

He was a giant of conservation. His deep voice and the twinkle in his eye conveyed his intellect and his passion for conservation whenever he spoke.

SUZAN EREM

Executive Director
Sustainable Iowa Land trust

During his time in government service, Paul worked with integrity and passion to improve the health of the land that we all depend on. Because of his innumerable contributions and his dedication to this work, the world is a much better place.

MIKE DOMBECK

Former chief, U.S. Forest Service

How could one man be so generous, kind, bright, visionary and collaborative and make it all look like fun? Would that each of us could gain the gift and grace to be more like Paul, a sturdy log cabin compared to us wind-blown pup tents!

GARY PAUL NABHAN

Writer and Conservationist



How I wish I could have 30 more years to see what our next “greatest generation” will do. Let’s give them a chance. Because of them I remain hopeful. I often close my essays with reference to a 1968 song by Louis Armstrong: “I say to myself, what a wonderful world.” I still believe it, along with that other 1960s song: “Deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome some day.”

PAUL JOHNSON was born in Oakland, California in 1941 and grew up in Beresford, South Dakota.

He earned a bachelor’s degree in forestry at the University of Michigan, where he met his future wife Pat. Paul was an early member of the U.S. Peace Corps, serving in Ghana from 1962 to 1964. Paul returned to the UM to earn a master’s degree, teach, and conduct field research in tropical forest ecology in Costa Rica.

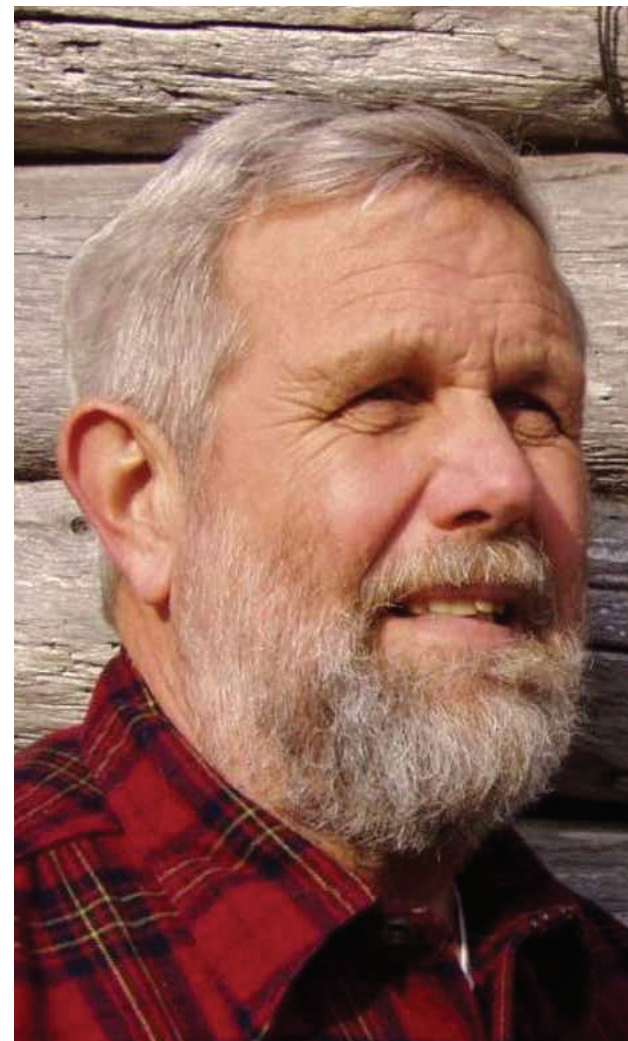
Paul and Pat married in 1965. In 1974 they moved to Decorah, Iowa, where they and their three children—Eric, Andrew, and Annika—established Oneota Slopes Farm. Paul was elected to the Iowa House of Representatives, serving from 1985 to 1990, providing leadership in enacting (among other measures) the Groundwater Protection Act (1987), the Resource Enhancement and Protection Act (1989), and the Iowa Energy Act (1990).

Through his work in Iowa, Paul became a national leader in the sustainable agriculture movement. He served on the Board on Agriculture of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (1988–1993) and in 1993 was named chief of the USDA Soil Conservation Service. In four years as chief, Paul oversaw the agency’s transition into the Natural Resources Conservation Service, championed the conservation programs of the Farm Bill, and published the landmark report *America’s Private Land: A Geography of Hope*.

Returning to Iowa and Oneota Slopes Farm, Paul continued to serve conservation as director of Iowa’s Department of Natural Resources (1999–2000); as a leader and counselor with many non-profit environmental and community organizations; as a co-founder of the Winneshiek Energy District; as a prolific writer and speaker; and as a passionate advocate and mentor to so many others. Paul died on February 15, 2021, surrounded by his family, at home on the land that he cared for so deeply for so long.

Honoring Paul Johnson

A Legacy of Public Service,
Leadership, and Conservation



“It is now your turn to help
paint our portrait on the land.”

Paul Johnson, Foreword to
Iowa: Portrait of the Land (2000)

THE PAUL W. JOHNSON LEGACY FUND

PAUL JOHNSON (1941–2021) was one of Iowa’s—and the nation’s—great conservationists. An ad hoc group of his family, friends, and colleagues has embarked on a project to remember and honor Paul and his legacy of public service, leadership, and conservation. Those of us who knew and worked with Paul appreciate his profound contributions to the stewardship of our lands and waters. Paul cared about it all: the health of our soils, the quality of our waters, the diversity of our wildlife, the beauty of our landscapes, the fate of our climate, the well-being of our communities and our democracy. Paul’s lifelong commitment to these values inspire those who carry on his work—and will serve the cause of conservation and public service for generations yet to come.

Paul was a pragmatic visionary who practiced what he preached and always exhorted others to become engaged citizens and active caretakers of the land. There is no better way to celebrate Paul’s legacy than to share his love of land and to encourage others to take action in their own communities and landscapes. We are raising funds for a **Paul W. Johnson Legacy Fund** that will carry forward his commitment.

Program goals of the PWJ Legacy Fund are under development. Initial priorities include:

- A **PUBLISHED COLLECTION** of Paul’s writings, featuring a brief biography and a discussion of Paul’s ideas within the historical and future contexts of private lands conservation.
- A **SMALL GRANT / FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM** to encourage writing and other forms of communication advancing a land ethic in public policy and across America’s working landscapes.
- An **ANNUAL OR BIENNIAL FORUM** for sharing ideas, energy, inspiration, and fellowship around themes of working lands conservation and public policy.
- A **PUBLIC POLICY INITIATIVE** dedicated to the idea that private landowners hold responsibilities towards society and society holds responsibilities towards landowners, and that a Private Lands Conservation Act is needed to define those mutual responsibilities and to guide federal policy.

Paul, through his actions and writing, carried forward the land ethic proposed by another influential Iowa conservationist, Aldo Leopold. We know that Paul would want all of us to carry it even further, and to create our own legacies of commitment to the land, to one another, to future generations, and to the full community of life. The **Paul W. Johnson Legacy Fund** will serve that goal.

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

For information on the legacy fund, and for online giving options, please visit dbqfoundation.org/paulwjohanson. To contribute by check, please make your check payable to the Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque. Indicate “Paul W. Johnson Legacy Fund” in the check’s memo line and mail your check to:

Community Foundation of Greater Dubuque
700 Locust Street, Suite 195
Dubuque, Iowa 52001

STAY IN TOUCH

We welcome your thoughts. To share your own ideas about extending Paul’s legacy, please contact any of us on the list below. If you have further questions about the legacy fund, please contact Andy Johnson at andy@oneotaslopes.org.

Thank you.

FROM THE JOHNSON FAMILY & FRIENDS OF PAUL:

Ralph Rosenberg	Dennis Keeney
Charlie Bruner	Pat Leavenworth
David Osterberg	Steve Hopkins
Curt Meine	Pat Johnson
Craig Cox	Eric Johnson
Mark Rasmussen	Andy Johnson
Max Schnepf	Annika Johnson