

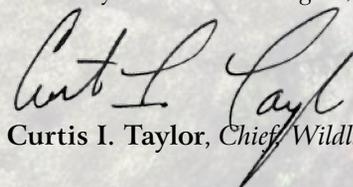
Remembering a Legend

As far back as my high school days in McDowell County, I readily admit to being drawn to anything and everything to do with wild turkeys. During my career as a wildlife biologist starting at West Virginia University, then University of Tennessee, Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and 30 plus years with West Virginia DNR, I have been more than fortunate to spend time with the legends of wild turkey conservation. Glenn “Tink” Smith of Piedmont, West Virginia, was one of those legends. While Tink was best known for his award-winning, breathtaking photos of wild turkeys, perhaps one of his best skills was communicating with people, and his message was always the same: do whatever we can to promote conservation of wild places and wildlife, especially turkeys, and introduce our young folks to the wonders of nature and the joy that comes from hunting and fishing.

For those of you who might not know, Tink’s wild turkey photos were taken from a blind that started out as a hole in the ground. From this angle, Tink produced images of turkeys like no other – from a chipmunk’s eye view; many times so close he could have touched them. He literally took enough pictures of wild turkeys, and other wildlife, to fill a good size room, maybe 100,000. Instead of trying to profit from his unique talent, Tink would give his photos to anyone promising to use them to help wild turkey conservation. Tink quickly became a fixture with the National Wild Turkey Federation and supplied photos for their magazine, which had started out using pictures of tame turkeys because there were very few quality images of wild turkeys available. But he also played a monumental role with the newly formed conservation group. He became a spokesperson for the Federation and the need to raise dollars for scientific management of his precious wild turkey resource, not just in West Virginia, but across the country. In true West Virginia fashion, his message was always to the point and down to earth, nothing fancy, just “let’s get the job done.”

I saw Tink at every National Wild Turkey Convention I attended and was inspired, humbled and filled with Mountaineer pride every time he took the stage to address the multitude of convention goers. It was quickly evident to any in the room that he was a true West Virginian, proud of his state, his heritage, and what had been done to increase turkey numbers. I always looked forward to my conversations with Tink, no matter what the venue, and I always knew I would come away with some of his knowledge and skills, whether it was dealing with turkeys or people. I was overwhelmed when he took the time to send me a congratulatory card and personal note when I became Chief with instructions to go out and buy myself a steak dinner!

Tink turned 101 years old April 5, 2012. Sadly, he passed away just 10 days later. He will be remembered and missed by all who were fortunate to hear him speak or be able to spend time with him. His words of encouragement, wisdom and plain old common sense will be forever etched in my memory. I think about him a lot and carry in my wallet a business-card-sized turkey photo he gave me 20 years ago as a reminder of my obligation as a hunter, biologist and West Virginian to keep the welfare of the wild turkey foremost in my thoughts and deeds. Tink wouldn’t have it any other way. Until we meet again, farewell my friend.



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