Karl was a great man and an equally great friend. He gave an incredible amount of energy to Coastal Conservation Association Florida. We went through so many battles over the past 35 years that I can hardly list them.”

-Ted Forsgren, Special Advisor to CCA Florida

The angling community lost one of its true champions this summer with the passing of legendary angler, journalist and conservationist Karl Wickstrom.

Wickstrom began his career as a sports reporter and in 1969, he founded Florida Sportsman, which quickly grew to become the voice of the state’s recreational anglers and hunters on issues of access, management and environmental causes.

Through the decades as publisher of Florida Sportsman, Wickstrom helped fight and win a number of legal changes to benefit Florida marine resources and recreational angling. He was one of the early founders of the Florida Conservation Association in 1984 (now CCA Florida) and worked to achieve gamefish status for redfish, ending commercial sale of the species in the state, and fought ceaselessly for the rights of recreational anglers subject to management policies that often favored commercial fishing interests.

“Karl was a great man and an equally great friend. He gave an incredible amount of energy to Coastal Conservation Association Florida,” said Ted Forsgren, Special Advisor to CCA Florida. “We went through so many battles over the past 35 years that I can hardly list them. Some of the big issues included gamefish status for redfish, blending two agencies into one constitutional fish and wildlife commission and banning fish traps in federal waters. And of course, the constitutional amendment prohibiting the use of gill and entanglement nets, the ‘mother of all fishing wars,’ as one of the commercial fishing lobbyists called it.”

That battle was one of conservation’s biggest victories in the name of marine resources and recreational angling. The movement came to be known as the net ban, and Wickstrom, Florida Sportsman and CCA were key leaders in the campaign to amend Florida’s constitution to ban the nets. In 1994, the constitutional amendment that the campaign put to ballot passed with 72 percent of the vote. In the years following Florida’s fisheries rebounded dramatically.

Wickstrom earned a long list of publishing and conservation awards. In 1995 the American Sportfishing Association named him “Man of the Year” for his work on the gillnet ban. In 1999, he won The Billfish Foundation’s John Rybovich Lifetime Achievement Award and he was inducted into the International Game Fish Association’s Fishing Hall of Fame in 2008.

As lauded as he was publicly for his accomplishments in conservation of wildlife resources, Wickstrom was also well loved by his readers for his emphasis on the value of fishing and hunting in their lives. For nearly 50 years now, the magazine he started has spread both of those messages throughout Florida and across the U.S, and the interests of outdoor enthusiasts have been much stronger for his achievements.