

**Virginia Chapter of the American Fisheries Society  
Eugene W. Surber Professional Biologist of the Year Award**

For his outstanding commitment to the conservation and restoration of aquatic resources in Virginia, it is my honor to nominate John Jacob Schmerfeld of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the American Fisheries Society's Eugene W. Surber Professional Fisheries Biologist of the Year award. John was the USFWS Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) coordinator for Virginia from 2000 to 2010. During his tenure, John was instrumental in settling cases grossing over \$8 million that have been directed towards the restoration of Virginia's aquatic resources. Because of his efforts, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) and Virginia Tech were each able to establish fully-staffed freshwater mussel cultivation facilities. These facilities have produced over 2 million endangered mussels that have contributed toward mussel recovery in the Tennessee River drainage. Although he is still involved in several ongoing NRDAR cases, John has recently accepted the position of Climate Change Coordinator for the USFWS National Wildlife Refuge System in Arlington, Virginia. Some of John's significant contributions include the following:

In the fall of 1996, over 6 million gallons of coal slurry escaped from a faulty holding impoundment and entered into the Powell River watershed. Throughout the natural resource damage assessment settlement process, John interacted with Federal, State and local governmental and non-governmental agencies to identify key restoration options in the Powell River watershed to compensate for the spill injury. John developed strong partnerships within the local community to ensure the successful restoration. His belief is that goals are only achieved by involving the people throughout the decision-making process. The case was settled for \$2.4 million and efforts directed to the restoration and rehabilitation of several hundred acres of riparian area, the re-establishment of rare freshwater mussels and fish, and the general improvement of the Powell River ecosystem quality.

In 1998, a tanker truck overturned near the Clinch River, spilling 1,350 gallons of a rubber accelerant turning the river white and killing aquatic life for about 7 miles downstream, including over 18,000 freshwater mussels of 16 different species. The spill killed over 700 federally listed mussels, which was the largest single take of endangered species since enactment of the US Endangered Species Act. Under John's direction, a natural resource damage assessment was conducted on the spill to obtain funds from the responsible party for restoration. The case was settled for \$3.8 million and the funds used for mussel restoration, habitat protection and community educational outreach.

In 2001, a soil fumigant was applied to fairways and greens of the Washington Golf Course and Country Club (WGCC) in Arlington County, Virginia followed almost immediately by heavy rains that caused runoff from the golf course to contaminate two streams, Donaldson Run and Gulf Branch, tributaries to the Potomac River, and National Park Service lands. The fumigant was highly toxic to aquatic life and virtually no living organisms were detected after the spill. It was estimated that over 1,000 American eels were killed. Under John's direction and leadership, through the natural resource damage

assessment process, WGCC directed \$145,000 for stream restoration activities and monitoring on their property. The now complete restoration activities included bank stabilization, sediment reduction, riparian buffer plantings, construction of in-stream structures to dissipate storm water surge energy and long-term protection of a two-acre wildlife area.

On July 9, 2007, a fungicide was accidentally spilled into the North Fork Roanoke River from activities at the Blacksburg Country Club (BCC) in Montgomery County, Virginia. Approximately 10,000 fish were killed as a result of this spill, including the federally-listed endangered Roanoke logperch (*Percina rex*). Under John's direction and leadership, the USFWS, VDGIF, Virginia Tech and BCC worked together to develop a \$50,000 suite of six restoration projects to be implemented over a five-year period beginning in March 2012 on BCC property and funded by BCC. The streambank stabilization projects will protect and restore logperch habitat over time, with the primary purpose of improving water quality within the North Fork Roanoke River. Some of the projects will be developed by students in a VT stream restoration class, providing a unique educational partnership and opportunity.

John remains involved in mercury contamination cases on the South River in the Shenandoah Valley and the North Fork Holston River of Virginia's Tennessee Valley. Both involve on-going natural resource damage assessment related to mercury contamination from past chemical industrial activities. Under John's leadership and direction, several years of injury studies were completed with VDGIF, Virginia Tech, the College of William and Mary, James Madison University, and others, providing a strong scientific base for the cases and contributing widely to the forefront of scientific literature on mercury effects in aquatic and terrestrial wildlife.