

George M. Woodwell, President

1977-1978



George M. Woodwell, President

The new President of The Ecological Society was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, graduated from the Boston Public Latin School and from Dartmouth College. He spent three years in the Navy in the early 1950's before attending graduate school at Duke University. He taught for three years in the Department of Botany at the University of Maine before joining the staff of Brookhaven National Laboratory in the spring of 1961. In 1975 he moved to the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole to become the Director of the Ecosystems Center. He has held an adjunct appointment at Yale and has taught there intermittently over several years.

Woodwell's interests in science have been most heavily focused on the development of concepts of ecosystems and the use of those concepts in developing solutions to environmental problems. He has been particularly interested in the problems of toxic substances, especially the challenges presented by the persistent chlorinated hydrocarbons, by radioactivity, and most recently, petroleum. He assembled a group of colleagues at Brookha-

ven National Laboratory to examine over a period of more than a decade the ecological effects of ionizing radiation through a series of long term studies of plant and animal communities. This work made the Brookhaven oak-pine forest one of the best-studied communities in the world, and the program has been highly productive of articles, techniques for studying communities, and concepts including net ecosystem production and measured degree of community retrogression. These studies led Woodwell to an intensive interest in the systematic changes in natural communities caused by chronic disturbance, a series of changes best recognized as biotic impoverishment. His current interests extend these studies and include a special emphasis on the role of the biota in the world carbon budget.

Woodwell has been active throughout his career in attempts to bring a closer relationship between the science of environment and the applications of this knowledge in management of resources. These activities came to focus in the middle 1960's in the efforts to restrict the use of DDT, a series of efforts that led to court challenges and ultimately to the banning of the use of DDT in the United States. These activities also led to the founding of the Environmental Defense Fund and the Natural Resources Defense Council, two conservation law groups that have had considerable impact on the course of environmental legislation in the United States. Woodwell was a founding trustee on both these institutions and continues as a member of their boards. He serves on various other boards, including the World Wildlife Fund and the Conservation Foundation.

Woodwell's career thus combines, as effectively as that of anyone in our field, research accomplishment and contribution to environmental affairs. During his term as President, Woodwell hopes both to strengthen the Society's contributions to scholarship, and to improve the recognition by others of the contributions that ecologists can make in contemporary challenges on environment.