

Northeast Region volunteer selected for national award

Zeeger de Wilde, of Seaford, Del., was selected as the Volunteer of the Year for his unwavering support and commitment to the Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Maryland and Virginia. Over the last 20 years, de Wilde has volunteered more than 12,000 hours on several refuges near his home and at more than 200 refuges across the country he was visiting while traveling. Drawing extensively on his background in horticulture, he is leaving a lasting mark by helping create butterfly gardens showcasing native plants. According to refuge staff, de Wilde is a cornerstone of the volunteer program and a role model for volunteers nationwide.

The National Wildlife Refuge Association and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation selected recipients of the 2010 Refuge System Awards. These annual awards recognize refuge conservation professionals, volunteers and Friends groups exemplifying outstanding dedication and passion for wildlife conservation in advancement of the mission and purposes of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Most recently de Wilde redesigned the Butterfly and Beneficial Insect Garden at Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge Visitor's Center, adding, removing, and transplanting native vegetation that attracts a variety of butterflies, bees and other pollinating insects. He was also instrumental in developing and maintaining the Bayscape Butterfly Garden at Eastern Neck refuge.

Born and raised in Holland, de Wilde grew up amidst the Nazi occupation during World War II. After the war he studied horticulture and arboriculture. In 1953 he immigrated to Canada and then to the Maryland area in 1968, where he eventually became a U.S. citizen and started his own landscape business.

In 1990 de Wilde responded to an ad in his local newspaper calling for volunteers at the Blackwater refuge and decided to visit the complex. "I fell in love with the environment," he said. "It reminded me of Holland." He began volunteering his time every second

Friday for an eight-hour shift, commuting more than four hours round-trip between the refuge and his home.

“It’s been an absolutely wonderful experience. When you have good leadership, you have good volunteerism,” he said. “I’m honored. It’s rewarding to work with a group of great people. I’ll be doing this as long as I can. It’s really a wonderful thing.”

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service works with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. We are both a leader and a trusted partner in fish and wildlife conservation, known for our scientific excellence, stewardship of lands and natural resources, dedicated professionals, and commitment to public service. For more information about our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>.

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