

2015 Norman A. Berg Conservation Legacy Award
Roberta Parry

Roberta Parry's almost twenty-five years in the public sector with US Environmental Protection Agency and, on detail, at the Natural Resources Conservation Service of the US Department of Agriculture, showed her devotion to soil and water protection and conservation. She demonstrated that, with skill and patience, seemingly intractable issues can be resolved. By bringing together diverse scientists and policy makers, she successfully bridged cultural, disciplinary, bureaucratic divides to produce public policies that could be and were successfully implemented to benefit conservation and the environment.

As Senior Agriculture Advisor at EPA and as project leader for Conservation Evaluation and Assessment Program (CEAP) while on detail to NRCS, she earned universal respect for her work on legislative, regulatory, voluntary policies and scientific issues that improved awareness and protection of water quality. Roberta provided vision for fixing the national problem of nutrient pollution from agricultural production. Working with a team of innovators from within and outside EPA, she designed an incentive challenge to the private sector, securing financial commitments from various agencies and companies. Her grace and determined leadership led to successful partnering across federal agencies and the private sector. She set a standard for excellence for working with diverse groups to achieve public policy goals.

Roberta displayed extensive understanding of agricultural systems, watershed management and complex ecosystems and focused this knowledge to overcome the technical challenges to quantifying the environmental effects of conservation and developing measurement tools. She succeeded in bridging bureaucratic boundaries, working extensively with multiple federal and state agencies. Even outside of government, she gained farmers', advocates, and scientists' respect having worked with such organizations as the Soil and Water Conservation Society, the Agronomy and Soils Science Societies, SERA17 (a research and extension initiative focused on phosphorus losses especially from animal agricultural systems) and the International Certified Crop Advisor Program of the American Society of Agronomy. Generally chosen as the leader of workgroups and committees from a wide variety of national organizations and scientific disciplines, she succeeded in keeping workgroup members on track and directed onto the goal.

In the words of Dr. Peter Kleinman of USDA's Agricultural Research Service, "[p]erhaps most remarkable about Roberta's success is the modesty that she retained, even as major national and regional partnerships and policies emerged. Never one to seek the lime light, she was also never shy about pushing for outcomes that she felt were necessary, no matter how unpopular. As a result, she garnered respect from esteemed scientists, administrators and activists. All in the



conservation community owe her a depth of gratitude as one of the most effective voices, and forces, bridging agriculture and the environment.”

Roberta is a native of Glens Falls, New York. After graduating from Harvard University’s Graduate School of Public Policy after a stint as a teacher in Vermont, she worked for the US Environmental Protection Agency, retiring in January 2015. A committed bird-watcher, she was a resident of Silver Spring, Maryland where she was often seen in early mornings pursuing her love and passion. She received the Norm Berg Legacy Award in June 2015 at a widely attended ceremony in Washington, DC. The members of the National Capital Chapter and the larger agricultural conservation community are saddened by her untimely death from cancer in December 2015.