



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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**ROSS D. MURPHY, CITIZEN-ACTIVIST OF OKLAHOMA,
RECEIVES PRESTIGIOUS INTERNATIONAL AWARD FOR
DEEP FORK WETLANDS CONSERVATION**

Ross D. Murphy of Tulsa, Oklahoma, has received one of the prestigious **National Great Blue Heron Awards** from the North American Waterfowl Management Plan Committee for outstanding contributions to the continent's waterfowl and wetlands resources.

"Ross Murphy is living proof of that old adage: 'one person can make a difference,'" Mollie Beattie, Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said in announcing the award. "The partnerships he formed, his work with landowners, and his deep commitment to conserving the Deep Fork River wetlands are truly noteworthy. I am personally pleased the international community has recognized his significant contributions with this award."

National Great Blue Heron Awards are conferred annually by the International Plan Committee, made up of members from Canada, Mexico, and the United States, for substantial long-term contributions on a national level. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan is an agreement among the three countries to reverse the continent's loss of wetlands and stem the decline in populations of waterfowl and other migratory birds. It is carried out through joint ventures with public- and private-sector partners.

The Deep Fork River bottomlands, comprised of some 80,000 acres in northeastern Oklahoma, account for 25 percent of the state's remaining wetlands. Their importance to wetland-dependent wildlife has long been recognized, making them a key focus area of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Protection efforts for Deep Fork started in 1978 but were stalled for 10 years because of landowner objections. Murphy "jump-started" the project again in 1988 with a three-part program to recruit support from other conservation groups, educate landowners, and raise funds for wetland protection.

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He traveled the state speaking to different groups, recruiting 85 organizations as partners, and meeting with and winning the support of 350 landowners. His next hurdle was convincing the state legislature and the governor to approve a national wildlife refuge. With this in hand, he was able to convince the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to establish the Deep Fork National Wildlife Refuge to protect 20,000 acres, with the Oklahoma Wildlife Department to protect and manage the remaining 60,000 acres as a Wildlife Management Area.

Finally, to make it all happen, Murphy spearheaded the effort to gain funding not only to establish the project but also to restore some of its lost and degraded wetlands. Largely through his efforts, the Oklahoma Wildlife Department committed \$1 million, the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund matched this with a grant of another \$1 million, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife committed \$2.2 million to begin acquiring land and restoring wetlands. Murphy personally raised \$20,000 in cash and donations and spent more than \$5,000 of his own funds for postage, printing, telephone calls, and gasoline.

Murphy received the **National Great Blue Heron Award** October 20 from Deputy Director Lynn Starnes of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Southwest Region during ceremonies at the Tulsa Zoo. The award is an original framed carving of a great blue heron by "Cork" McGee of Chincoteague, Virginia.