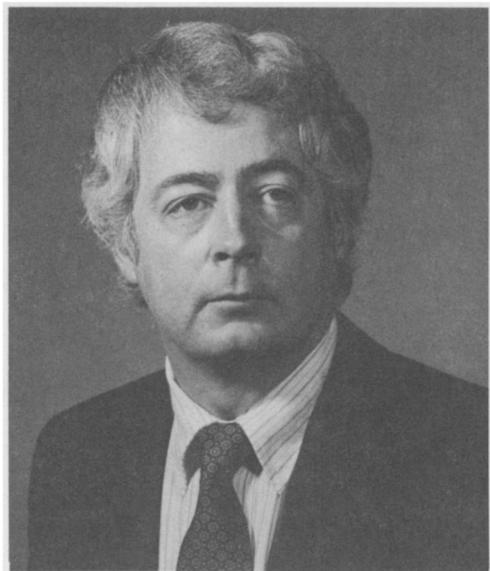


## paul g. risser, president

1984–1985



In this the 69th year since the founding of the Ecological Society of America, our new President, Paul G. Risser, assumes the leadership during one of its most challenging periods. The development of ecology as both an empirical and theoretical science has converged with a broad popular support for environmental protection and conservation. Ecology has become an important, if not the central, issue in the major national environmental concerns of today—disposal of hazardous wastes, exploitation of renewable resources, acid deposition, global climate modification, and preservation of genetic diversity, to name a few. In this challenging period of the Society's history, Paul Risser brings to the presidency a wealth of experience in both the basic and applied aspects of ecology in academia as well as in state and federal government.

Paul Risser was born on 14 September 1939, in Blackwell, Oklahoma, a rural agricultural community of some 9000 residents in the north-central region of the state. He grew up on a wheat and cattle farm where he worked until he entered college. This

background, together with his father's interest in bryology, influenced his early interest in ecology. After graduating from Grinnell College with a B.A. degree in biology in 1961, Paul spent two years at Jackson Memorial Laboratory in Bar Harbor, Maine, where he conducted studies on tissue culture of spruce tumors under the direction of Philip White. This work reaffirmed his interest in the field aspects of ecology, and the imprint of physiological research influenced his later curiosity about the functioning of ecological systems. He continued his education at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, originally attracted by interests in physiology and ecology. After obtaining the M.S. degree in botany in 1965, Paul received grants from the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation and the National Science Foundation while studying the physiological ecology of spring ephemerals in Wisconsin forests under the direction of Grant Cottam. He received the Ph.D. degree in botany and soils from the University of Wisconsin in 1967.

In 1967, Paul joined the faculty of the University of Oklahoma as Assistant Professor of Botany. During the next 10 years, he progressively assumed more responsible academic positions, serving as Assistant Director of the Biological Station at Lake Texoma from 1970 to 1974, being promoted to Associate Professor and serving concurrently as Director of the Oklahoma Biological Survey from 1971 to 1977. In 1975, Paul took a one-year leave of absence from the University of Oklahoma to join the National Science Foundation as Program Director for Ecosystem Studies. He returned to the University of Oklahoma in 1977 as Professor of Botany and Chairman of the Department of Botany and Microbiology, where he remained until 1981. During his 14 years at the University of Oklahoma, Paul taught many graduate and undergraduate courses, developing a curriculum in community ecology with emphasis on an ecosystem perspective. He has had numerous doctoral and master's degree stu-

dents, while serving on the Graduate Committee and many other departmental, college, and university committees.

The study of the structure and function of grassland and forest ecosystems, including environmental planning and management, has been Paul Risser's primary research interest. He was a central figure in the grasslands biome of the United States International Biological Program. During the past 16 years, he has been the principal investigator or co-principal investigator on 41 different projects funded by state, federal, and private organizations, ranging from basic ecological research, to applied studies on natural resource management, to science education. He has had two books published, including *The True Prairie Ecosystem* in 1981, and is currently writing a third one, *Ecology and Natural History of the Plains and Prairies*. He has published a number of invited book chapters dealing with plant community structure, productivity, resource management, ecology, and conservation of grassland ecosystems. He has made a significant contribution to our understanding of both grassland and forest ecosystems with more than 50 journal publications, and also to the application of scientific knowledge to resource management in 45 technical reports to government agencies and industry.

Paul has always been generous with personal commitments to the ecological profession and the ESA. As a teacher and major advisor of graduate students, he motivates his students by his personal involvement and enthusiasm—always challenging them to attack difficult problems with new approaches. Yet even with a heavy academic schedule, he has always found time to serve the scientific community: he served as President of the University of Oklahoma Chapter of Sigma Xi, as President of the Southwestern Association of Naturalists, as secretary of the Ecological Society of America from 1978 to 1982, and as ESA President-elect from 1983 to 1984.

Many, often unheralded, individuals in our scientific discipline give unselfishly of their time for the betterment of the profession. Paul Risser is a singular example. He is presently Chairman of the editorial board of the United States International Biological Program publication series and a member of the editorial

board of the Torrey Botanical Club. Paul's participation on national scientific boards and committees is too numerous to detail, his most notable professional service to ecology being as Chairman of the advisory panel for the NSF's Division of Environmental Biology, Chairman of the Interagency Federal Committee on Ecological Reserves, and as a member of the National Research Council's Environmental Studies Board. Paul has also played an important role in international scientific coordination as a member of the NSF's International Environmental Programs Committee, the United States Department of State's Man and the Biosphere Program, and, most recently, as the ecology representative on the United States National Committee for SCOPE (Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment).

In 1983, the Illinois Natural History Survey, the largest biological survey in the nation with a staff of 200, celebrated its 125th anniversary. Paul, who is presently Chief of the Survey, was motivated to accept this new challenge in 1981 for several reasons: an opportunity to apply his administrative skills, the pragmatism of using fundamental ecological principles in problem solving, and the chance to return to his early research interests in the interface between physiological ecology and natural history. Already, he is using his position to further broaden ecology in the study of regional landscapes and long-term ecological processes.

Paul approaches his tenure in office as our President with optimism and enthusiasm. He vigorously supports the Society's traditional goals of publishing scientific journals of the highest quality and providing the framework for stimulating scientific meetings for creative interaction between professionals. Yet, in today's social setting, he understands the importance of the Society as a forceful advocate for ecology on the issues of environmental quality and natural resource utilization. These goals, together with the continuing challenges in science education and the support of ecological research, will be areas where Paul's leadership of our Society will be most valuable. The Ecological Society of America welcomes Paul Risser as its new President.

—David E. Reichle