For immediate release

EARTH DAY FOUNDER GAYLORD NELSON TO RECEIVE MEDAL OF FREEDOM
-President says Nelson inspired Americans to protect the environment-

Washington, D.C., April 21--President Clinton today announced that he would award Earth Day founder Gaylord Nelson, now counselor to The Wilderness Society, the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his lifetime commitment to environmental protection.

"In establishing Earth Day, Gaylord Nelson helped us to recognize that our fragile environment was increasingly at peril and that each of us could make a difference," said President Clinton. "His work has inspired all Americans to take responsibility for the planet's well-being and for our children's future."

"I am constantly impressed with the progress that has been made since that first demonstration 25 years ago," said Sen. Nelson. "Millions of Americans participated in 1970, and now millions more around the globe are showing their concern for the condition of our planet and demanding that their leaders make decisions that will protect the environment now and for future generations. There has been a sea change in the degree of environmentally educated people in our society. They, in the end, will make the difference."

"I am grateful for President Clinton's honor," added Nelson.

The Presidential Medal of Freedom is the highest civilian award of our government. Established by President Kennedy in 1963, it is awarded only by the President to those persons who have made especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States. Previous recipients include Ansel Adams, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., John Steinbeck, Anwar Sadat, Pearl Bailey, Walter Cronkite, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, Dr. Jonas Salk, and Barry Goldwater.

"Gaylord Nelson is an inspiration to all of us at The Wilderness Society," said Jon Roush, President of The Society. "We are blessed by his experience, wisdom and vision and we feel particularly proud that President Clinton has honored him in this extraordinary way."
None could be more deserving."

For 40 years Nelson has been one of the nation's foremost environmental leaders, best known as the founder of Earth Day. His goal for that first Earth Day in 1970 was "to organize a nationwide public demonstration so large that it would, finally, get the attention of the politicians and force the environmental issue into the nation's political dialogue and onto the national political agenda."

"As we commemorate the 25th anniversary of Earth Day, his creation, it is fitting that we honor this great American's lifetime of public service," said President Clinton.

Currently, Nelson is focusing on the combined issues of population growth and sustainability. In speeches he has been giving across the country, he says that evolving into a sustainable society is the greatest challenge we face. A sustainable society is one that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

Nelson's environmental achievements go well beyond Earth Day. Always ahead of his time, Nelson, as Wisconsin's Governor from 1959 to 1963, won approval of a one-cent-per-pack cigarette tax to finance state acquisition of parks and wetlands. It was the first program of its kind.

He authored legislation to preserve the 2,000-mile Appalachian Trail, which faced numerous threats, and later introduced a measure to establish a national trail system including the Appalachian Trail. It became law in 1968.

Sen. Nelson was the first to introduce bills to mandate fuel efficiency standards in automobiles; control strip mining; and ban the use of DDT and agent orange (2-4-5-T). All were passed by Congress.

A former U.S. Senator (D-WI), Nelson became Counselor of The Society in 1981. He served 10 years in the Wisconsin Senate, was twice elected Governor, and, in 1963, began an 18-year career in the U.S. Senate. In 1992, Nelson won the Only One Earth Award from the United Nations Environment Programme.

Born on June 4, 1916, in Clear Lake, Wisc., he received his BA degree in 1939 from San Jose State College in California and his LLB at the University of Wisconsin Law School in 1942. He was in the U.S. Army during World War II for 46 months, serving as first lieutenant during the Okinawa campaign. Returning to Madison, Wisc., Nelson practiced law from 1946 to 1958. He lives with his wife, Carrie Lee, in Kensington, Md., and has three children and two grandchildren.

Now celebrating its 60th anniversary, The Wilderness Society is committed to protecting the nation's natural heritage through the fostering of good stewardship of its national forests, parks and rangelands. The Society has 275,000 members and 12 offices nationwide.