Richard McNeil, professor emeritus in the Department of Natural Resources, died September 25, 2018 in Ithaca, at age 85.

McNeil was known for international conservation, bringing perspectives from the social sciences into the study and management of wildlife, and broadening the Department of Natural Resources curriculum by advocating for environmental sciences and ethics courses.

“Dick had a significant impact on thousands of students and helped set the trajectory of the Department of Natural Resources,” said Jim Lassoie, professor of natural resources.

McNeil received his bachelor’s (1954) and master’s degrees (1957) from Michigan State University, and his doctorate (1963) from the University of Michigan in fish, game and wildlife management, with a dissertation on farmer perceptions of deer damage in Michigan. He joined Cornell’s faculty in 1964 and became emeritus in 1999.

As a faculty member, he made a mark on his field by arguing for the
importance of ethics in wildlife management. In 1998, he published an important paper, “Ethics Primer for University Students Intending to Become Natural Resources Managers and Administrators.”

“Dick was a wildlife biologist who realized that policy makers and the public were central to the successful management of wildlife in specific and natural resources in general,” Lassoie said. He added that McNeil was the department’s first totally environmentally-focused faculty member, and helped move the department beyond its historical focus on the management of forests, fish, and wildlife.

Thanks to McNeil and others, “today we are truly an interdisciplinary unit of social as well as biological applied scientists,” Lassoie said.

McNeil also worked to broaden the Department of Natural Resources teaching mission to embrace the interdisciplinary environmental sciences.

Daniel Decker, professor emeritus in the Department of Natural Resources, was a teaching assistant under McNeil in the mid-1970s. Decker noted that McNeil took a keen interest in helping graduate students learn about teaching methods and make them better instructors.

McNeil received the SUNY Chancellor’s Award of Excellence in Teaching in 1994 and the CALS Edgerton Career Teaching Award in 1996.

He was predeceased by his wife, Mary Ann, and is survived by a daughter and son.

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