

# ‘Part of My Life... Part of My Identity’: Hunting, Fishing, and the Development of Jimmy Carter's Conservation Ethic

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President Jimmy Carter's failures in domestic and foreign policy overshadowed his accomplishments. But among his successes was the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. Signed into law on December 2, 1980, just before he left office, it was the culmination of four years of effort by his administration and Congressional allies. Even though it had been supported by powerful environmental groups, this controversial legislation required the firm backing of the executive branch, without which it may never have passed.

At the signing ceremony, Carter proudly proclaimed, ‘We are setting aside for conservation an area of land larger than the State of California.’ For him, the signing of the bill was one of the most ‘pleasant occasions in my life,’ and future historians will probably agree that the Alaskan legislation was among the more important environmental achievements in American political history.

Why did Jimmy Carter feel so deeply about the need to protect the natural world? What factors, if any, in his childhood and early adult life encouraged the development of a conservation ethic?

This paper endeavors to answer these questions by examining Carter's own statements, particularly as found in his book, *An Outdoor Journal: Adventures and Reflections*, published in 1988. In many cases the former president will be allowed to speak for himself, rather than using my words to rephrase his observations.

An analysis of Carter's early life reveals the central role played by ‘blood sports’ in his socialization as a confirmed sportsman and conservationist, one who pursues game fishes, birds, or mammals according to a prescribed code. One important rule of the code states that the hunter or angler must demonstrate a genuine commitment to the perpetuation of both game and habitat. By examining Carter's experiences in hunting and fishing, especially with his father, we can trace the evolution of a conservation ethic that would have a major impact on the preservation of North American wilderness.