



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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ON THE COVER: SANDHILL CRANES UNDER A COTTONWOOD AT BOSQUE DEL APACHE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE IN NEW MEXICO. CREDIT: ROBERT DUNN



Greater Sage-Grouse Success Shows We're Still Capable of Great Accomplishments

I had the privilege of standing with Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell in September to announce an epic and unprecedented conservation success. One that will shape the landscape of the West, and influence how we think about and approach conservation in North America, for generations to come.

Over the past five years, the Fish and Wildlife Service and its state wildlife agency counterparts in 11 states came together with a broad coalition of public and private partners and worked tirelessly to address threats to the greater sage-grouse and the “Sagebrush Sea” where it makes its home.

Together, we succeeded to such an extent that this emblem of the western landscape doesn't require the protections of the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

In 2010, it was almost a foregone conclusion that the greater sage-grouse would need ESA protection to avoid extinction. But the prospect of listing—and the ESA's provisions supporting the conservation of candidate species—catalyzed the most ambitious and far-reaching conservation effort in the act's history.

Putting aside ideologies and preconceptions, partners came together to find shared solutions and worked around the clock on multiple levels to put effective conservation measures in place to protect, connect and restore large blocks of habitat. The ESA enabled us to collaborate with a broad array of stakeholders to tailor cost-effective, locally driven solutions that benefit wildlife, contribute to economic prosperity and expand opportunities for outdoor recreation and tourism. For example:

- The Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service embarked upon and completed the revision of 98 land use plans covering more than one-half of the species' remaining habitat on over 60 million acres.
- The states updated or developed conservation plans to address the primary threats within their borders and are proceeding with implementation.
- The Service embarked upon candidate conservation agreements with private landowners and states, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture has targeted key private lands conservation, investing more than

\$400 million through the Sage Grouse Initiative, and pledging another \$198 million by 2018.

- The Secretary led a new effort to address the threat posed by invasive grasses and wildfire.

While the sage-grouse was the catalyst, the conservation measures will reverberate through an entire ecosystem. Habitat protections will benefit not just sage-grouse but elk, mule deer, pronghorn antelope, bald and golden eagles, and more than 350 other native species that share the landscape.

We'll also improve the health and productivity of the land, preserving a working landscape for people and communities across the West.

Ensuring that these successes are sustained will take continued hard work and perseverance. While the threats have been lessened, they have not been eliminated, and much work remains to fully implement the conservation actions outlined in state and federal conservation strategies. We will continue to work with our partners to implement these measures and evaluate their effectiveness, making adjustments as needed. We have directed \$4 million per year for at least the next five years to fund greater sage-grouse related partnership work. State, federal and private partners will also continue their commitments to sage-grouse conservation.

People often lament that America is no longer capable of greatness that we're too divided to act together in the best interests of the nation.

This historic effort shows we can still accomplish great things when we come together.

Similar partnership-driven conservation efforts averted the need to list the New England cottontail in the Northeast and the bi-state population of greater sage-grouse in California and Nevada. They contributed to delisting of the Oregon chub, the first fish species recovered in the ESA's history.

Successes like these are vital to the future of our nation. Not just our natural heritage, but to our culture, our economy, and the health and well-being of our children and their descendants. □

Plan Identifies Immediate Steps to Help Polar Bears

The Service took measures in 2008 to protect polar bears as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) because of the loss of its sea ice habitat attributed to global warming. Their long-term survival depends on the world's willingness to address the greenhouse gas emissions that are warming the Arctic and the world.

In the meantime, though, the Service has issued the Draft Polar Bear Conservation Management Plan, crafted by stakeholders from public, private and nonprofit sectors. The plan identifies immediate actions that will put polar bears in a position to recover if global warming eases.

Stakeholders are now finalizing the plan.

"Polar bear conservation requires a global commitment to curb the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere," says Alaska Regional Director Geoffrey Haskett. "Until that happens, we're going to do everything within our power to give the polar bear a chance to survive."

Polar bear populations are projected to decline through the end of the century, but the plan outlines actions that can be taken now to enable polar bears to persist while efforts are made to stabilize global greenhouse gas emissions.



A male polar bear stands alert on the Arctic coast near Kaktovik, Alaska

The loss of sea ice is projected to lead to decreased or greatly decreased populations in three of the four polar bear "ecoregions" by 2050. That projection is based on a scientific model from 2008 that has been updated to include two possible scenarios for greenhouse gas emissions this century. One scenario has greenhouse gas emissions increasing at the current rate, and the other has emissions leveling off about mid-century and then declining.

The plan's immediate actions will better manage subsistence harvest, minimize risks of contamination from oil and chemical spills, protect denning habitat from human disturbance and industrial activity, deter human-bear conflicts, and conduct research.

Polar bears are significant in Alaska Native culture, and representative organizations helped in both drafting the plan and in the call to action to preserve polar bear populations.

"In the words of our founder Charles Johnson, when we lose polar bears, we also lose our cultures," says Jack Omelak, executive director of the Alaska Nanuq Commission. "Our people are natural conservationists and have practiced taking only what is needed for centuries. We treat polar bears and their habitats with reverence. Now, we are looking to our global community to do the same."

The Polar Bear Conservation Management Plan is intended to meet the provisions of both the ESA and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. It will also serve as the United States' contribution to an action plan being developed by the five polar bear range countries—Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States—under the 1973 Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears. □

Law Enforcement Agent Uses All His Experience to Fight Wildlife Trafficking

Senior Special Agent George Phocas became the Service's first overseas law enforcement attaché in 2014 when he was posted to Bangkok, Thailand.

During his 25-year career with the Office of Law Enforcement, he has worked cases on all manner of natural resources from corals to tigers and from orchids to timber. Phocas has served not only as a detective but on patrols, border operations, undercover investigations, and complex cases of public corruption and other crimes. He also led capacity-building and training efforts throughout the Pacific Region. He most recently helped design and implement the system of environmental "Green Courts" in the Republic of the Philippines.

This experience certainly comes in handy in the attaché position. "The challenges—and solutions—facing the world's efforts to preserve a wild heritage are increasingly found in law enforcement and the courts," says Phocas. "Several countries have no agency with true police investigative authority to deal with natural resources. Often, one agency has responsibility for permitting and science for wildlife, and another for timber, but neither has the requisite police authority to investigate beyond the borders of the forest."

The Service is a world leader in the full-scope approach to law enforcement, with the institutional knowledge and authority of a ranger program, border inspection office and federal

investigative agency. Phocas is working with partners and countries to address this deficiency overseas.

An important role for the attaché is to provide counter-trafficking expertise to groups rolling out the National Strategy for Combating Wildlife Trafficking at U.S. embassies around the world, and to partners and foreign nations echoing the strategy. Phocas spends time holding workshops, where he leads interactive discussions with different partners in the enforcement spectrum—first responders, investigators, prosecutors, judges—to come up with decision mechanisms and develop a better understanding of all investigative options.

Of course, for investigators, it's not just training, outreach and science; it's also about the

casework. While international disclosure laws make some efforts unwieldy if not impossible, Phocas has already had several successes.

Phocas assisted investigators in Indonesia with identification of wildlife seized from an illicit market vendor and destined for export. Items ranged from stuffed birds of paradise to shark fins and ivory. In a Sri Lankan case—perhaps the biggest two interceptions ever of protected rosewood timber—Phocas, a member of the United Nations' expert working group on timber trafficking, gave a provisional field ID and facilitated the examination of rosewood samples by the Service's Forensics Lab. Thanks to this intervention, more than 50 40-foot containers from Madagascar were seized.

Phocas has had quite a few other successes, but these remain mostly in the shadow of the bigger story: an increasing willingness and capacity by international partners to address this illicit trade with the appropriate investigative and police response. "Governments have begun to go beyond soft approaches and civil discourse, and are now putting criminals behind bars," he says.

For example, new national strategies guiding law enforcement are now in place across Southeast Asia and will lead to better police success and cooperation to combat wildlife trafficking.

Phocas continues to work in the background to assist governments fighting wildlife crime. He says, "Before President Obama issued the Executive Order on Combatting Wildlife Trafficking

in 2013, some individuals were taking advice from people who don't do this work professionally, if at all. Now the specific expertise and experience of the Service's Office of Law Enforcement can be brought to bear, and it's my honor to step up to this challenging and rewarding task."

The Service's International Attaché Program continues to expand. Attachés were posted to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Gaborone, Botswana; and Lima, Peru, in August. A fifth attaché will be stationed in Beijing, China, in 2016. □

(Left) Senior Special Agent George Phocas with elephant ivory. (Right) This shipment of protected rosewood timber was seized in Sri Lanka.



Pulling the Pernicious Pepperweed Plant

The pernicious perennial pepperweed plant is a fun tongue twister, but this coastal invader is no laughing matter. Native to Europe and Asia, this mustard relative is classified as a noxious, invasive weed in 15 states, including Massachusetts and Connecticut, and it outcompetes the native salt marsh grasses that help to filter storm-water pollutants, buffer against storm damage, provide habitat to fish and wildlife, and support recreational and commercial activities for local towns.

Perennial pepperweed is a relatively new invasive plant to the northeastern United States, discovered in the early 1990s at the north end of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge on Plum Island, Massachusetts. Infestations are typically found near the coast and on coastal islands, and dense stands often occur at the upper edges of salt marshes above the high tide line.

The plant is a problem in the Great Marsh, the largest marsh system north of Long Island, New York. Since 2006, the Great Marsh Perennial Pepperweed Eradication Project has engaged numerous volunteers to pull thousands of pounds of pepperweed from Parker River Refuge and surrounding areas. Removing these invasives allows native salt marsh grasses a chance to regenerate and create a more resilient salt marsh at the refuge. With the help of many local partners such as Mass Audubon and local schools, more than 70 sites have been restored.

In 2013, the Department of the Interior allocated \$340,000

through the Disaster Relief Appropriations Act to make the Great Marsh more resilient. Nancy Pau, wildlife biologist at the refuge, says these supplemental funds will allow the refuge to treat almost 100 percent of the pepperweed, where past funds covered only between 60 and 70 percent of the treatment needed.

"While the refuge does use herbicide spraying to treat pepperweed, pulling by volunteers allows the refuge and its partners to treat approximately 900 stands of pepperweed in the six-week treatment window, allowing us to combat almost every stand in the Great Marsh," says Pau.

For the past two years, River Valley Charter School has helped refuge staff battle dense stands of this aggressive plant, pulling pepperweed from 4.7 acres along the Plum Island Turnpike and along Plum Bush Down, a small residential area along the Great Marsh in Newburyport.

In June, nearly two dozen fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders from the school pulled 15 large garbage bags full of plants from six areas where pepperweed control is badly needed. Lauren Healey, pepperweed assistant for Mass Audubon and member of Gulf of Maine Institute (GOMI), along with several other team members



from GOMI and Newburyport High School removed 14 large garbage bags of pepperweed from the Great Marsh this past summer.

"While the kids are having a good time and learning how to identify and properly pull the weeds, they are also turning the Great Marsh into a more resilient natural barrier that will help sustain wildlife and their own communities against future storms," says Frances Toledo Rodriguez, invasive species coordinator at Parker River Refuge. □

MARGIE BRENNER, External Affairs, Northeast Region

(Top) Nancy Pau points out the white flowers of pepperweed, an invasive species plant that has been the focus of a long-term removal project in the Great Marsh. (Bottom) Fourth- through sixth-graders from River Valley Charter School pull invasive pepperweed plants from the salt marsh at Parker River National Wildlife Refuge in Newburyport, Massachusetts.

MARGIE BRENNER/USFWS

FRANCES RODRIGUEZ/USFWS

The 20,000 Hour Volunteer



BILL O'BRIAN/USFWS

"I like counting cranes," says Jim Montgomery, only slightly understating the fact that he has 26 years of continuous weekly crane counts at Bitter Lake National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico. And Montgomery is a volunteer!

"I'm nervous that he's going to retire," says refuge volunteer coordinator Steve Alvarez. "On the books, Jim officially has 18,554 volunteer hours. [Refuge Manager Floyd Truetken] and I are sure he is over 20,000 since he doesn't claim all his time."

Montgomery has a Ph.D. in zoology and has spent his career teaching biology at New Mexico Military Institute. The refuge offered him an opportunity to do projects like counting those cranes, which he started in 1988. He has even presented papers to the North American Crane

Assistant Manager Larry Ulibarri (from left) and Refuge Manager Floyd Truetken join volunteer Jim Montgomery at a Bitter Lake Refuge dry lake bed.

Working Group. "He is the refuge expert on cranes," says Alvarez. Montgomery also participates in biweekly waterbird counts and monitors nesting terns to see if the eggs hatch.

Montgomery was also an original board member when the Friends of Bitter Lake Refuge organized in 2000, and he continues to keep the books and make sure the nature store always has change.

Montgomery also leads a bimonthly "refuge discovery tour," guiding families through areas of the refuge normally closed to the public. "The theme is that the refuge is more than a place with a fence around it. The refuge maintains and creates

habitats," he explains to visitors. "Sometimes it seems kids have been dragged along; other times people seem very interested and there is good interplay."

Once he was able to show off new habitat for three endangered snails and the tiny Noel's amphipod. And why is this important? "It maintains the integrity of the ecosystem."

His long hours haven't gone unnoticed. In 2003, the National Wildlife Refuge Association named him Volunteer of the Year. Of course, back then it was just 10,000 hours. □

KAREN LEGGETT, National Wildlife Refuge System, Headquarters

Conservation Coup



TOM KOERNER/USFWS

Thanks to some amazing partners and one of the largest conservation efforts in U.S. history, the Service has concluded that the greater sage-grouse does not require protection under the Endangered Species Act. Working together, 11 Western states, federal agencies, private landowners and industry were able to secure the future of the greater sage-grouse and its unique sagebrush habitat.

INTO THE CITIES

(Top) Across the country, the Service is seeking to engage new audiences at urban refuges, such as Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge near Denver. (Bottom right) An osprey nest overlooks the Atlantic City coastline. (Bottom left) Youth Conservation Corps staff work in a community garden at Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge in New Mexico with Refuge Manager Jennifer Owen-White.

With 80 percent of Americans living in urban communities, the challenge to ensure that natural resources are conserved and valued by the American people has become more complex. The Service is committed to serving this growing diverse, urban audience. The Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, launched in 2013, provides opportunities for residents of America's cities to learn about and take part in wildlife habitat conservation.





IT TAKES A CITY

*Atlanta is one of the
latest cities to host an
Urban Wildlife Refuge
Partnership*

by KATHERINE TAYLOR



You know a project is destined for success when the Girl Scouts are involved and donating part of their cookie money.

Atlanta's South Fork Conservancy and its partners working to restore Peachtree Creek got a big boost from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) and other partners, who committed more than \$100,000 to this coalition's work in Southwest Atlanta.

The restoration effort includes the help of dedicated volunteers. Recently around 40 volunteers from the Lindridge Martin Manor Neighborhood Association, located in northeast Atlanta, cleared honeysuckle vines and kudzu from the area around



Four volunteers from Boys & Girls Club Atlanta join Sally Sears on trail clearing on MLK Day 2015.

Conservation Program. NFWF, the Service and a host of partners announced a series of grants for new and existing partnerships around the country. The money was made possible by NFWF's Five Star and Urban Waters Restoration Grant Program. Nationally, these Five-Star grants generated \$2.35 million in direct contributions and matching funds from local partners.

Atlanta is one of three new Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships, which support natural habitat restoration efforts led by community organizations that utilize volunteers. This year the South Fork Conservancy received \$29,000 from NFWF and \$75,000 in matching funds from other organizations to work on initiatives such as creating an urban meadow along Peachtree Creek.

In January, around 80 volunteers spent their Martin Luther King Jr. holiday clearing Meadow Loop Trail of saplings.

"We spent hours working with the neighbors on the restoration plan for the urban meadow," says Sears. "We were aware that we were removing trees some people wanted to keep; but, the consensus vote of the neighbors and all of the scientists with whom we worked was to restore the meadow and not let it succeed into a mixed forest. The neighbors decided to use the perimeter around the meadow as the looping nature trail we call Meadow Loop Trail."

Bluebirds and mockingbirds are at home in the meadow. Otters, beavers, blue herons and crawfish are all in Peachtree Creek.

"The collaborative nature of the South Fork Conservancy's natural restoration work is just the type of effort the Fish

and Wildlife Service and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation are seeking to support through Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships," says Cindy Dohner, the Service's Southeast Regional Director. "The South Fork Conservancy includes everyone in its work—Atlanta Public Schools, Girl Scouts, National Audubon Society, neighborhood groups. Everyone has a voice, and they are all lending a hand."

The community's work continues in and around Peachtree Creek. The Atlanta Botanical Garden and the Blue Heron Nature Preserve helped choose the wildflowers in the meadow. The National Audubon Society conducts bird identification tours. Eco-Addendum, a nonprofit group in Atlanta that conducts naturalist walks, held a wildflower tour in mid-July. Students grew American Chestnut hybrids to plant along a creek bank downstream of the meadow, as Atlanta Public Schools and The American Chestnut Foundation created an orchard of blight resistant chestnut trees.

Along with Atlanta, two other cities—Anchorage, Alaska, and Springfield, Massachusetts—joined the 14 others with Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships through the Five Star grants.

Five cities—Atlanta, Georgia; Baltimore, Maryland; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; New Haven, Connecticut; and McAllen, Texas—are now designated Urban Bird Treaty cities, joining 21 other such partnerships nationwide. The Urban Conservation Treaty for Migratory Birds—known as the Urban Bird Treaty—works with cities and partners to conserve migratory birds through education, citizen science and conservation action in urban and suburban areas. □

KATHERINE TAYLOR, External Affairs, Southeast Region

Peachtree Creek. They also planted milkweed and educated neighbors about the monarch caterpillar's dependence on milkweed as a food source. In addition, The Georgia Conservancy is forming groups of volunteers to hold regularly scheduled Monday morning workdays to keep the milkweed plants from being overwhelmed by honeysuckle or kudzu.

The milkweed plants are thriving," says Sally Sears of the South Fork Conservancy. "We saw our first monarchs return in mid-July."

Partnerships, such as this new one with the South Fork Conservancy, are all part of the Service's Urban Wildlife

Very Bee-Coming

A drop of volunteerism makes for positive ripples

by JANE HENDRON and SARAH SWENTY

Pollinators, including bees and butterflies, are struggling to survive in California and throughout the United States. Over the summer, President Obama signed the National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators, calling on the American people to assist in the conservation of these species, which are critical to the nation's economy, food security and environmental health.

John Cleckler, the liaison to CalTrans, the California Department of Transportation, for the Service's Sacramento Field Office, had already been doing just that.

Cleckler was excited to learn his daughter's Montessori school in urbanized Carmichael, California, was next door to Koobs Nature Preserve, which, in addition to being a Vietnam Memorial, serves as an outdoor classroom.

Seeing invasive trees and weeds taking over the four-acre site and crowding out native

Biologist Leigh Bartoo identified and successfully secured grants to purchase hundreds of milkweed (pictured here) and other native plant species for the Koobs Preserve.

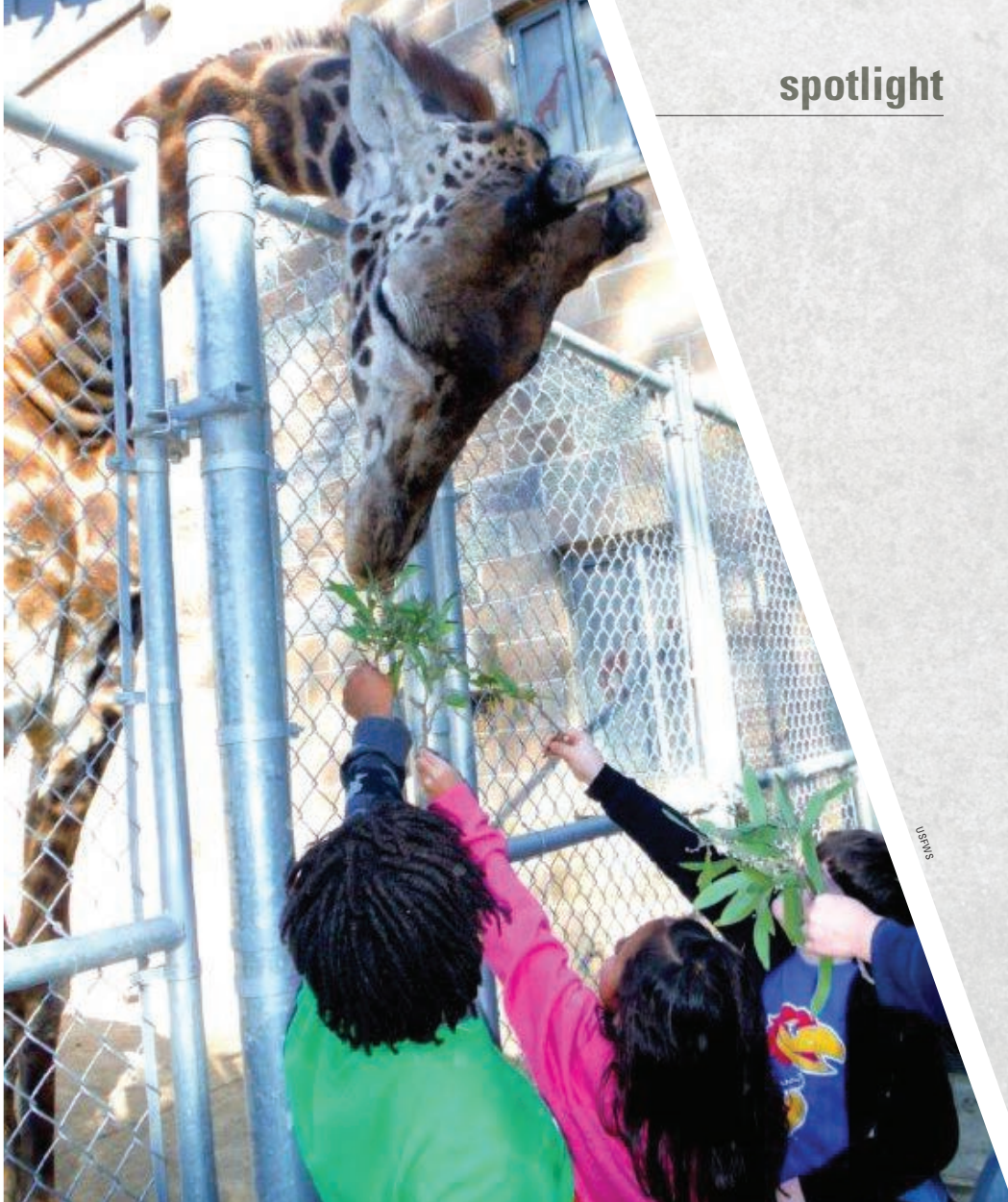




plants and animals, Cleckler began organizing volunteers to maintain and improve the site. Tasks have included reclaiming pathways, removing non-native plants and much more.

Service biologist Leigh Bartoo secured grants to purchase hundreds of milkweed plants and other native plant species for the preserve. Students from the Montessori school planted and now help care for the site, which provides valuable habitat for monarch butterflies and other native pollinators. This hands-on experience helps kids understand the role and value of pollinators and how to protect the environment.

Cleckler also engaged local partners, such as Westervelt Environmental, which digitally mapped the preserve;



the Sacramento Zoo, which accepted downed invasive acacia trees to feed their animals; and Bailey Tree Co., which donated large amounts of mulch.

Now a home to native pollinators and birds, Koobs Preserve provides urban schoolchildren a way to connect with nature, and offers their parents a monthly opportunity to enjoy camaraderie and volunteerism.

The efforts to improve the preserve caught the attention of the Carmichael Kiwanis Club, which recognized Cleckler as the 2015 Volunteer of the Year for his “extraordinary community service.”

JANE HENDRON and SARAH SWENTY,
External Affairs, Pacific Southwest Region

(Left) The Carmichael Kiwanis Club recognized John Cleckler as the 2015 Volunteer of the Year. (Above) Children who helped with the Koobs Preserve restoration efforts got to deliver the downed invasive acacia trees to the Sacramento Zoo for the giraffes and other animals to eat.

EUREKA!

*Empowering girls
through a
connection to
the outdoors*

by JENNIFER LAPIS

The Service's Northeast Region teamed up with the Holyoke, Massachusetts, Chapter of Girls Inc. this summer to engage and educate teenage girls by connecting them with nature.

(Top) Learning about fresh water mussels. (Bottom left) Girls in the Eureka! program search for life in pond water. (Bottom right) Looking for frogs at the edge of the pond.



TOP: DAVID PERKINS/USFWS. BOTTOM: JENNIFER LAPIS/USFWS





Girls Inc. is a national organization that inspires girls to be strong, smart and bold by providing them with life-changing experiences and solutions to the unique challenges they face. Girls involved in the program this summer spent time outside with Service biologists and visitor services staff, gaining hands-on experience in the natural world that surrounds their communities.

The girls ranged in age from 5 to 18 and came from urban communities in the greater Springfield area of western Massachusetts. Some had never experienced being immersed in nature before the summer program.

Service employees and interns worked together to develop interactive, educational and fun experiences for all the girls. In addition, staff from the wildlife department at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, helped to conduct some of the activities, such as mist netting birds for study and bird identification.

The work with Girls Inc. supports the Service's Urban Wildlife Conservation Program, which creates opportunities for urban residents to find, appreciate and care for nature in their cities and beyond. In fact, Springfield was just designated as one of the Service's Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnerships.

Some of the girls in the Girls Inc. five-year Eureka! Program got their hands dirty by pulling invasive multi-flora rose, exploring aquatic insects in a pond, fishing for trout and learning to hold birds that were captured in the mist nets.

At first, many of the girls were squeamish about touching or holding the plants or animals. However, their curiosity got the better of them, and soon they were smiling and laughing as they held a fish they caught or pulled weeds from one of the raceways while wearing waders, waist deep in the water.

"My favorite part was when we went into the water with the waders on," says Haley, a first-year student in the Eureka! Program. "I liked going outside to try something new and face my fears."

Another aspect of the program involves placing third-, fourth- and fifth-year Eureka! students in work settings for four weeks, 20 hours a week. During her month-long stint in the Northeast Region's External Affairs Office, 15-year-old Marie Gonzales developed a work program focusing on communications and storytelling. "This experience has given me a wider knowledge of the different types of professions that I can look into. Who knew you could help fish and wildlife for a real-world job?" she wrote in one of her blogs.

Sarah Dunton, director of Education for the Holyoke Chapter of Girls Inc., sums the partnership up perfectly: "The girls attending both the Eureka! and Elementary School STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering and Math] programming have had a great time exploring the outdoors with the Service team. This partnership allows us to offer more opportunities for girls to explore STEM, STEM careers and the science in the world around them." □

JENNIFER LAPIS, External Affairs, Northeast Region

BETH GOODSTEIN/USFWS

For People & Pollinators

Planting a future for monarchs in St. Louis

by JOANNA GILKESON

Clocking in at up to 3,000 miles from start to finish, the monarch butterfly's annual fall migration is one of the longest wildlife journeys in the world. During this time, monarchs fly anywhere from 50 to 250 miles per day from their summer breeding habitats in the United States and Canada to their forested winter sanctuaries in Mexico. To successfully cross the finish line, monarchs need places to rest and recharge along the lengthy trek. But such friendly stopping points, as well as breeding areas, have decreased, hurting the butterfly's population.

The public has taken notice and, in some places, started taking action.



“We know that as much as nature needs people; people need nature—even more so in an urban environment,” says Mayor Francis Slay of St. Louis, Missouri. “Our Milkweeds for Monarchs project aims to help people experience biodiversity where they live, work, learn and play. In turn, we hope people will enjoy benefits of connecting with nature, such as improved health and well-being, reduced stress and anxiety, and enhanced educational outcomes.”

For St. Louis, the movement to restore monarchs represents something much bigger—a movement to conserve all that comes with this beautiful butterfly: habitat, prairie flowers, healthy pollinator populations and thriving urban communities.

Milkweeds for Monarchs: The St. Louis Butterfly Project is one city's effort to help re-create native habitat by building urban butterfly gardens that also offer places for residents to enjoy nature. On Earth Day 2014, Mayor Slay committed the city to planting 50 monarch gardens to commemorate the city's 250th birthday last year, and he challenged the community to plant 200 more. The city is tracking newly created gardens on a map, which currently shows more than 160 registered monarch gardens in St. Louis.

Native milkweed is the sole food source for monarch caterpillars and the host plant on which females lay their eggs. Milkweed flowers are also one of the plants that provide nectar as food for adult monarchs throughout their lifespan and during their migration. As wildflowers bloom at different times throughout the year, a diversity of nectar sources is needed to nourish monarchs and other pollinators.



GEORGIA FARHAM/JUSEFWS

Tallgrass prairie and its plentiful wildflowers once covered mile upon mile of the American Midwest. It was home to many well-known species, including bison, prairie-chicken, prairie dogs, grassland birds and the monarch butterfly. Now, though, less than 4 percent of original prairie habitat remains.

To transform the butterfly's geographically large migration corridor to provide pockets of pollinator and prairie habitat, the Service is supporting St. Louis and other local efforts one patch at a time. In June, Service Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius and Mayor Slay joined conservation partners and the Eastern Tallgrass Prairie Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) to announce a joint \$80,000 grant from the Service and the LCC in support of the St. Louis Milkweeds for Monarchs program.

The \$80,000 grant has enabled the program to expand into schools and neighborhoods, as well as hire a part-time coordinator and host a monarch intern, Elizabeth Ward.



COURTESY OF THE CITY OF ST. LOUIS

"It's a terrific partnership that the city has with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the LCC. This grant really helped the city build capacity for the program and position it to monitor the impact of our gardens on butterflies and the well-being of the community," Ward says. With the help of the grant, researchers from the Missouri Botanical Garden, the St. Louis Zoo and the University of Missouri-St. Louis will evaluate 30 existing monarch gardens and seven urban prairie patches for both environmental and socioeconomic outcomes. This research is intended to inform cities across the nation about how to improve monarch habitat and urban conservation efforts.

With St. Louis taking the initiative to provide an urban oasis for monarchs and pollinators in a community-driven way in the middle of their migration path, it wasn't long before other metropolitan areas took notice.

"We have been contacted by various cities across the nation who have reached out and want to do similar things and empower their own communities," says Catherine Werner, director of sustainability for St. Louis, who oversees the Milkweeds for Monarchs program. "I think a lot of people have seen positive things in Milkweeds for Monarchs and people want an initiative like this in their own area. We're excited to get this attention and help lead by example."



JOANNA GILKESON/JUSEFWS

(Top left) Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius helps a preschooler plant milkweed as part of the St. Louis Milkweeds for Monarchs program. (Top right) The St. Louis City Hall butterfly garden, including butterfly weed and purple cone flowers for pollinators. (Bottom) Monarchs need places to rest and refuel, like this wild onion plant.

Mayor Slay and the city have taken a groundbreaking approach to helping restore monarch populations. In time, Milkweeds for Monarchs: The St. Louis Butterfly Project will be one piece of multiple urban monarch initiatives along the monarch's migration route, roughly represented by the I-35 corridor; to support pollinators, and benefit people who live, work and play across the nation. □

JOANNA GILKESON, External Affairs, Midwest Region

*Project aims
to restore
marsh and
beachfront at
Prime Hook
Refuge*

marshy renewal

A dredge digs out channels in the refuge to allow free flow of water. The sand and mud are being used to fill in open-water areas to allow for plant growth.

by RON MACARTHUR | One of the largest marsh restoration projects ever attempted on the East Coast is finally underway. After years filled with studies, public hearings, research and permitting, work has started on a \$38 million project to replenish the Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge marsh and beachfront in Delaware.

Three dredges have started Phase 1 of the project to dig out channels to allow free flow of water from the Broadkill River in the south and Slaughter Canal and Prime Hook Creek in the north. It's that water moving through the channels that will provide the foundation for marsh restoration. Dredging will be ongoing 16 hours a day, six days a week and take about a year.

The increased water exchange and flow will help lower the water level within the refuge by reducing the amount of water stacked in the existing refuge units. The exposed mudflats will provide an area for marsh grass to grow. It's hoped that growth will occur naturally but aerial seeding is not out of the question, says Al Rizzo, project leader for the Coastal Delaware National Wildlife Refuge Complex.



BART WILSON/USFWS



BART WILSON/USFWS

Most of the work is taking place in Unit 2, the most decimated of the four refuge impoundments. Nearly all of the marsh in the unit has been destroyed by saltwater intrusion from the Delaware Bay. Storms have opened a series of breaches along the coastline of Unit 2.

Thousands of acres of what used to be freshwater marsh have been changed to open water, drowning out marsh plants.

Rizzo says the ultimate goal of the project is to return the refuge to a functioning saltwater marsh—with smaller sections of freshwater marsh—as it was a half century ago.

“We’ve seen some natural growth the last one to two years,” Rizzo says. “We are on the right track.”

Phase 2 of the project—set to begin in early October—will be the rebuilding of about 7,000 feet of beachfront north of Primehook Beach with 1.1 million cubic feet of Delaware Bay sand. More than 10,000 feet of sand fence will be installed in three rows to provide stability. The project includes the planting of 20 acres of spartina and 38 more acres of other vegetation, including beach grass. This phase will be coordinated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The project is among 31 Service coastal resilience projects funded by the Department of the Interior through the Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2013. □

RON MACARTHUR, *The Cape Gazette*
(reprinted with permission)

(Top) Staff of ER&M plant spartina plugs by hand into the mudflats along Fowler Road. (Bottom) Birds are already using the new mudflats, created by spraying rich organic soils into open water to encourage marsh grass regrowth.

MUSEUM OBJECTS COME TO LIFE

This is a series of curiosities of the Service's history from the National Conservation Training Center Museum. As the first and only curator of the museum, Jeanne M. Harold says the history surrounding the objects in the museum give them life.

Squirrely



On a trip to Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia, I absolutely fell in love with the endangered Delmarva peninsula fox squirrels that were running all over the place. Being a curator, and curators are a collectively squirrely bunch, I shamelessly asked them to freeze and send me the next road-casualty squirrel that

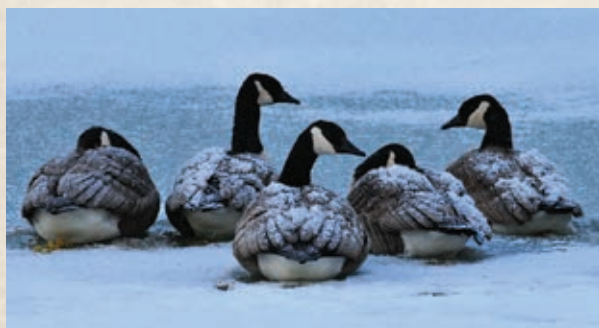
they encountered. They did, and our taxidermist brought him back to life (so to speak) with a beautiful mount. The little guy now greets our students and visitors when they arrive at the lobby of NCTC. We named him George; stop and say hello if you visit us! We are removing the squirrel from Endangered Species Act protection because it is recovered.

Radiation Alert!



We have two vintage Geiger counters from Santee National Wildlife Refuge in South Carolina. They are Civilian Defense equipment and would have been used if the unimaginable happened—a nuclear attack or leak from a nuclear power plant. Fortunately they were never needed as evidenced by the large bag of unused batteries that accompanies the counters. Only in the case of disaster equipment are we happy that something we purchase sits gathering dust and is then disposed of.

Just Honing His Skills



C. Douglas Swanson was a law enforcement officer with the Service for many in the mid-20th century. As a special agent, he was involved in many important cases. He won accolades for a historic alligator poaching case that

spanned from Louisiana to New Jersey. He won marksman certificates annually, and he even won second prize in the 1965 Grapevine Liars Contest, run by one of the regional offices. He told a story about birds in a cold snap whose feet froze into the water and they lifted up the entire lake they were sitting on. For his tall tale, he won a capon. Not that lying was condoned in the highest offices of the Service! I tend to write it up to being a good undercover special agent, and Agent Swanson was certainly that.

Bear Ink



We recently received a bear tattooing kit from Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. The small machine is similar to ones found at tattoo parlors everywhere. It was used to put identifying ear markings on sedated (I hope well sedated!) bears as part of studies on populations and habits. I, myself have a little bear tattooed on my wrist.

I think it only fair, then, that bears should have a tiny tattoo of me artfully applied to their ears also, but I think all they got was a number.

transitions

Mountain-Prairie

Anna Muñoz, currently the Chief of Staff to the Director, has been tapped as the new Assistant Regional Director for External Affairs in the Mountain-Prairie Region.

In her current role she leads Departmental and Directorate-level coordination for the agency. She brings leadership, policy and management experience from a range of positions and leadership-level details that include: Ecological Services, National Wildlife Refuge System, and Congressional and Legislative Affairs. Her experience ranges from field-work in the Southwest Region as a wildlife biologist to policy development in Headquarters. She also worked for the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency earlier in her career. She holds a master of science degree in wildlife and fisheries science from Texas A&M University. □

Midwest



Bob Russell (pictured between Migratory Birds staff Katie Koch and Tom Will) retired on July 31, ending a 34-year career with the federal government. He had been with the Service for 17 years, the last 14 with the Midwest Region's Migratory Bird Program.

Bob helped save the Meadowlands with the Service's Ecological Services Field Office in New Jersey, and worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in New Orleans, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Department of Corrections as a biologist, the Defense Mapping Agency in Washington, DC, (he's always been secretive about that work), Everglades National Park, and Gulf Island National Seashore in Mississippi. His most exotic job was warden for the Cape Clear Bird Observatory in Ireland.

Bob is a gifted birder, with a life list of 1,200-plus species (which does not YET include an ivory-billed woodpecker and Eskimo curlew). He has an encyclopedic knowledge of bird distribution and abundance. He serves on the Records Committee for the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union and was the most active contributor to the recently completed Minnesota Breeding Bird Atlas.

One of Bob's major duties has been to help develop and implement conservation plans for shorebirds and waterbirds that occur in the region's Bird Conservation Regions and Joint Ventures. He has been involved in the Whooping Crane Eastern Population reintroduction project since its inception. Bob's breadth of field experience has also allowed him to provide excellent technical assistance to field stations and partners.

Bob loves traveling and fine food. He has visited many special birding spots in both the Palearctic and the Nearctic. He has spent many hours (of his own time) in the Southeast

Region looking for the very elusive ivory-billed woodpecker, and he'll be able to intensify those efforts in retirement. Bob also might write a long-promised book on the birds of Stearns County, Minnesota, based on decades of monitoring data he has amassed in this area that is near and dear to his heart.

Bob will continue to assist the program as a volunteer after his retirement by helping complete Breeding Bird Survey routes and survey blocks for the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas Project. □

TOM COOPER, Migratory Bird Program, Midwest Region

Leopold's Legacy



Estella Leopold, 88, dedicates the Leopold Memorial Site at the site where her father, Aldo Leopold, died, fighting a neighbor's fire, in 1948. The dedication came during the Aldo Leopold Foundation's Building a Land Ethic Conference in August in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Cynthia Martinez, Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and others represented the Service. To watch keynotes from the conference, go to bit.ly/1VSeykG

MARIA ARNOLD/USFWS



Alisa Shull, a 32-year Service veteran, has been named Endangered Species Chief for

the Midwest Region. Alisa, a native of Richmond, Virginia, comes to region from the Austin, Texas, Ecological Services Field Office.

Alisa started with the Service as a co-op student working for Patuxent Wildlife Research Center and later with the Endangered Species Program in the Southwest Regional Office in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She moved to the Fort Worth Field Office and later transferred to Austin, Texas, when Sam Hamilton (as the State Administrator) opened an office there in 1991. Alisa was the listing and recovery branch Chief there most of the next 24 years, with a short break to serve as the Edwards Aquifer Coordinator.

Alisa developed a strong interest and love for wildlife and nature as a child, when her interest was fueled by her great-grandmother and grandmother. "My great-grandmother would talk about wildlife on her property when I spent time with her on her place in the country," Alisa says. "My grandmother bought me a subscription to Ranger Rick magazine and renewed it for years. I'm a classic example of how connecting children with nature can encourage them to value nature and support its conservation."

After receiving her B.S. degree from Virginia Tech, where she majored in forestry and wildlife, Alisa earned her M.S. degree in wildlife ecology from Oklahoma State University. Her thesis work focused on bison at Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge.

Alisa's husband, Patrick Connor, continues working for the Austin Field Office via telework from the Midwest Regional Office. They have two adult daughters.

After 24 years in Austin, a move to the north is a big change. "I've heard great things about the people in Region 3 and I'm excited to be here," she says. "You can see from my background that this is the farthest north and coldest place I've ever lived, so tips on how to survive the winters are welcome!" □

GEORGIA PARHAM, External Affairs, Midwest Region



After 31 years of federal service—all of them with the Service—**Steve Lewis**

retired on June 30. Steve began his career in 1984 in the Division of Refuge Management in Washington, DC. He later moved to the Migratory Bird Management Office, which was developing a national program focusing on nongame bird conservation, and Steve was fortunate to be one of the people to help get that effort off the ground.

In 1987, then-Director Frank Dunkle wanted to downsize the Washington Office, and that offered Steve and his wife, Lynn, who is with the Ecological Services Program in the regional office, an opportunity to come to the Midwest Region. In his early days in the region, Steve assisted with some of the planning that fed into the then-new North American Waterfowl Management Plan. He also spent two enjoyable years at Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge.

In 1990, Steve returned to the regional office and assumed the job he would have the rest of his career as the region's Nongame Bird Coordinator. In that capacity, he has worked with regional field stations, other regions and partners to develop a coordinated approach to the conservation and management of nongame birds in the Upper Midwest as well as other places "our" birds go in the non-breeding season.

Steve says that it has been a real privilege working with colleagues to address the challenges faced by the several hundred nongame bird species that occur in the Midwest Region at some point in their annual cycle. He appreciates the support that nearly 20 Regional Directors, Assistant Regional Directors and Division Chiefs, as well as many field station managers and biologists, have given him (and the birds) over the years.

Steve plans on doing some volunteer work, along with a lot of bike riding! Steve will be greatly missed by the Migratory Bird Program family and everybody who had the pleasure

of working with him! His passion for conserving and better understanding migratory birds is sure to continue into his retirement. □

TOM COOPER, Migratory Bird Program, Midwest Region

Northeast

Joe McCauley: My Uncle, My Conservation Hero



Probably, I was whining about what to do for my grade school science fair project one year. My mom suggested I talk to my uncle who was early in his Service career, working at Supawna Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in New Jersey.

That was how I found myself playing a tiny role in the "Live Trapping and Relocation of Northern Bobwhite Quail."

The goal was to trap bobwhites at Supawna Meadows and relocate them to the Tinicum National Environmental Center, what is now John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum in Philadelphia.

Reading my project again, I was reminded that we failed pretty miserably: Only eight birds were caught; just six released; and none survived. The bird is listed as rare at John Heinz now.

But it introduced me to the Service and let me spend time outdoors with my uncle, so on that hand it was a success.

Now, nearly 30 years later, I am editor of *Fish & Wildlife News*, and Uncle Joe (McCauley) is retiring after a 32-year Service career that took him throughout the Northeast Region. His last day is Oct. 31.

Joe started as a co-op student at the Cortland, New York, Ecological Services Field Office in May 1983 and served as a co-op the next year at Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia and North Carolina. After two years in the regional office as an ascertainment biologist (land protection planner), he returned to the field, first at Supawna Meadows and then for nearly seven years at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge in Virginia. After another stint in the regional office (this time as Atlantic Coast Joint Venture Coordinator), he spent 10 years at Eastern Virginia Rivers National Wildlife Refuge Complex. He is retiring as Chief of the Realty Division for the National Wildlife Refuge System in the Northeast Region.

Of all his jobs (general biologist, wildlife biologist, refuge manager, and fish and wildlife administrator), Joe says, "Every job I've held has been an honor and a treasure, and I have loved them all. That said, I will always consider myself a refuge manager first and foremost."

I know I won't leave as big a mark on the Service as Joe has. Wendi Weber, the Northeast Regional Director, says of Joe: "I've never known a Fish and Wildlife Service without Joe McCauley. Joe's integrity, strategic thinking and "can-do" attitude made him loved and respected by his colleagues—both inside the Service and with partners and landowners. His conservation legacy is remarkable, and he will be sorely missed."

Another colleague praises Joe, for knowing everything about everything. How can I compete with that?

So I ask Joe what he is most proud of.

It isn't "Live Trapping and Relocation of Northern Bobwhite Quail." It also isn't the gig at the Library of Congress when he and the rest of the Sturgeon Generals played *I'm a Fish*, a song he wrote for a compilation CD to celebrate the refuge system centennial. It isn't even his work to help launch the South Atlantic Migratory Bird Initiative, the first integrated bird conservation plan under the North American Bird Conservation Initiative and done by a Joint Venture

He says he is proud of all the land he helped bring into the National Wildlife Refuge System. During Joe's tenure as Realty Chief, a total of 17,721 acres were added to the system. Of course, he played a role in land conservation before his Realty days—one productive partnership he developed at

Eastern Rivers acquired more than 20 refuge tracts as well as additional partner-owned protected lands.

But he adds, "I have to say that I am most proud of those young (at least younger!) men and women who I have helped get a foothold with the Service. Recruitment and mentoring are also enduring legacies, and helping bring in new talent, skills and diversity is what will keep the Service vibrant and relevant for future generations of Americans."

Other than taking me fishing, Joe says of the future, "I will never abandon the mission." He also gave Virginia refuge managers a heads-up: "I look forward to volunteering and continuing to work with partners to advance land protection and conservation in my home watershed, the Chesapeake Bay. As an old fish once told me, "Spawn till you die."

Joe adds: "I'll be forever grateful to those who took a chance on me and gave me the most satisfying career anyone could hope for."

It is kind of awesome to have one of your conservation heroes in your family. □

MATT TROTT, External Affairs, Headquarters

honors

Headquarters



Jim Bowker, research program manager with the Service's Aquatic Animal

Drug Approval Partnership (AADAP) Program, says he's honored to be one of the 2015 recipients of the American Fisheries Society (AFS) Distinguished Service Award, which "recognizes outstanding contributions of time and energy for special projects or activities by AFS members." Jim earned the award for his work as a mentor of young professionals within AFS, and for retooling and reinvigorating the Emerging Leaders Mentorship Award Program.

Jim wasn't always a "fish guy" but is proud to be one today. He completed his undergraduate and graduate work at Eastern Michigan University and embarked on a career in chemistry, focused on analysis of contaminants in aquatic biota. After being surrounded by fishery biologists for years, he felt the itch to step back from the lab bench and get his hands on fish. One leap of faith and a cross-country move later, Jim found himself with the AADAP Program where he continues to shepherd sedatives, therapeutics and other essential tools for fisheries science through the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval

process. Jim has a reputation for going above and beyond the call of duty, and his strength as a scientist and commitment to leadership have been recognized by the Service as he most recently served as a coach for the Stepping Up To Leadership. His willingness to do and give more than expected is evident in his work with AFS, too. Besides the service he was honored for, he is an officer of the Fish Culture Section and Western Division and has made countless contributions to AFS initiatives.

Jim and the rest of the AADAP Program received the Service's 2014 Rachel Carson Award for Scientific Excellence (Group). AADAPP is part of Headquarters but is physically located in Montana. □



The League of United Latin Americans Citizens (LULAC) has honored the Service with two awards. The Presidential Sponsorship Award was presented by past-National LULAC President Margaret Moran to **the Service** in recognition of its new national partnership and support of their National Convention in Salt Lake City, Utah in July. The award

recognizes the Service's efforts to engage Latinos as a new audience, and signals LULAC's entry into wildlife conservation. The award also recognizes Director **Dan Ashe** (pictured, right, with LULAC National President Roger Rocha) for his leadership efforts championing diversity and inclusion efforts.

LULAC also presented the Federal Representative of the Year Award to External Affairs' **Noemi Perez** for her efforts to ensure a diverse multicultural federal government that accurately represents the people it serves. Noemi helped develop a national wildlife conservation initiative that cemented LULAC as the first national Latino partner for the agency. □

Congratulations to **Kayt Jonsson, Danielle Brigida, Ken Goddard, Barry Baker, Pepper Trail, Becky Kagan, Dyan Straughan, Ed Espinoza, Heidi Ruffler, Christina Meister, Nancy Monroe, Matt Trott, Danielle Kessler, David Yeargin and William Woody.** □

Pacific



For his efforts to enhance habitat for Yellowstone cutthroat trout, Partners for Fish and Wildlife biologist **Cary Myler** (pictured, right, with Damon Keen from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game) was honored by an Idaho conservation organization. The Henrys Lake Foundation presented Cary with the Louis Trager Memorial Award, which is given "in memory of Louis Trager whose life and deeds of stewardship exemplified a commitment of time and service in selfless dedication to the preservation and enhancement of the natural habitat of the Henrys Lake Watershed." Foundation President Phil Baker praises Cary's work. "Our work would not have been possible without the commitment that Cary has shown in helping us improve and protect the fishery of Henrys Lake, one of the most important Stillwater fisheries in the western United States," Barker says.

Stop Invasive Species in Your Tracks



COURTESY PLAYCLEANGO

Everybody has a role to play in stopping the advance of invasive species—those plants, animals and microorganisms that are not native to a particular area and wreak havoc outside their normal range. A new campaign the Service is partnering in PlayCleanGo: Stop Invasive Species in Your Tracks is a clear call to action to people who are regularly outdoors, whether working or recreating. More information: <www.playcleango.org>.

On March 3, in honor of World Wildlife Day, the Service's Wildlife Forensics Laboratory—the first and only full-service wildlife forensics lab in the world—held a live chat online from its Ashland, Oregon, offices. For incorporating live chat into a fascinating tour of the forensics lab, the Service won the Best Live Chat category of PR Daily's 2015 PR and Social Media Awards.

The chat consisted of interviews with experts and authorities on animal skeletons, animal morphology and anatomy, and animal gunshot wounds, interspersed with real-time questions from the national web audience.

A career biologist, Cary has worked for eight years as the Partners for Fish and Wildlife biologist in the Eastern Idaho Field Office on various conservation projects. The award does not surprise his supervisor, Kathleen Hendricks. "Cary embodies the concept of partnering in the Gem State. His work with the Henrys Lake Foundation is a shining example of his success in leveraging partnerships to deliver on-the-ground conservation," she says. □



On behalf of the Idaho Fish and Wildlife Office, fish and wildlife biologist **Dwayne Winslow** (pictured, center, with Allyn Meuleman of the Bureau of Reclamation and the Service's Michael Morse, Dwayne's supervisor) accepted an award from the Bureau of Reclamation for completing a comprehensive landscape-scale analysis of water delivery operations in the Snake River Plain. The analysis successfully balanced the operational needs of water users from Jackson, Idaho, to Brownlee Dam—approximately 670 river miles—with the conservation needs of the endangered Snake River physa snail and three other protected invertebrates. Dwayne was instrumental in completing the section 7 compliance under the Endangered Species Act,

National Environmental Policy Act review, and Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act implementation. The successful completion of the consultation contributed to the permitting of a new water management system, which will provide water to the people of the Minidoka Valley for many years to come while preserving the native aquatic wildlife of the Snake River. □

Southeast

Special Agent **Darwin Huggins**, Assistant Special Agent in Charge for the Southeast Region, has been named a winner of the 2015 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Guy Bradley Award, which honors "extraordinary individuals who have made an outstanding lifetime contribution to wildlife law enforcement, wildlife forensics or investigative techniques."

Darwin began his wildlife law enforcement career in 1980, working first as a game warden for Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. In 1990, he began his career with the Service as a refuge officer, eventually moving up to his current leadership position.

During his 35-year career, Darwin has compiled a record of superior accomplishment in wildlife law enforcement. He has served as the case agent in multiple investigations that have documented violations of the Endangered Species Act, Lacey Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, as well as other federal and state statutes. He has also worked with foreign, federal, state and local counterparts on enforcement of foreign, federal and state wildlife laws.

Darwin has held various leadership positions with the Office of Law Enforcement and leads by example, being an excellent role model. He is also a relied-upon expert in the field of wildlife law enforcement. □

Midwest



The Service's **Midwest Region** was honored with the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (MAFWA) President's Award, which recognizes stewardship and dedication to fish and wildlife conservation. This is the first time the Service has received this distinguished award.

"Recently the Service's Midwest Region has focused on improving working relationships with state fish and wildlife agencies and has significantly enhanced support for the states' programs and interests," said Ed Boggess, MAFWA president, in presenting the award. "These improved relationships and sensitivities to the authorities, roles, and needs of state fish and wildlife agencies are recognized and very much appreciated." He highlighted increased leadership and peer-to-peer efforts in such challenging areas as conserving the northern long-eared bat and efforts to control the spread of Asian carp.

"I am honored to accept this award on behalf of our entire team of Midwest Region employees who work closely with our state partners on a daily basis," said Tom Melius, Midwest Regional Director (pictured). "We greatly appreciate this recognition from MAFWA and our state partners and look forward to continued collaboration in conserving our fish and wildlife resources." □



The Service has used fire to conserve, protect and enhance habitats for fish, wildlife and plants since the early 1930s, and annually the Midwest Region honors one employee who effectively uses hazard fuel and prescribed fire techniques for wildfire prevention and habitat conservation management.

Blake Kinsley (pictured, left, with Midwest Regional Director Tom Melius) was selected by his peers as this year's Midwest Torch Award recipient. Blake has worked at the Iowa Wetland Management District and Union Slough National Wildlife Refuge in Iowa for six years.

"Blake has a high level of integrity in carrying out his job and goes above and beyond what is required of him. He is a leader that people follow" says Blake's supervisor, Clifford Berger.

Blake, with the help of his team, worked with Iowa Department of Natural Resources biologists to initiate a prescribed fire program covering 35 counties in the northwest region of Iowa. Blake's impressive work continues with his elite knowledge of Geographic Information System (GIS) and Fire Management Information Systems that contribute to important documentation. □

Northeast



Ron Essig, the Chief of the Fish and Wildlife Section of the Division of Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration in the Northeast Region, took over as the 131st president of the American Fisheries Society in August. "I am truly humbled to begin my tenure as president of the American Fisheries Society since so many fine leaders in our profession have come before me. I will be using the theme of 'Fisheries Conservation and Management: Making Connections and Building Partnerships' during the coming year," he says.

After earning a B.S. in biology from Rutgers University in 1976 and a M.S. in fisheries biology from the University

of Massachusetts in 1979, Ron worked with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. In 1991, Ron began his Service career as a fishery biologist with the Federal Aid Program in the Northeast Region where he has been administering Sport Fish Restoration and other grants to state fishery agencies for the past 24 years. □

At the 12th Conference of Parties (COP) for the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in June in Punta del Este, Uruguay, **Scott Johnston**, from the Migratory Bird Program, served as one of five U.S. delegates. During the opening of the convention, the United States was elected vice president of the convention, and the State Department asked Scott to take the role, largely a ceremonial one intended to assist the president during the convention if needed. At one point during the convention, the president did ask Scott to take over during an open floor session. Scott had the pleasure of calling on countries: "The Acting President recognizes the delegate from Democratic Republic of the Congo. You have the floor, sir."

In addition to his duties as vice president, Scott worked with multiple partners to host side events that highlighted the work he is doing on the Atlantic Flyway Shorebird Initiative—a multi-country effort to conserve shorebirds along the Atlantic. In addition Scott made presentations at the regional meetings where he spoke to representatives from the Western Hemisphere. □

The **Building a More Resilient Atlantic Coast** story map, an interactive online feature detailing Hurricane Sandy projects being implemented by the Service, has won a 2015 Special Achievement in GIS Award from Environmental Systems Research Institute (Esri). This prestigious international honor highlights organizations using Geographic Information System (GIS) to improve the world—and set new precedents throughout the GIS community.

The map features information, images and links for Hurricane Sandy resilience and recovery projects in 14 states, led by the Service and funded by \$167 million through the Department of the Interior. The story map was developed by External Affairs and GIS specialists at the Service using the Esri ArcGIS online mapping platform.

Nominations for the award are submitted by Esri staff from thousands of organizations worldwide, then reviewed and selected by Jack Dangermond, Esri president and founder. □



Northeast Regional Director **Wendi Weber** has been named as this year's recipient of the

Service's Ira Gabrielson Leadership Award. Wendi received the award in a ceremony in July at the National Conservation Training Center.

The Gabrielson Award is an honor that participants in the Service's Advanced Leadership Development Program (ALDP) bestow on one Service employee who models outstanding leadership. The award, now in its 13th year, is named after Dr. Ira Gabrielson, who served for 11 years as the director of the Bureau of Biological Survey, the precursor of the Fish and Wildlife Service.

The key leadership qualities used to evaluate nominees are: vision and determination; commitment and integrity; and executive leadership competencies such as leading people, business and acumen building coalitions. Her nomination says: "Wendi is the kind of leader you want to emulate" and cites many examples of her leadership, including "working tirelessly with congressional members and Department [of the Interior] officials to implement over \$86 million in response and restoration funds to FWS resources after Hurricane Sandy."

"I believe there is no greater honor than being recognized by Service colleagues who I respect and admire," Wendi says. "This has been an incredible honor that I will forever cherish."

Wendi joined the Service in 1998 and has served as the Northeast Regional Director since 2011. □

in memoriam

Pacific



Longtime Service employee **Carol Wanstrom** died June 29 at the age of 62. She suffered cardiac arrest while at work. An Idaho native, Carol was raised in the small farming community of Arco, Idaho. She graduated from Idaho State University in Pocatello with a bachelor's degree in government. Carol began her federal career working for Senator Frank Church (D-Idaho) in Washington, DC, as a Senate aide from 1976 to 1988. She then came home to Idaho and began her lifelong career with the Service in 1991 as a clerk. Throughout the years, she was promoted to secretary for the Idaho state supervisor.

A true believer in the mission of the Service, Carol was a dedicated employee and loved working for the Service. Carol thought of the staff in the office as part of her family and always enjoyed hearing about births, weddings and family events. Carol was an integral part of the Combined Federal Campaign, chairing the group multiple times. She also was the principal

leader of the charitable giving for the office's "Christmas Family" for the Women and Children's Alliance.

Carol thought of others before herself and led a life of gratitude and grace. □

Mountain-Prairie

Mountain-Prairie Region Contracting Officer Tim Officer's son, **Timothy A. Officer Jr.**, was killed during a military training accident in August in Florida. Timothy Officer Jr. was a member of an elite Air Force special operations unit and a decorated combat veteran with several tours of duty in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Tim's youngest son, Justin, was killed in combat while serving in Afghanistan in 2010. □



Shea Manfred Magstadt, 29, died July 6 in Stanley, North Dakota. Shea was born and raised in the Kindred, North Dakota, area where he developed a passion for the outdoors, wildlife, hunting and fishing. He graduated from North Dakota State University in Fargo with a bachelor's degree in zoology. His dream was to work

in the wildlife field, and this pursuit took him to seasonal jobs in Virginia, Louisiana, Kentucky, Georgia and Nebraska. His first permanent position was with the Service in Crosby, North Dakota. He was later transferred to Kenmare, North Dakota, as a wildlife refuge specialist for the Lostwood Wetland Management District.

Shea was hard working and dedicated to wildlife habitat management and protection, and he truly loved managing and protecting natural resources in the Prairie Pothole Region of northwest North Dakota. He especially enjoyed working with partners to use grazing and haying as tools to improve habitat on Service lands for the benefit of migratory birds and other wildlife.

Although not his favorite part of the job, Shea spent a tremendous amount of time working with oil companies to reduce impacts to Service interests from energy development. He completed this and all of his work with a sense of pride because he knew that his effort was making a difference for the resource.

Shea was especially proud that he successfully completed the Federal Wildlife Officer training program. Shea did an excellent job when dealing with law enforcement issues, and he truly enjoyed the contacts he made with individuals who were hunting and fishing in the field.

Even though Shea worked extremely hard every day, he was also known as a true office prankster. He continually kept his co-workers on edge as they never knew when they might become the target of his next practical joke. Shea had a great sense of humor and was quick to poke fun, but also took his share of jabs from the rest of the staff. Shea's presence at work kept things enjoyable and fun for everyone around him.

Shea was also an outdoor enthusiast who enjoyed hunting and fishing at every opportunity. He would pursue most any species of fish and game that was in season. From open water and ice fishing, spearing northern pike and snagging paddlefish to hunting deer, chasing upland birds and decoying waterfowl, he enjoyed it all. Waterfowl hunting was his true joy, and he spent many days in a decoy spread hunting ducks, geese and cranes.

Shea's pursuit of waterfowl did taper off after he got a new hunting partner, an energetic German shorthair puppy named Kota. Working with Kota created some frustration for Shea, but it paid off as the duo harvested many sharp-tailed grouse and pheasants.

Shea, his jokes, hard work and deep connection with nature will all be missed. □

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Taking a Break

Black skimmers visit Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge in North Carolina. As their name implies, black skimmers skim. They fly above the water with their bill open, the lower portion dipping just below the surface in order to snag a fish. They usually don't see their food, snapping their bills shut on fish by feel alone.



EVE TUREK

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