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Michael R. "Squeak" Smith

Nov. 1, 1948 - Oct. 16, 2026

Michael R. "Squeak" Smith, 77, of Morganton, North Carolina, passed away on Friday, October 16, 2026, after a period of declining health.

Born in Alma, Michigan, on November 1, 1948, he was the son of the late John and Bea Smith. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his brother, Craig Smith.

Squeak graduated from Michigan State University and then entered the United States Air Force, where he served for 12 years, retiring as a captain and flight commander of F-4 Phantom jets.

In 1986, Squeak came to North Carolina in pursuit of pristine trout waters. That pursuit grew into a calling and a lifelong commitment to protecting and improving the environment. He served on the boards of several nonprofit organizations, including Table Rock Trout Unlimited, Trout Unlimited National, Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina, and Resource Institute.

Squeak was also honored to be part of Casting for Hope, helping to develop this nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting women with gynecological cancer.

Whether volunteering, fly-fishing a North Carolina mountain stream, or salmon fishing

on his beloved Betsie River in Michigan with his river family, Squeak never met a stranger. Everyone he met became a forever friend.

The family extends its heartfelt thanks to Dr. Shawn Hamm, Amorem nurses Heaven and Erica, and Kay Brown for their kindness, compassion, and care.

Those left to cherish his memory include his wife, Connie Hairfield Smith; his children, Heather Lynn Smith (Dale), Aaron Smith (Dana), Doug Hairfield (Mary Ann), and John Hairfield (Nicole); his grandchildren, Lilly Brown, Dylan Smith, Annabelle Hairfield, Parker Hairfield, Lena Hairfield, Adele Pond, and Evie Pond; his sisters-in-law, Angie Farr (Dick) and Sue Smith; his mother-in-law, Betty Davis; and many nieces and nephews.

A private service for Squeak will be held with a celebration of life to take place at a later date.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Foothills Conservancy of North Carolina or to Casting for Hope.

Sossoman Funeral Home and Crematory Center is assisting the family with the arrangements.

Tribute Wall

Squeak was my friend ,I am proud to say,since we started conversing online about a dozen years ago.Although we never met in person he generously shared his life with me and taught me so much that I hadn't known before. Our conversations 'across the water' became very dear to me,as indeed did he. He had an indefatigable zest for life and every day seemed to take on a new challenge. His deep and abiding love for his family and Miss Connie shone through everything. He was a remarkable man indeed who will be greatly missed.

–Jane Marie Bleasdale

I worked at Foothills Conservancy of NC when Squeak was on the Board. He is a great conservationist and awesome person. I knew him more than 20 years ago and He always stuck out in my memory as a wonderful person and had such a great character! He is one of those people you never forget. My heart goes out to you and your family.

–Annette Henson

Heather, So sorry to see that your dad is gone. You were blessed to have him as long as you did. I hope your precious memories help you through these hard days. Please give my condolences to Lilly & Connie. Love and prayers always

–Linda Early

–Jane Sohovich

Squeak was a champion for streams, rivers, and conservation throughout the United States. His fingerprints and inspirations are on many organizations that shared his resource ethic and his footprints will leave a living legacy not only with these organizations, but on the projects that were implemented. The stream

projects in particular will provide generations access and enjoyment of water resources. Our condolences to his family, the conservation world lost a advocate with his passing.

–Alan and Robin Walker

I often referred to Squeak as one of my favorite humans. We enjoyed deep conversations and someday, I should have paid him for "therapy". A kind and compassionate friend who offered advice at times and encouragement at others. Squeak will be truly missed by many and I am proud to call him my friend.

–Flossie Amoia

Squeak was a tireless advocate for his home river, the Catawba, and rivers all over the United States. His loss will be felt by the many friends he had working to protect our waterways in North Carolina.

–John Searby

A true conservationist who made a tremendous impact on our North Carolina fishery resources!

–Alen Baker

Such a loss. Squeak left a true legacy for resource protection: water, land, fish! I worked with Squeak for over 26 years in the non-profit world. He was a trusted, committed force for doing the right thing. Sincere condolences to his family and his community.

–Vicki Taylor

A wonderful person who personafied the term "caring for others". You will be missed so much by family and communities.

—Robert Reynolds