



# News Release

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**Southwest Region (Arizona • New Mexico • Oklahoma • Texas)**  
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## **Fishery Biologist Wins Award for Her Extraordinary Work Getting Children into America's Great Outdoors**

Congratulations to Jennifer Johnson who was presented with the Arizona/ New Mexico American Fisheries Society (AFS) "Professional of the Year Award" at the recent AZ/NM AFS Annual Meeting held in Pinetop Arizona on February 3-5, 2011. Johnson, a Fishery Biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) Arizona Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office (AZFWCO), was recognized for her considerable efforts in fisheries research and management, and for developing, and increasing fisheries education programs in many important and creative ways.

The American Fisheries Society is the world's oldest and largest organization dedicated to strengthening the fisheries profession, advancing fisheries science, and conserving fisheries resources. The Arizona/ New Mexico chapter's Professional of the Year Award is based on fisheries-related work that can span more than one year and can be given to a fisheries professional from a federal, state, tribal, university, or private agency or company working in Arizona or New Mexico.

Beginning in 2007, Johnson began exploring educational opportunities throughout Arizona. Johnson has been active in groups, programs, and events such as Trout in the Classroom, Kids Gone Wild, More Kids in the Woods, White Mountain Wildlife and Nature Center Wildlife Festival, Loan-A-Rod, Biologist in Training, Panther Pals, and youth fishing derbies, among others. Johnson has also been involved in supervising local young people in various conservation works.

Johnson has been an important part of developing innovative approaches for fisheries education for children, such as developing informative games like “Fashion-A-Fish” and “Fish Bingo.” Johnson also helped develop coloring pages containing native fish of Arizona. These games and activities aim to both provide entertainment as well as education for children who might not have been exposed to nature in this way before. For instance, “Fashion-A-Fish” teaches youth about fish morphology and anatomy. Other games Johnson has helped develop teach youth about native and non-native fishes.

“I am continually impressed by of Jennifer’s ideas and achievements,” said Mike Oetker, Assistant Regional Director of Fisheries for the Service’s Southwest Region. “She has certainly gone above and beyond in her efforts, and I can’t think of anyone who would be more deserving of this award. She is a credit to the fisheries department, as well as the Service.”

Connecting children with nature is increasingly important because research has shown that the value that people place on nature as adults is greatly influenced by their interaction with nature as children. Today, fewer and fewer children are exposed to the outdoors, which is not only bad for the future of our natural habitats; it is also bad for the children themselves who need the fresh air and exercise that the outdoors can provide.

As a woman working in the fisheries field, Johnson is in the minority, making her achievements all the more significant. Johnson was selected for this award out of a field of qualified nominees from across agencies all over Arizona and New Mexico. Apart from her extensive outreach and education work, Johnson was also recognized for her fisheries work with Arizona Native American tribes as well as important Apache trout recovery work.

“We are so proud to have her representing the fisheries department,” said Oetker. “Jennifer is an excellent example of an employee really taking the message and the values of the Fish and Wildlife Service to heart, and applying them to her work in a truly inspirational way.”

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The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working 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 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 on our work and the people who make it happen, visit [www.fws.gov](http://www.fws.gov).

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