



# DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

## news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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### NATIONAL WETLANDS CONSERVATION AWARD WINNERS ANNOUNCED

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director Mollie Beattie today announced Wildlife Forever, a conservation group headquartered in Minnetonka, Minnesota, and Joe Carter, a retired coastal resort developer, of Charleston, South Carolina, are the winners of the 1995 National Wetlands Conservation Awards.

The awards, recognizing outstanding private sector contributions toward the conservation of wetlands, are made annually to a private sector organization and to an individual.

Service officials will present the National Wetlands Conservation Awards at separate ceremonies; to Wildlife Forever on July 1 in Bloomington, Minnesota, and to Carter on June 30 in Washington, DC.

"I am encouraged by the positive efforts made by those who have awakened to the call and recognized the importance of America's wetlands to wildlife and people," said Director Beattie. "The National Wetlands Conservation Awards recognize the crucial role of the private sector in protecting valuable wetland areas."

Wildlife Forever, the non-profit affiliate of the North American Outdoor Group, provides challenge grant funding for projects involving habitat restoration, enhancement, and protection; research; fish and wildlife management; and conservation education.

"Wildlife Forever's commitment to restoring and protecting wetlands makes it highly deserving of the National Wetlands Conservation Award," said Director Beattie. "Not only has Wildlife Forever enhanced habitat for wildlife, but their project funding also has nurtured many wetlands conservation efforts benefitting private landowners."

Of the \$268,000 awarded through the grant program to date, more than \$149,000 have been provided for projects involving waterfowl and wetlands conservation, with more than 60,000 wetland acres affected nationwide.

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Many of these projects have involved restoring wetland functions in basins previously drained for agriculture, development, and industry. This has meant the return of vital habitat for waterfowl, big game animals, upland gamebirds, neotropical migratory songbirds, and economically important species of fish.

Service projects funded by Wildlife Forever include efforts to improve water quality by reducing the amounts of contaminants, pollutants, and sediments entering water supplies; reducing soil erosion by taking marginal lands out of production; recharging groundwater supplies; and reducing the downstream impacts of flooding.

These efforts have also led to increased recreational opportunities for the public and new economic opportunities for landowners; for example, many farmers are leasing areas of their property containing reestablished wetlands to hunting clubs.

Joe Carter's wetlands conservation efforts have been achieved while serving as chairman of the Winyah Bay Focus Area Task Force for the past 3 years. Prior to his retirement 2 years ago, Carter was a successful coastal resort developer.

A voluntary partnership of state and Federal agencies, conservation groups, and private landowners, the task force is committed to the long-term protection of the 525,000-acre Winyah Bay through voluntary conservation easements and management. The task force was formed under the umbrella of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, a cooperative program among the United States, Canada, and Mexico to increase waterfowl and other migratory bird populations throughout the North American continent through the restoration and protection of wetlands.

"Joe Carter is a shining example of how one person's ingenuity and willingness to give of themselves is making a difference for the future of our natural resources," said Director Beattie. "The progress being made by the Winyah Bay task force is due largely to his leadership as a facilitator and his outstanding coordination skills in bringing all parties to the table and forging a consensus."

Because of Carter's efforts, voluntary conservation easements have been placed on about 4,000 acres of private lands that have been identified as key to achieving meaningful long-term protection of the area. Carter was also instrumental in developing a proposal to establish the 42,000-acre Waccamaw Neck National Wildlife Refuge.

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The diverse habitats making up the Winyah Bay include 70 miles of important corridors for neotropical migratory songbirds, and coastal blackwater stream systems valuable to wading and shorebirds. Protecting resources in the area is particularly challenging due to its proximity to major tourist attractions and the associated demands for development in the Myrtle Beach Grand Strand area.

The National Wetlands Conservation Award was established in 1990. Recipients are traditionally presented with an award plaque and a framed Federal Duck Stamp print at annual ceremonies celebrating the launching of each year's new Federal Duck Stamp, which raises funds for wetlands acquisition.

The Service is involved in many wetlands conservation efforts owing to its responsibilities to protect migratory birds, inland fisheries, and endangered species, all of which depend to a large degree on wetlands habitat for their survival. Wetlands also benefit people by helping to purify water, recharge groundwater reservoirs, store floodwaters, and control erosion.

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