



# NEWS RELEASE

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**OUTSTANDING REFUGE MANAGER, REFUGE EMPLOYEE,  
AND REFUGE VOLUNTEER NAMED FOR 1996**

A refuge manager in New Mexico, a biologist in Texas, and a volunteer in North Carolina have been named the 1996 outstanding refuge manager, refuge employee, and refuge volunteer by the National Wildlife Refuge Association and the National Audubon Society.

The prestigious awards for outstanding accomplishments and contributions to the National Wildlife Refuge System were presented March 26 at the 61st annual North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference in Tulsa, Oklahoma. The honorees received commemorative plaques, certificates, and monetary awards.

In presenting the awards, Bill Ashe of the National Wildlife Refuge Association, said, "On the one hand, it is distressing that the refuge system is so underfunded that it cannot afford to properly maintain the habitat and visitor facilities.

"But how fortunate we are to have, throughout the system, innovative managers like Phil Norton, dedicated staff members like Tom Stehn, and committed volunteers like Don Perry, who get the job done, one way or another," he said.

The National Wildlife Refuge System was started by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 and has since grown to 508 refuges in all 50 states. It encompasses 92.3 million acres of lands and waters dedicated to wildlife, including some of the most endangered such as whooping cranes.

Phil Norton, manager of Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge in Socorro, New Mexico, received the Paul Kroegel Award, given in honor and memory of the system's first manager. Kroegel was made "protector" of Pelican Island, the system's first refuge in 1903. His dedication and effectiveness set a high standard for those who followed.

Norton was recognized for several innovative accomplishments including making major habitat improvements, improving community spirit, initiating a large and effective "Friends" group, and particularly for establishing a unique resident volunteer program. The volunteer ranks include electricians, building

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contractors, lawyers, mechanics, and equipment operators whose donated skills have helped make the Bosque one of the showcase refuges in the system.

Norton was instrumental in starting the annual "Festival of the Cranes," now managed by the Socorro Chamber of Commerce. It is attended by more than 10,000 people and is strongly supported by the community. As one of the refuge system's top 10 "birding hot spots," Bosque del Apache refuge attracts \$3.3 million to the area from birding ecotourism.

When Norton arrived at the Bosque refuge, portions of the refuge were a virtual "salt desert" because of inadequate water flows. Norton helped obtain \$1 million from the Interstate Stream Commission to clean out the drainage system. Then, volunteers and staff rerouted canals and built or rebuilt drainage facilities, including one that would have cost more than \$50,000 if contracted. With borrowed or surplus equipment, staff and volunteers also reshaped and regraded portions of the 15-mile visitors' tour road, saving \$200,000.

Norton initiated moist soil, native vegetation, and seasonal flooding management to duplicate "nature's way" and rejuvenate soils as well as to encourage select species of desirable plants. The results have been so outstanding that regional seminars are conducted on the refuge to demonstrate habitat management techniques for other organizations.

Manager Norton is currently collecting equipment and volunteer talent for another major project: burying 12 miles of overhead power lines, saving \$500,000 if contracted.

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Thomas V. Stehn, biologist at Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the Texas Gulf Coast at Austwell and winter home of the only wild flock of whooping cranes, was recognized for protecting and enhancing refuge habitat.

Because of the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, Aransas refuge has lost 1,150 acres of critical whooping crane habitat to erosion since the 1930s.

Over the course of 10 years, Stehn succeeded in persuading the Corps of Engineers to stop this erosion and loss of refuge habitat and actually create new marshes along the refuge shoreline.

He was a major player on an earlier innovative private project by Mitchell Energies in the development of a new marsh created from dredged material. It was the first project of its kind on the

Texas coast and the precursor to the erosion repair work by the Corps.

Together with the refuge manager, Stehn helped Conoco devise permit restrictions that allowed the company to develop its natural gas reserves on the refuge in an environmentally sound manner. This project established a new standard for operating in sensitive environments along the coast.

Stehn does aerial surveys of the whooping cranes during the winter at Aransas and helps the Canadian Wildlife Service with summer production surveys on the cranes' nesting grounds in Wood Buffalo National Park in the Northwest Territories. His knowledge of crane movements, nesting areas, and winter territories allows him to track the flock and determine mortalities, especially during the cranes' 6-month stay on the Texas coast.

Stehn served for many years on the Whooping Crane Recovery Team and continues to provide invaluable biological expertise to the team. He also helps with the Breeding Bird Survey and is the author of many respected research papers, studies, and reports.

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Richard "Don" Perry, a volunteer at Pea Island and Alligator River national wildlife refuges on the North Carolina coast near Manteo, epitomizes the outstanding volunteers in the refuge system.

Perry has donated 2,700 hours, valued at \$20,000, to the two refuges since 1988 and refuses to claim many additional hours, saying "it's not work." He is a highly acclaimed and sought-after birding tour leader and, according to his nominator, is frequently compared favorably to noted ornithologist and artist Roger Tory Peterson. He plans and presents school programs on bird banding and migration, conducts bird censuses and surveys, frequently trains new refuge staff in certain activities, and trains and coordinates refuge volunteers.

In addition to his talents as a self-taught ornithologist, Perry is a skilled 'finish' carpenter. He has built bookshelves, brochure racks, display cases, tables, boardwalks, observation platforms, and osprey nesting structures on the refuges. He is a popular ambassador for the Alligator River and Pea Island refuges, reminding citizens and visitors that these lands belong to them and they have a responsibility to take care of them.

The volunteer program on the two refuges has contributed over a million dollars in donated time and talent in the last 11 years.