd Olson, *Reflections From the North Country*

Gusty Island

Introducing a special new addition to the Listening Point Foundation.

In partnership with the Trust for Public Land and the Minnesota Land Trust, Listening Point Foundation is excited to announce that we have taken over stewardship of Gusty Island on Burntside Lake.

In 2019, Trust for Public Land donated Gusty Island to Listening Point Foundation, after first placing it under a conservation easement with the Minnesota Land Trust. We have been working closely with both organizations to put measures in place that protect the present ecological systems, allow regulated public access, and give us the flexibility to use the island for programming that helps people foster their connections to wild places.

About Gusty Island

Gusty Island is an undeveloped 4.5 acre property on Burntside Lake, near Ely, Minnesota. Tucked in near a protected cluster of islands, it sits less than a mile from Sigurd Olson's beloved Listening Point.

The island contains rolling, relatively rugged topography, with many rock outcroppings and domed hills that rise as much as 30-40 feet above the shoreline of the lake. Gusty is almost entirely forested, largely with even-aged red pine over 100 years old. White pine and cedar are also present, along with balsam, birch, spruce, and aspen. In the fairly open understory, widespread and undisturbed lichen and moss make up much of the forest floor. It is a classic Canadian Shield, north woods scene.

The future possibilities for Gusty Island are numerous and exciting. The vision is gradually developing, and we are looking forward to sharing our progress with you as we advance into the years ahead. It is certain that this island will allow Listening Point Foundation to further our mission of advancing Sig's wilderness philosophy by being a place that inspires wonder and connection. We invite you to get involved and stay tuned as the story unfolds!

listeningpointfoundation.org/gusty-island/



THIS & THAT

🦋 **Snowshoe Hikes.** All are welcome to join in on our snowshoe hikes out to Listening Point during the 2020 Ely Winter Festival, February 6th - 16th. Enjoy a trek through our winter wonderland and enjoy hot drinks and Elizabeth's cookies by the woodstove in the cabin. Details and registration are on the Events page of the LPF website, listeningpointfoundation.org

🦋 **New Email Updates.** Did you know Listening Point Foundation has a new digital newsletter? Through this platform we will occasionally share stories, announcements, updates, and event details throughout the year. Sign up on the Contact page of our website!

🦋 **Students and youth.** This year brought many new and returning youth groups to Listening Point. We enjoyed sharing Sig's philosophy and story with students and instructors at Northland College, the Coe College Wilderness Field Station, the University of Minnesota Duluth, Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center, and the Audubon Center of the Northwoods, to name a few. We also had new opportunities to connect with YMCA camps around the Ely area, including Widjiwagan, Menogyn, Warren, du Nord, and the new Camp Northern Lights. We are excited to continue developing these relationships and to share Sig's legacy with younger generations.

🦋 **Montessori School Visit.** In September, LPF had an opportunity to welcome our largest group of students to Listening Point yet. Over the course of three days following the Annual Northwoods Dinner, we welcomed 120 Montessori students from the Great River School in grades 7 and 8. The students toured Listening Point in several small groups, and all were respectful of and

engaged with the environment and the peacefulness of that place. It was fantastic to see them sit quietly on the Point and take in their surroundings, and many told us at the end that they did not want to leave! It was a rewarding visit for all involved.

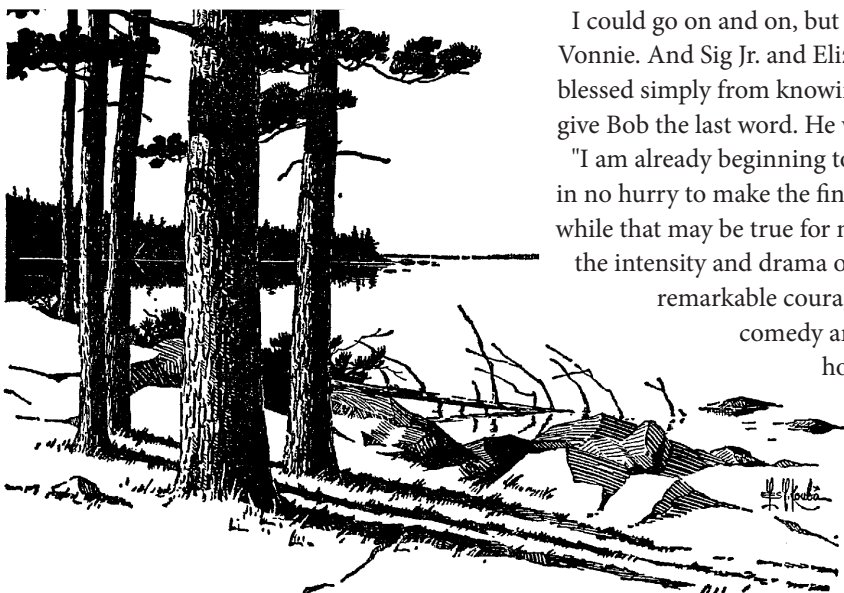
🦋 **A big thank you to all of our volunteers!** Many thanks once again to our fantastic volunteers who give so much time and energy towards our success. Our tour guides put in hundreds of hours this summer, leading groups from all over the United States and abroad. Many also pitched in during our summer booth at the Blueberry Arts Festival, along with all kinds of projects throughout the year; cleaning the Listening Point cabin, maintaining the Olson home and yard, making cookies, and more. We are grateful!

2020 Calendar

- **February 15: LPF Board Meeting, Ely MN**
- **April 4: Annual SFO Luncheon, St. Paul MN**
- **June 6: LPF Board Meeting, Ely MN**
- **September 11: Annual Northwoods Dinner, Ely, MN**
- **October 24: LPF Board Meeting, Ely MN**

Please check our website and Facebook page for additional activities and dates.

The End of an Era *continued from page 1*



I could go on and on, but I write this with tears as I will really miss him. As I do Vonnie. And Sig Jr. and Elizabeth and Sigurd himself. My life has been immensely blessed simply from knowing them. But rather than continue to ramble, let me give Bob the last word. He would appreciate that! From his memoir:

"I am already beginning to feel closer to the dead than to the living although I am in no hurry to make the final rendezvous. Still, I cannot escape the feeling that while that may be true for nature, it is not for man the end of the story. I think of the intensity and drama of a single life, its joys and its heroism and squalor, its remarkable courage, its moments of weakness and moments of grace, its comedy and its tragedy. Lives are written in blood. Every life, however humble, is in its own way, remarkable, not just a tale told by an idiot. Does not each of us sense the cosmic drama of survival, of trying to understand, of feeling the tides of life and change while sensing something of the ineffable? So how can it be erased, and forgotten as if it were nothing?"

Peacefully Relentless

I have been blessed with being able to visit many of America's wilderness areas and natural treasures, but it wasn't until our extended visit to Listening Point during my recent Artist-in-Residence that I realized just how far-reaching Sigurd Olson's influence was. As I spent time at Listening Point, pondering Sig's wilderness philosophy and all it has led to, it occurred to me that many of the big outdoors adventures I have enjoyed would likely not have been possible were it not for the work and dedication and wilderness passion of Sig. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Isle Royal, Denali, Wrangle-St. Elias Preserve, Everglades, Great Smokey Mountains, Yellowstone, the Tetons...the list is long.

When I think about the dizzying pace and lack of direction in our modern lives, I am thankful for the many areas that have been set aside for quiet, low-impact use. Areas large enough to be sheltered from the sounds of civilization. Places with limited access, providing a respite from the crowds. Wild places. Places to listen. These are places where a person can live purposefully, close to the natural environment we were meant to be a part of.

The wilderness philosophy of Sigurd Olson was a key factor in preserving many of these wild places we cherish today. It was, and still is, an inspiration to other conservation visionaries and people who love wild things and wild places. Even those who don't yet realize or acknowledge the need for wild places benefit from the accomplishments of Sig's work and wilderness philosophy.

Helping set aside areas like these and extolling their benefits required Sig to expend a phenomenal amount of energy, effort and passion over long periods of time. Like a river

doing its work, he was peacefully relentless, wearing away obstacles and seeking out new paths along the conservation journey.

Sig may no longer be physically with us, but his wilderness philosophy still serves as a guiding principle and his passion for preserving wild places is still enhancing the lives of people across the country and around the world. That river is still doing its work. Flow is what keeps a river alive. So, it is now up to those of us living in the present to ensure that conservation river keeps flowing and does not dry up or become stagnant.

I am thankful for the foresight of the Listening Point Foundation and the opportuni-

ties they provide. Their dedication to preserving Sig's Listening Point as a place where people, wearied from our man-made world, can come to listen and get back in synch with natural rhythms, along with their passion for enabling others to find their own personal listening points, continue to feed the flow.

My hope is that Sig's vision and wilderness philosophy, flowing through a far-reaching network of wild places and listening points, continue to fuel the dreams and ignite the wilderness passions of generations to come, keeping them in touch and in tune with the songs of the wild.

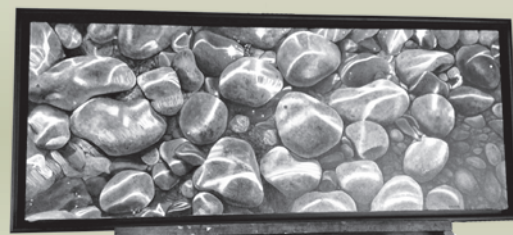
—John Highlen



In October 2019, Listening Point Foundation hosted three Artist-in-Residence participants at the Olson family home in Ely, MN: Kathy Strahota, a visual artist who resides near the Twin Cities in Minnesota, and John & Julie Highlen, a writer/illustrator duo from the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Kathy came to gather inspiration, photographs, and sketches for an upcoming series of oil paintings inspired by Listening Point. A gorgeous print of a prior painting of hers, "Lake Superior Rocks," was featured in our Silent Auction at the annual Northwoods Dinner in September in Ely. Shortly thereafter, John and Julie came to stay after a weeklong canoe trip in the nearby Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). They spent hours out at Listening Point contemplating, sketching, and gathering inspiration for future written and painted pieces.

The above piece was written by John, and we felt that it captured the spirit of Listening Point Foundation. We too are feeling grateful as we near the end of another successful year and get ready to embark on a new decade in 2020.

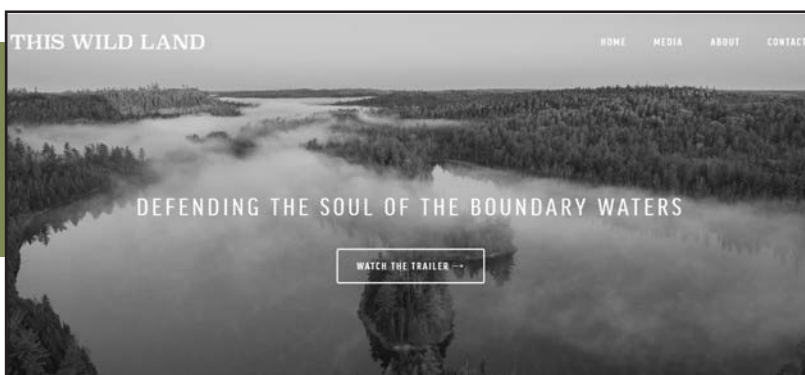


“This Wild Land: Defending the Soul of the Boundary Waters”

At our Annual Northwoods Dinner in September, guests enjoyed the premiere of “This Wild Land,” a short documentary created by a group of local Minnesota filmmakers.

The documentary, inspired by Sig Olson’s philosophy and love of wilderness, showcased the special nature of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and influence it has on the people who live, work, and recreate there. Brendan Harris represented the other filmmakers at the dinner (John Mooty, Will Mooty, Frank Bolton, and Zech Thormodsgaard), presented the film and about the process of its creation.

Watch the website for updates about its wider release! If you missed the Dinner, you can watch the preview and learn more at thiswildlanddoc.com.



Donate a personalized brick for the Listening Point Foundation house patio

Once owned by Sigurd and Elizabeth Olson, the house in Ely, MN has a brick patio where hundreds of visitors gather every year.

With a \$100.00 donation you can have a brick inscribed with a personalized message that will last through the years for generations to come. Bricks ordered throughout the year are inscribed over the winter and placed in the patio every spring. A thank you note and photo of the finished brick will be sent to you when completed. And of course, you are welcome to visit and see your donated brick in person!

Bricks can be engraved with up to three lines with a maximum of 20 characters each (including spaces and punctuation). Send us a note or visit listeningpointfoundation.org to donate a brick this year!



"We cannot all live in the wilderness, or even close to it, but we can, no matter where we spend our lives, remember the background which shaped this sense of the eternal rhythm, remember that days, no matter how frenzied their pace, can be calm and unhurried."

– Sigurd. F. Olson, *Reflections of the North Country*

*Best wishes for a
joyous holiday season
and a Happy New Year*



from the Listening Point Foundation

Listening Point Foundation Contribution Form

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Listening Point Foundation is a 501(c)3 educational organization that welcomes charitable contributions that support its educational mission and preservation efforts. Giving opportunities include annual support, memorials, planned giving and in-kind donations. For more information on giving, please contact us at 218-365-8889.

CONTRIBUTION AMOUNT

- ☐ \$35 ☐ \$250
☐ \$50 ☐ \$500
☐ \$100 ☐ (other) _____

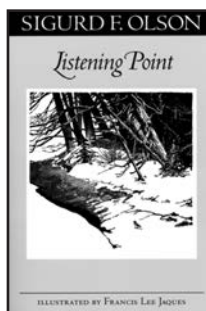
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GIFT SHOP

Share the spirit of Listening Point with friends and family with one of these gift items that celebrate Sigurd Olson, Listening Point, wilderness and more! See next page for order form.



Sigurd Olson Classics
Attractive paperback versions of seven of Sigurd Olson's most loved books.

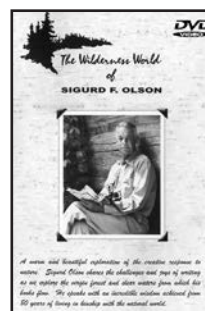
- *The Singing Wilderness*
- *Listening Point*
- *The Lonely Land*
- *Runes of the North*
- *Open Horizons*
- *Reflections from the North Country*
- *Of Time and Place*

..... \$16



Wilderness Days
University of Minnesota Press has published a new paperback edition of *Wilderness Days*—a collection of Sig's writings that depicts the essence of the magnificent woodlands and waters of the legendary Quetico-Superior region that borders Minnesota and Ontario.

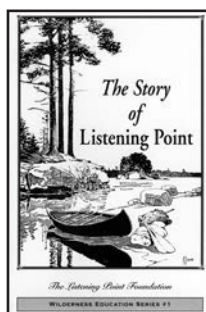
..... \$18



The Wilderness World of Sigurd F. Olson DVD

A digitally remastered version of the classic film "The Wilderness World of Sigurd F. Olson" includes more than two hours of conversations with Sig as he speaks about the craft of writing and life in the wilderness. You'll also hear Sig's wife Elizabeth and their son Sig Jr. speak candidly about Sigurd, his profession, and life in the north woods.

..... \$15



The Story of Listening Point
This 28-page booklet, written by Sig's son Robert K. Olson, tells the inside story of how Listening Point came to be and why, what it meant to Sigurd Olson, and what it continues to mean to wilderness lovers and loyalists. Features dozens of historical photos and images.

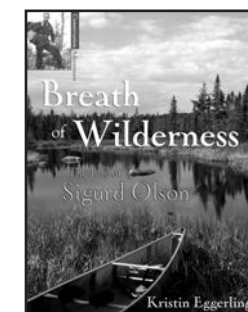
..... \$5



For Kids

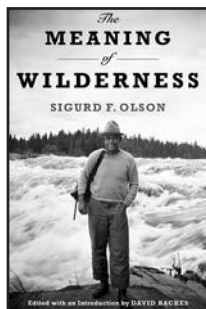
Sig Olson's Wilderness Moments
For Kids! Five selections of Sig Olson's writings, with "Points to Ponder" and "Activities" following each section. Excellent opportunity to introduce Sig to the younger generation. Includes blank pages at the end of the book for several of the activities—journaling, mapping, etc.

..... \$5



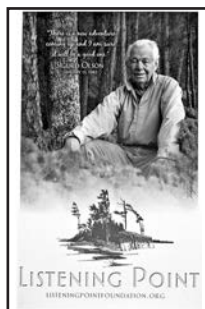
Breath of Wilderness
By Kristin Eggerling. A must-have for your Olson library. The story covers Sigurd Olson's love of wild places and how that love transformed his life. It is a book written for middle school students, but can be enjoyed by all. 92 pages.

..... \$13



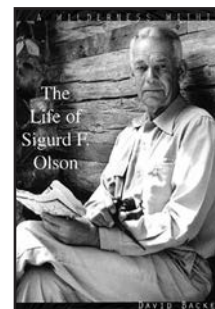
The Meaning of Wilderness
Now available in paperback! First published in 2001, this book features a collection of Sigurd F. Olson's articles and speeches. It offers a lively look at the evolution of one of environmentalism's leading figures and is essential reading for Olson fans, historians, and outdoor enthusiasts around the country.

..... \$18



Sigurd Olson Poster
The image, taken by Bryan Stenlund, may well be one of the last photos of Sig before he died. The 11" by 17" poster includes Sig's last typewritten words: "A new adventure is coming up and I'm sure it will be a good one." A must have for Sig fans.

..... \$16



A Wilderness Within
By David Backes. The authoritative portrait of one of the greatest environmentalists of the twentieth century. The book is a stunning look at a man with a vision for the natural world and for himself. Essential reading for Olson fans.

..... \$23 (paperback)



LPF Mug

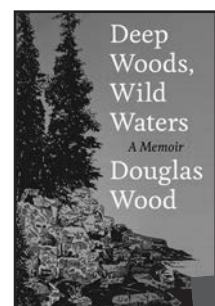
3 finger handle. With logo, website, and "Sig's legacy ... pass it on!" Available in black or white.

..... \$10



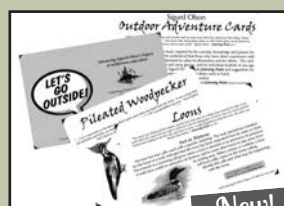
Firewood Happens
by Mike Lein.
A series of short essays, humorous, knowledgeable stories for those who love to hunt, fish, or sit on a lakeshore.

..... \$12



Deep Woods, Wild Waters, A Memoir
by Douglas Wood.
A joy to read - Wood shares bushwhacking skills, hurtling down wild rapids, crossing stormy lakes, or simply navigating treacherous currents and the twisty trails of everyday life.

..... \$23



Sigurd Olson Outdoor Adventure Cards!!!
11 water resistant colorful cards for outdoor activities. Sig Olson quotes, and nature observation ideas.

..... \$15

If you are shopping through Amazon this holiday season, please consider using AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com). The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to the charitable organizations selected by customers. Every little bit helps!



LPF Hats

For your wearing pleasure! 100% cotton, embroidered with the Listening Point logo. Cranberry. Adjustable leather strap. (More colors available in 2020!)

..... \$18



Listening Point Luminaria

Created from the original watercolor batik, Last Light on the Lake, by Listening Point Residency artist Kim Gordon. The four windows of this handmade paper luminaria show a view of Listening Point and the lake in the evening light. Luminaria is 4-sided, measures 5"x5"x9.5". The windows are printed on archival Japanese washi paper and the frame is of a heavyweight, dense black Forest Stewardship Council cover stock. Place luminaria over a flameless candle or tealight - do not use with real flame! Comes completely assembled in a flat plastic sleeve with simple instructions to refold along score lines to its 3-D shape. Can be re-flattened and stored in its sleeve. Protect from wind and water.

..... \$17

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☐ *Wilderness Days (os)* @ \$18.00 = _____

☐ Sigurd Olson classics, paperback @ \$16.00 = _____

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☐ *Story of Listening Point* booklet, by Robert Olson ... @ \$ 5.00 = _____

☐ *Wilderness Moments* booklet @ \$ 5.00 = _____

☐ *Breath of Wilderness* @ \$13.00 = _____

☐ *A Wilderness Within* @ \$23.00 = _____

☐ Sigurd Olson poster @ \$15.00 = _____

☐ *The Meaning of Wilderness* @ \$18.00 = _____

☐ LPF Hat *Cranberry* @ \$18.00 = _____

☐ LPF Mug (*choose black or white*) @ \$10.00 = _____

☐ *Firewood Happens* by Mike Lein @ \$12.00 = _____

☐ *Deep Woods, Wild Waters* by Douglas Wood @ \$23.00 = _____

☐ Outdoor Adventure Cards @ \$15.00 = _____

☐ Listening Point Luminaria @ \$17.00 = _____

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Students from Great River School in St. Paul journal quietly out on Listening Point in September.



Leadership Development Program (LDP) teens from YMCA Camp Northern Lights doing service work. Pictured in front of the brush pile created from our participation in the Firewise program in St. Louis County this summer.



A peaceful photo of Sig's Writing Shack, taken by LPF Artist in Residence Kathy Strahota during her stay in October 2019.



More Leadership Development Program teens from YMCA Camp Northern Lights. Over ten weeks we hosted five different groups for a tour and service learning. Among other helpful tasks, they hauled quite a lot of brush!



LPF Volunteer Peta Barrett cleaning the mantle at Listening Point. It was a chilly day but much was accomplished.



Students from Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center listen to the history of the Sauna at Listening Point.

Thank You!

The Listening Point Foundation would like to thank the following individuals, businesses, foundations and organizations for their generous donations:

Nicholas Adelman	Reverend June Eastvold	Linda and James Law	Sharon and Jeffrey Rome
Mark Allsup	Larry and Nancy Eisinger	Janelle LeBlanc	Stephen P. Sandell
Elizabeth Alward	Natalie Erhart *	Mike Lein	John Saxhaug
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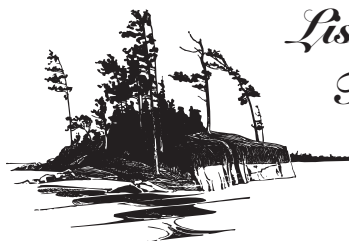
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