



## Obituary

**Died:** Thursday, May 26, 2016

Florence, MT - Dr. Jack Ward Thomas passed away in his home on May 26, 2016 after a long battle with cancer. Kathy, his devoted wife of twenty years, was at his side. Jack was a loving and proud husband, father, and grandfather; a veteran; loyal friend; an accomplished and genuine outdoorsman; a professor; and a giant in the fields of wildlife biology, ecosystem management, and public lands management and policy. Born in Handley, Texas on September 7, 1934, Jack was a young child during the Dust Bowl and had lifelong memories of spending time under a table draped with a damp tablecloth to keep the dust at bay. He earned his undergraduate degree in wildlife management from Texas A&M in 1957, and then worked for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for 10 years before taking his first U.S. Forest Service position – as a research biologist – in Morgantown, West Virginia in 1966. While working there, he earned his Master's degree in wildlife ecology from West Virginia University. In 1969, he moved to Massachusetts where he headed a Forest Service research unit at The University of Massachusetts at Amherst. Jack earned his Ph.D. in Forestry there in 1972, and wrote one of his most successful contributions to the field of wildlife biology – an article for the general public entitled “Invite Wildlife to Your Backyard.” In 1974 he moved to La Grande, Oregon to work as the chief research wildlife biologist and program leader at the USFS Forestry and Range Sciences Laboratory. In that post, Jack was instrumental in establishing the Starkey Experimental Forest Elk Project – an incredibly ambitious and unprecedented long-term study on elk ecology and interactions with their habitat and with humans. He also led a major science assessment and planning effort for wildlife conservation that was the first practical instance of what became known and adopted across the nation as ecosystem management. That effort was published as *Wildlife Habitats in Managed Forests*. In 1982 he co-authored (with fellow preeminent elk ecologist and dear friend Dale Toweill) the tome *Elk of North America* – popularly referred to as “the Elk Bible.” In 1991, Jack became embroiled in controversial political issues in the Pacific Northwest -- in conserving old growth ecosystems and spotted owl habitat -- which led to the "spotted owl wars" and related controversies. President Bill Clinton selected him to lead the development of what became known as the Northwest Forest Plan -- which focused on old-growth ecosystems with emphasis on conservation of northern spotted owls and other old-growth forest species. Two years later, President Clinton appointed him the thirteenth Chief of the U.S. Forest Service in December of 1993. During his time as head of the USFS, the Northwest Forest Plan was adopted. Upon retirement from the Forest Service in 1996, he accepted a position as the Boone and Crockett Professor of Wildlife Conservation at the College of

## Service Summary

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### Celebration of Life

2:00 PM Sat Aug 27, 2016

### Boone and Crockett Club

250 Station Drive  
Missoula , MT 59801

Forestry and Conservation at the University of Montana in Missoula, Montana. He again poured himself into his work, mentoring students and keeping actively engaged in conservation planning and policy at local, regional, national, and international scales. Jack retired from the University of Montana in 2006. This spring, the University of Montana awarded him an honorary Doctorate for his professional accomplishments, lasting contributions to the University, and his role in mentoring, shepherding, and inspiring scores of students. As a preeminent biologist, public land manager, orator and a leader of his profession, Jack had many honors, awards, and accolades bestowed upon him over his 60 year career. But more than that, he was a truly exceptional man. He believed as Maya Angelou does that "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." He was kind, generous with his time with students, employees, friends, and colleagues. Jack contributed immeasurably (and more than he knew) to students and professionals across the country. More often than not, they were individuals who needed a hand, a gentle course-correction, or a bit of perspective as they face their own challenges. For as strong and imposing character as he was capable of being, he could just as easily be brought to tears in the middle of a speech or lecture as he recalled a moment of tenderness, tragedy, or simple, true beauty. Just as he moved others, he was constantly moved by the human and natural world around him. Jack is survived by his wife Kathy, his sons Greg and Britt, step son and daughter Paul and Erin Connelly and their families, including six grandchildren, Devin, Nolan, Lexi, and Claire Thomas and Tipton and Mary Kate Connelly. He was preceded in death by his first wife, Margaret. The scores of students and professionals he has taught and mentored over his 60-year career pledge to do their part to emulate his work ethic, his sense of honor, and his humanity. He will be deeply missed by many. Jack's family is grateful to all the staff at the Community Cancer Center, The Hospice of Missoula, their special friends Robin and Nick Nichols and the many friends and neighbors who have helped during his long battle. A scholarship fund will be set up in Jack's memory in the College of Forestry and Conservation at the University of Montana. Gifts can be made payable to the University of Montana Foundation and noted as a gift in the memory of Jack. Checks should be mailed to the UM Foundation, Post Office Box 7159, Missoula, MT 59807-7159 or friends may give on line <http://www.SupportUM.org> and designate that the gift is in memory of Jack Ward Thomas. There will be a small family and friends service June 25th in La Grande Oregon. Also there will be a Celebration of Life at the headquarters of the Boone and Crockett Club in Missoula on August 27th from 2:00 P.M. until 4:00 P.M.