



William Edward Cox

February 18, 1944 - October 2, 2025

William Edward Cox, professor emeritus of civil and environmental engineering at Virginia Tech, died at home with his wife by his side on Thursday, October 2, after valiantly battling pancreatic cancer for more than six years. An avid fisherman, award-winning photographer, and internationally recognized water management specialist, he was a native of Pulaski, Va., and long-time resident of Blacksburg, Va. He was 81.

Cox was preceded in death by his parents, William Walker and Cora Davis Cox of Pulaski, and sister and brother-in-law, Wilma Cox Wright (Ned) of Dublin, Va.

He will be deeply missed by his beloved family, including his wife of nearly 60 years, Clara Brown Cox of Blacksburg; their daughter and son-in-law, Wendy Cox Royston and Keith A. Royston of Smithfield, Va.; and granddaughters Reagan Amberley Royston and Bryce Acadia Royston of Smithfield.

Also surviving him are three brothers-in-law he loved like brothers and their wives/fiancé, who were like sisters to him: J. Morris Brown (Phyllis) of Chapel Hill, N.C., Dennis E. Brown (Kay) of Carrollton, Va., and Joseph H. Brown (Renée Blevins) of Christiansburg, Va.; a sister, Juanita Bentley (Duane) of Pulaski; nephews Paul Ayers of Pulaski and Jeff Ayers of Apex, N.C.; and nieces Lisa Faddis (R.J.) of Pulaski and Lori Umberger (Doug Jr.) of Dublin. Additionally, special friends Dan and Angela Mathias of Craig County, Va., and

fishing buddies Lanseford Dawson of Draper, Va., and Bill Copenhaver of Salem.

After graduating from high school as co-salutatorian, Cox earned bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering from Virginia Tech. He taught at Virginia Commonwealth University before returning to Tech in 1972 for a Ph.D. in civil engineering.

After working for the Virginia Water Resources Research Center at the university, he began teaching in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, where he also served as assistant department head and played a major role in the development of the department's curriculum assessment procedures. The department recognized him for "outstanding leadership" in its Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology efforts. He was inducted into its Academy of Distinguished Alumni in 2010. Additionally, the Virginia Tech chapter of Chi Epsilon named him a chapter honor member "in recognition of superior scholarship, character, practicality, and sociability," and the College of Engineering presented him with the Dean's Award for Excellence in Service for "extraordinary performance in public service." During four decades at Tech, he wrote numerous articles, which appeared in professional journals and other publications, and made many presentations at professional conferences.

Nationally, Cox helped develop a model state water code with colleagues in the American Society of Civil Engineers and helped found the Environmental and Water Resources Institute within ASCE. Both ASCE and EWRI selected him to receive their Service to the Profession and Lifetime Achievement awards.

Additionally, Cox worked on international water issues as a member of UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme and wrote IHP's report on managing the relationship between water and development, which UNESCO translated into several languages, published, and distributed to numerous

countries.

Water also played a role in his non-working life. He went fishing whenever and wherever he could, but his favorite places to dip his line were the Fryingpan and Taylor rivers in Colorado, tributaries of Lake Erie near Erie, Penn., and the New River in Pulaski, Montgomery, and Giles counties, Va. He often tied his own flies and invented a spinning lure that would not twist his fishing line.

Additionally, Cox loved photography and had a special knack for framing his shots, which reflected the beauty of landscapes and wildlife, although he especially enjoyed recording the lives of his daughter and granddaughters. The family traveled extensively, and he viewed many sections of the world from behind his camera lens. His photographs appeared in magazines and newspapers, and he received several awards, including two from Kodak in an international competition.

His knowledge was so broad that his wife called him her “walking encyclopedia,” and their daughter said there was “nothing my daddy doesn’t know.”

The family thanks ACG Hospice for its care of William during the final months of his life and neighbors Tanja Doyle and her son, Alex, and friends Dave and Betsy Kibler of Salem for their many visits and loving help.

A celebration of Cox’s full and rewarding life will be held on Sunday, October 12, at 2 p.m. in the McCoy Funeral Home, 150 Country Club Drive SW, Blacksburg. Arrangements are being handled by McCoy.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

OCT **12**. 2:00 PM (ET)

McCoy Funeral Home
150 Country Club Dr. S.W.
Blacksburg, VA 24060
(540) 552-3211
mccoyfuneralhome@verizon.net
<https://mccoyfuneralhome.com>

Tribute Wall

RA

“ Clara - I was so, so sorry to hear this news. Please know that Paula and I are holding you in our hearts. We are thinking of you. Please take care... Randy

Randy - October 12, 2025 at 09:22 AM

AT

“ Clara. Bill was a wonderful person. Always willing to help and share his knowledge. My wife Maria Teresa and I send our deepest sympathy to you and your family.

Antonio Trani - October 12, 2025 at 08:30 AM



“ I have pictures of William fishing in his Senior year at Pulaski High School. A small group of friends dedicated to camping, hiking and fishing, Our only hangouts of that era were streamside.

Philip Huff - October 11, 2025 at 01:41 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of William Edward Cox.



October 11, 2025 at 01:23 PM

PH

“ Phil Huff planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of William Edward Cox.

Phil Huff - October 11, 2025 at 01:23 PM



“ Clara, I am saddened by this news. Bill helped me a great deal understanding how the college worked. He was always supportive of me and what we did for students. He is greatly missed - and I am so sorry for your loss.

Bevlee Watford - October 10, 2025 at 11:08 AM

CD

“ Clara, I am so sorry to learn of Bill's passing. Although I never knew Bill, I felt quite fond of him by your frequent and loving words about him. I trust you will find peace in the coming weeks and months.
Catherine Doss

Catherine Doss - October 10, 2025 at 07:24 AM



“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of William Edward Cox.



October 09, 2025 at 04:22 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of William Edward Cox.

October 09, 2025 at 04:22 PM



“ *Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of William Edward Cox.*



October 08, 2025 at 12:33 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of William Edward Cox.

October 08, 2025 at 12:33 PM



“ *Clara, I'm so sorry to hear of Bill's passing. He was a tremendous human being. His wisdom and patient approach to furthering professional practice through ASCE was admired by all he worked with. He was also an accomplished fisherman whose company on the trout stream I enjoyed and will reminisce fondly about.*
Kyle Schilling

kyle schilling - October 08, 2025 at 10:45 AM

JM

“ My dear Clara, I just read of William’s passing. We haven’t seen each other for so long, but I remember how much Gerald enjoyed having a long conversation with William at our 50th class reunion while you and I were involved in our own memories. I wish we had lived closer because I believe the two of them would have enjoyed each other’s company. All I can say is that my heart aches for you. You and your family will be in our prayers in the coming days, weeks and months as you learn to deal with this different life. I wish we could see you but it will not be possible.
My love,
Jo Ann Lewis Meeks (and Gerald)

Jo Ann Lewis Meeks - October 07, 2025 at 10:38 PM

SM

“ Clara, I am very sorry to hear of Bill's passing. He was a wonderful person and an accomplished professor. My memory of him is that he was a friendly, kind, and gentle neighbor on Shelor Lane. I always enjoyed our conversations and hearing of his fishing adventures. I know he will be missed by many.

Scott Midkiff - October 07, 2025 at 08:36 AM