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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE HONORS FOUR FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

Three citizens and a private conservation organization in Alaska, Maryland, Tennessee and the District of Columbia were honored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today for their contributions to the National Wildlife Refuge System and for their "passion and commitment to the conservation of wildlife, fisheries and plant resources."

Director Jamie Rappaport Clark presented the "Refuge Hero" honors at a Washington reception sponsored by Sen. John Chafee (R-Rhode Island), and Congressmen Jim Saxton (R-New Jersey), John Dingell (D-Michigan), John Tanner (D-Tennessee) and Ralph Regula (R-Ohio). The reception also marked an early kickoff for National Wildlife Refuge Week, which runs this year from October 11-17.

"Our purpose in being here tonight is to celebrate the growing support we see across the United States for the National Wildlife Refuge System," Clark said. "The 93 million acres making up this vast network of wildlife lands belongs to all Americans, and we always welcome a chance to say thank you to those who have become special friends. The four we honor here today are special friends. We could not do our job without them, and thousands more who help us every day, 365 days a year. They are invaluable."

The Service Citizen Awards were presented to:

- * Frank J. Wolff, of Cordova, Md., past president of Friends of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, which is located in Cambridge, Md.
- * Lonnie Williamson, of Washington, D.C., vice president of the Wildlife Management Institute and outdoor writer.

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AMERICA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES...
where wildlife comes naturally!

- * Ducks Unlimited of Memphis, Tn., accepted by Jack Payne, national director of conservation.
- * David R. Cline, of Anchorage, Ak., past regional vice president of the Alaska National Audubon Society.

Wolff was cited for serving "vigorously" to engage refuge managers and private citizens in organizing "Friends" groups to support area refuges. Wolff is credited with singlehandedly starting three such groups in Maryland and Delaware. As a current member of a national Friends mentoring team, Wolff travels extensively across the country instructing others on how to organize new groups.

Williamson helped raise awareness of the National Wildlife Refuge System among outdoor media because of the Wildlife Management Institute's leadership role on the CARE (Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement) group and his membership in the Outdoor Writers Association of America. Williamson secured continuous coverage of the refuge system through the OWAA publication, *Outdoors Unlimited*, for a full year. The coverage helped raise public awareness of Refuge funding issues as well as the System's contributions to conservation and public recreation.

Ducks Unlimited has been a virtual powerhouse for habitat improvement on refuges and waterfowl production areas over the past 15 years. The organization's biologists and engineers have constructed more than 470 projects worth more than \$21 million on scores of Refuge System units, often funding the projects wholly or in partnership with the Service. Without their assistance, innumerable wetland and upland restoration and enhancement projects including construction of water control structures, dikes, water delivery systems, nesting islands and prairie seedings would have been delayed well into the next century. Improved habitat conditions on 276,000 acres have benefitted not only waterfowl, but hundreds of birds that nest, rest and feed on the Refuge System.

Cline served 18 years as regional vice president for the National Audubon Society in Alaska. In that capacity, he provided funding and personal promotion of the popular Goose Conservation Calendar, which was prompted by the decline of four Arctic nesting species of geese. He also supported the annual Western Alaska science camp, providing 19 teenage students an opportunity to learn about natural science in the field. Cline served as a member of the negotiating team working to amend the 1916 Migratory Bird Treaty with Canada. And Cline also worked to establish the Alaska Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve, where more than 3,000 bald eagles congregate each winter -- the largest concentration in North America.

Begun in 1903 by President Theodore Roosevelt, the National Wildlife Refuge System now includes more than 500 refuges and thousands of waterfowl production areas and extends throughout all 50 states and U.S. territories and possessions. Hundreds of refuges are strategically located along the major migratory bird "flyways" and dozens were established to protect critically endangered species. National wildlife refuges teem with plants and animals of every variety, from mallard to moose, walleye pike to whooping crane, and cactus to cattail.

The Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Besides managing the 93-million-acre Refuge System, which includes thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas, the Service also operates 66 national fish hatcheries and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts.

Nearly 30 million people annually visit national wildlife refuges for birdwatching and other wildlife observation, hiking, fishing, hunting, nature photography and environmental education. At least one national wildlife refuge is located within an hour's drive of virtually every major city in the United States.

For more information on the National Wildlife Refuge System, call 1-800-344-WILD, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's homepage at www.fws.gov and click on "National Wildlife Refuge System," or consult the federal government pages in your telephone directory to find the nearest refuge.