

Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Awards

Nominations Form 2013

Award Categories (check only one per form)

I want to nominate: Wisconsin Conservation Warden Russ Fell for

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Spirit of the Shack

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Wildlife Biologist of the Year

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Excellence in Conservation

☐

Fisheries Biologist of the Year

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Law Enforcement Officer of the Year

Nominator information

Name: Dave Zebro

Organization: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Title: Regional Conservation Warden

E-mail: David.Zebro@wisconsin.gov

Phone number: 715.635.4093

1. Provide a brief (one page or less) overview explaining why the individual/agency meets the criteria for the award:

Conservation Warden Russ Fell has exhibited superb initiative to develop a well-rounded program within his administrative area and beyond. Russ does an incredible job of working with his community on everything from youth events, school talks, career days, hosting the Learn To Hunt bear and turkey programs. He is also involved in projects like Walleyes For Tomorrow and grant applications for youth days. He serves as a field training officer, Glock armorer and certified firearms instructor for both pistol and rifle. Russ dedicates a significant amount of time assisting at the DNR recruit academy in Tomah. Russ is held in high regard by fellow wardens on his team and statewide. Russ regularly assists wardens outside of his administrative area, participates in group checks and volunteers for statewide deployments. Russ is also very involved with his local law enforcement agencies and has become a household name around his administrative area.

Russ has maintained a superb attitude throughout his career. He has volunteered and continues to volunteer for training opportunities that increase his professional knowledge and skills as well as those of the warden force. He has also showed interest in advancing his career through promotional opportunities. He has also had a positive impact on the Spooner Warden Team and many wardens across the NOR. He is looked to as a leader and valued source of advice. He is extremely dedicated to the warden force.

Russ has a well-rounded law enforcement program and logged contacts, warnings and citations in a wide variety of categories. Russ logged numerous contacts with our felon in possession of firearms initiative and seized several firearms. Russ worked some deer ag tag hunting violations near Dallas, WI. Russ has a significant amount of tourists that fish local lakes and he has taken efforts to work overbaggers and conduct freezer checks. Russ worked migratory waterfowl cases and logged citations and warnings. Russ investigated several illegal baiting violations. Russ worked nighttime shine and shoot investigations. He worked fish run and tribal spearing duties. Russ worked an interesting shining complaint near Spider Lake where the suspect was observed shining, surveilled, and later found asleep in his vehicle at the boat launch. He located drugs, firearms and opium. Arrested and turned over to the subject to Barron County Sheriff's Dept. Russ investigated a serious hunting accident that resulted from 2

subjects shooting into a field of standing corn at running deer in front of the victim. The victim was hit in the thigh. Russ lead a detailed investigation ultimately finding the bullet at the scene with a metal detector. The WI Crime lab matched the gun and bullet to the shooter. Russ logged several illegal deer cases and assisted on one in Bruce. Russ tagged numerous furs and hosted a fur tagging day at the local police department providing excellent customer service to our local trappers.

Russ Fell is a household name in his administrative area. He is well-liked and respected by his community and the organizations he works with. Russ Fell is a valued team member and is regularly sought out for advice and leadership. Russ has an extensive network of cooperators and partnerships within his community. Russ works extremely well with all divisions within the DNR to support the overall mission of the department.

2. Please list and/or describe specific projects, work or accomplishments relevant to the award. Please limit your information to one page.

Russ wears his uniform proudly and is a great example of what is expected of a Conservation Warden. He also interacts with other LE outside of his Warden duties which makes the warden force a professional and well-trained presence. He assisted with the manhunt for armed bank robbers from the Exeland bank robbery. In addition, Russ serves as a tactical training instructor in firearms. He routinely works on issues concerning the statewide program and is required to travel across the state to provide qualifying shoots. He also works closely with recruit training in firearms and other LE topics.

Russ works closely with his local LE agencies and attends meetings of police chiefs and investigators. Russ works closely with his district attorney as well. Russ has earned "open door" access to his criminal justice partners which has also benefitted wardens that work with him.

Russ has organized and worked team group checks and teamed up with other wardens to work atv, snowmobile and boating details. Russ regularly logs efforts to target OWI, speed (radar) and noise enforcement duties on lakes and trails. He has investigated several snowmobile accidents and logged several snowmobile OWI arrests. One interesting boating OWI arrest took place on the Chetek Chain at night when Russ was nearly hit head on. Upon stopping the suspect boat he arrested the operator for being nearly 3x the legal limit and on parole with a "no drink" condition. Russ has attended or arranged for attendance for all of his safety courses. In addition, he spoke at safety classes that were offered during the Rice Lake and Cameron summer school classes

Russ received the 2009 NOR outstanding service team award for work accomplished with the water regulations staff shortages. Russ regularly works with water regs staff and county zoning office to address complaints or issues he comes across during patrol. Russ logged several littering investigations including a couch dumped in a ditch, fish guts being dumped into a lake and

general littering below the Rice Lake Dam. Russ investigated a significant manure spill caused by Nor Swiss Farms over-applying fields that ran off into a wetland. This company was referred to Department of Justice (DOJ) for charging. Russ investigated a siltation complaint on the Red Cedar River that was tracked back through the storm sewer to a new hospital construction zone.

Russ was involved in a wide variety of enforcement activities including trapping and fur tagging, bear, small game, turkey, waterfowl, ATV, boat and snowmobile, timber theft, waste of game, illegal baiting, septic haulers, manure runoff, sport fish enforcement, water regulations and shoreline development, shine and shoot cases, fish run, Ag Damage, musky snagging, a captive raccoon, littering, illegal burning and stormwater runoff.

Russ follows up on complaints concerning invasive species issues. He takes the time to educate the public when appropriate and maintains clean boating equipment to lead by example. Russ understands the department's stance on invasives and VHS. Russ investigated an untagged minnow trap in a trout stream during the closed season. He issued a citation and warned the subject for VHS violations. Russ worked with his supervisor to follow-up on some deer farm inspections for central office.

Russ is also very active in learning new skills and techniques for his own professional development. Russ attended high risk entry training at Volk Field. He uses his computer with programs such as Delorme, FGIS and Motorola Phone Tools. He uses camera surveillance on applicable cases and worked the metal detector on three incidents this year. Russ used his side-scan sonar to assist on three body recoveries from fatal boating accidents.

Russ maintains his equipment in good working order and adheres to maintenance schedules, winterizing, summarizing, etc... He is also a GLOCK armorer for the warden force. Russ had his radios reprogrammed and had a radio install completed for his patrol boat. Russ has become very good at using computer mapping software for investigations or accident documentation. His equipment is meticulously maintained and ready to respond.

Russ attends instructor workshops, trail ambassador meetings, and does a significant amount of guest speaking at civic group meetings. Russ attended the Barron County Fair and manned a DNR booth for public relations and information. Russ worked with his local newspapers and radio shows to cover a wide variety of DNR safety topics and general information dissemination. He made the cover and was featured in an article entitled "Opening Day With a Warden" in the March 2009 issue of American Hunter, a nationally distributed magazine. Russ organized the learn to bear hunt program for Barron and surrounding counties on the team. His two hunters were successful in taking bears with hounds. Russ took the time to fill out grant applications for the annual youth day event at the Rice Lake Rod and Gun Club. There were 125 kids signed up for this year's event and were mentored by 50 volunteers. Russ attended and assisted with the Women's outdoor shooting event at the Brill Area Sports Club. Russ worked with the Lights out program and assisted youth in ice fishing on Rice Lake. Fell and Cameron School teacher Travis Ebner organized the 5th annual Barron County

Learn to Hunt turkey program and sponsored 23 new turkey hunters. He spoke for career days at Rice Lake and Cameron High Schools. Russ attended the Monthly meeting of the Brill Rod and Gun Club. Russ participated in several local radio talk shows and spoke at several civic organizations (Rotary and RL men's club) in an attempt to promote safe, ethical hunting and regulations understanding prior to deer season. Russ spoke at a science class at the Rice Lake High School. Russ participated in the Chetek career fair and conducted three talks for high school students. Russ is very active with the local walleyes for tomorrow program and is looking into extended growth walleyes and habitat projects. Russ was a featured speaker at the Rice Lake Kiwanis club lunch at Lehman's in Rice Lake. Russ worked with the Bear Lake association to pass an ordinance for s-n-w along a sensitive wild rice area. Russ was a guest on a local Rice Lake radio station where he spoke about boat safety and aquatic invasives.

Russ has consistently operated at a high level throughout his career. He maintains his dedication to making the warden force a professional agency that is sought out for assistance and leadership. He has always been very active in tactical firearms training, FTO duties and training of new recruits. His public relations program is second to none and as I have stated before, he is a household name across his administrative area. He has explored promotional opportunities and continues to request leadership training opportunities on his annual learning plans. Russ has proven to be a "high output" warden that needs very little supervision to manage his programs. For all the above I feel that Warden Russ Fell has earned the Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award.

Midwestern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Awards

Nominations Form 2013

Award Categories (check only one per form)

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Spirit of the Shack

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Fisheries Biologist of the Year

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Wildlife Biologist of the Year

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Law Enforcement Officer of the Year

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Excellence in Conservation

Nominator information

Name: Mike Mitchener

Organization: KS Dept Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism

Title: PSE II

E-mail: mike.mitchener@ksoutdoors.com

Phone number: 620-672-0796

1. Provide a brief (one page or less) overview explaining why the individual/agency meets the criteria for the award:

I am pleased to nominate Jim Pitman for the 2013 Wildlife Section Award. Jim is a tireless employee who leads by example both internally and externally by his actions, attitudes, and conservation morals. Jim has worked for the Department for almost 8 years and in that time he has definitely made numerous contributions to wildlife management and conservation in Kansas and Nationally.

Jim is recognized as an expert in Lesser Prairie Chicken management, conservation and life history, in large part due to his post graduate research in Southwest Kansas. The information he gathered and analyzed as well as the contacts he made during his time at Kansas State University have made him an individual much sought after for his insight and input on lesser prairie chicken. Jim is a member of the lesser prairie chicken interstate working group made up of grouse biologists from all 5 states in the lesser prairie chicken range. He also serves with a group of biologists working with the Western Governors association developing a GIS based Decision Support System model

for threats and habitat needs for lesser prairie chicken. Jim has also been instrumental in Kansas working with NRCS and other federal agencies in development of the prairie chicken assessment tool, to assess habitats and their potential as lesser prairie chicken habitat. Jim has most recently been a key author of the lesser prairie chicken 5 state conservation plan to preclude listing of the lesser prairie chicken as threatened. Jim has been the primary developer of the habitat mitigation offset portion of the plan in which industry and landowners will voluntarily participate. This is a key portion of the plan to guarantee suitable habitat will exist for the lesser prairie chicken as well as providing certainty to the US Fish and Wildlife Service in their 12 month review of the potential listing of the lesser prairie chicken as threatened.

Jim was asked shortly after he started employment with the Department to be the MAFWA designee to serve on the Northern Bobwhite Technical Committee under SEAFWA. When the NBTC became the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative, Jim was asked and continues to serve on that organizations steering committee. Jim also serves on the National Wild Turkey Federation's Technical Committee as well as a member of the Kansas NWTF State Board.

Meanwhile back at Jim's real job as the Departments Small Game Program Coordinator, Jim has taken the reins of the departments turkey management committee and made it a very functional and effective group of employees that make management and regulatory recommendations that are well founded both biologically and socially.

Jim also has a tireless thirst for more and better knowledge. Jim continues his work to improve how survey data is collected and analyzed to give better information on species in his shop. Jim also works to develop research projects and successfully seeks grant funding to pursue these projects. Just a few of the projects Jim has been instrumental in developing include a project on Tom Turkey survival on public land in NW Kansas. A project in the flint hills on patch burning and patch grazing and effects on ground nesting birds with Kansas State University. Ongoing is development of a project on lesser prairie chicken in different habitats in Kansas to measure use of these different habitat types with new GPS radio technology.

Obviously, I have barely scratched the surface of involvement Jim has in wildlife conservation. But in this brief space I hope I have characterized Jim's deep passion for his job and wildlife conservation. Jim has had a relatively brief career so far and with so many contributions to date we can only look forward to the contributions that Jim will produce in the future.

Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Awards

Nominations Form 2013

Award Categories (check only one per form)

I want to nominate: Michael J. Hawkins for

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Spirit of the Shack

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Wildlife Biologist of the Year

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Excellence in Conservation

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Fisheries Biologist of the Year

☐

Law Enforcement Officer of the Year

Nominator information

Name: James R. Wahl

Organization: Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Title: NW Regional Fisheries Supervisor

E-mail: James.Wahl@dnr.iowa.gov

Phone number: 712-330-1848 (cell) or 712-336-1840

1. Provide a brief (one page or less) overview explaining why the individual/agency meets the criteria for the award:
2. Please list and/or describe specific projects, work or accomplishments relevant to the award. Please limit your information to one page.

I have answered both questions in the following narrative:

I would like to nominate Michael J. Hawkins for the 2013 MAFWA Fisheries Biologist of the Year award. Mike is a 14 year veteran of the Iowa DNR Fisheries Bureau and manages a nine county region in northwest Iowa stationed at the Spirit Lake Fish Hatchery.

Mike is a leader within our state working on watershed management projects. His skills with GIS, LIDAR, soil erosion models, and best management practices have helped him develop watershed plans in rural and urban settings. He currently has seven active lake restoration projects that he is working on. Several of these are shallow lake initiatives restoring highly perturbed shallow basins from the turbid water state to a clear water condition. An earlier successful project, Diamond Lake (Dickinson County), was selected by the National Fish Habitat Partnership as one of "10 Waters to Watch" for 2010.

Over the past 5 years Mike has utilized his leadership skills to spearhead the Lost Island Lake Restoration project. This collaborative effort between local stakeholders and numerous government-based partners reached completion in 2013. The benefits from this project have resulted in improved water quality and recreational fishery on this 1,100 acre natural lake located in Palo Alto County. Major accomplishments include the following: four water control structures & five fish barriers installed on adjacent marshes to remove adult carp & prevent re-infestation of carp on these shallow breeding areas; reducing carp biomass at Lost Island Lake from an estimated >400 lbs/ac to <50 lbs/ac utilizing a creative, incentive payment process with contract commercial anglers harvesting overabundant carp; aggressive stockings of sport fish predators to help control YOY carp reproduction; & implementation of a watershed management plan. As a result, water clarity has improved substantially with summer secchi disk readings of nearly 4 feet, and aquatic macrophytes sampled in 28 of 30 transects – the first vegetation documented in recent times. Sport fish numbers have increased substantially as well as fishing pressure with nearly 15,000 hours of fishing recorded during the summer of 2012.

Although Mike has been highly productive in watershed projects, his most significant accomplishment over the past year was the successful completion of an electrical fish barrier at the outlet of the Spirit Lake-Okoboji chain of lakes (Iowa Great Lakes). Flood waters on the Missouri and Little Sioux River drainage allowed Asian carp to enter the Iowa Great Lakes (IGL) during the summer of 2011. Fortunately flood waters receded quickly and only a small number of invasive carp migrated into the lakes. To prevent any future migration of invasive species, Mike led a local working group in 2012 to move the barrier project forward at a record setting pace. Local stakeholders raised \$400,000 to contribute to the million dollar project. Several Minnesota lakes are directly connected to the IGL's and Mike worked closely with the Minnesota DNR to secure additional funding support from their state (\$261,000) for barrier construction. Mike played a critical role in expediting the project through legal hurdles, permitting, contracting, and providing oversight of engineering design and construction. Construction was recently completed and the barrier is now fully functional heading into the 2013 open water season. Mike was awarded the Ace Cory Conservation Award by the Okoboji Protective Association for his tireless efforts and leadership in constructing the barrier.

If that wasn't enough to accomplish in one year, Mike also participated in the successful completion of an arched rapids replacing the Klondike Dam on the Big Sioux River in Lyon County. This multi-agency project initiated in 2009 was truly a joint effort of local (Lyon & Sioux Rural Water Association), state (Iowa DNR & South Dakota GF&P) and federal (USFWS & FEMA) agencies. The severely damaged low head dam was removed, thus eliminating safety concerns and allowing upstream fish migration, but still providing the upstream water elevation needed to operate alluvial drinking water wells. Mike wrote and secured a \$70,000 USFWS grant through the Fish Passage Program to help fund the ½ million dollar project which was completed this winter construction season.

In addition to Mike's fisheries biologist responsibilities, he also serves as IT technical support leader at the Spirit Lake Fish Hatchery. Mike provides IT support to over 20 Iowa DNR employees stationed at the Hatchery and also maintains the operating system so there is a minimum of down time and delays. He oftentimes is interrupted and puts his own work on hold to assist staff with a variety of computer and software issues. Mike recently constructed the Iowa DNR's first-ever radio station housed and maintained on Hatchery grounds. The low power AM traveler's radio station broadcasts Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) messages and other pertinent information to boaters and anglers entering the IGL's.

Mike is past president of the Iowa Chapter of the American Fisheries Society and current North Central Division representative to the Fisheries Management Section of the AFS. He serves as a volunteer on the Okoboji Fire & Rescue squad and has utilized his skills with underwater graphing systems to assist with several recoveries of drowning victims in the IGL's.

Mike has the highest respect from not only his peers, but also the many stakeholders he works directly with each and every day. I believe this and his many past and current accomplishments make Mike very deserving of consideration for MAFWA's Fisheries Biologist of the Year award.

Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Awards

Nominations Form 2013

Award Categories (check only one per form)

I want to nominate: Christopher B. Vitello for

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Spirit of the Shack

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Wildlife Biologist of the Year

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Excellence in Conservation

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Fisheries Biologist of the Year

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Law Enforcement Officer of the Year

Nominator information

Name: Brian D. Canaday

Organization: Missouri Department of Conservation

Title: Fisheries Field Operations Chief

E-mail: brian.canaday@mdc.mo.gov

Phone number: (573)-522-4115 *3174

It is my pleasure to nominate Christopher B. Vitello for the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies "*Spirit of the Shack*" Award.

1. Provide a brief (one page or less) overview explaining why the individual/agency meets the criteria for the award:

Chris is a highly motivated and experienced and well respected Fisheries Division Administrator and biologist with a 33+ year track record in resource management, project coordination and supervision. His extensive experience in interagency coordination, partnership development and public service is paralleled by a demonstrated history of multiple task management, budget oversight and working in team environments. Chris has served on numerous committees and task forces, designed and implemented field studies, management and recovery plans, coordinated stream basin and priority watershed plans, lead area and strategic planning efforts and excels with media and public contacts regarding various aspects of natural resource management. Widely known in conservation circles, Chris is a valued and respected individual who has consistently and effectively used vision and leadership skills throughout his career. Through his vision and leadership, the Missouri Department of Conservation and the natural Resources of Missouri are better today than ever before.

In thinking about this nomination, words like: **Visionary, Leader, Professional, Expert, Teacher, Respect, Coach, Mentor**, and **Friend** come to mind. Chris has exemplified what it means to be a "*conservation professional*" and we are fortunate to have him, his talents, and his energy in Missouri. Chris is an innovator and he willingly takes on difficult tasks exercising true leadership and professionalism representing the Missouri Department of Conservation and the resources he is dedicated to managing.

2. Please list and/or describe specific projects, work or accomplishments relevant to the award. Please limit your information to one page.

Examples of his innovation and leadership are demonstrated daily by his work with important conservation issues of the day including: the Regulations Committee, priority watersheds, endangered species, commercial fisheries, bio-security at the hatcheries, staff and boating safety, rare, threatened and endangered species like the Niangua darter, Ozark cavefish, Grotto sculpin and Pallid Sturgeon, Invasive species like Didymo, zebra mussel and Asian carps. Chris' s leadership in working alongside his staff with important sport fish species like smallmouth bass, trout and catfish have maintained and expanded the rich fishing history producing truly world class fisheries for smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, trout and catfish.

One (of many) examples that demonstrates Chris's leadership on a national scale includes his work to develop and foster a large scale habitat improvement project on Table Rock Lake and Lake Taneycomo with Bass Pro Shops, the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF), Arkansas Fish and Game Commission, the National Fish Habitat Partnership the US Fish & Wildlife Service and the US Army Corps of Engineers and Table Rock Lake Water Quality, Inc. on the Table Rock lake National Fish Habitat Initiative Project.

Initiated in 2007, this project is part of the NFWF's National Fish Habitat Initiative (NFHI) and More Fish Campaign and is designed to be a pilot project in a broader national program focusing on habitat restoration within reservoirs. . It is the nation's first National Fish Habitat Initiative (NFHI) project to enhance fish habitat and improve fishing opportunities. In 2012, the Table Rock/Taneycomo NFHI project is recognized by the National Fish Habitat Action Plan Board as one of the nation's "Ten Waters To Watch".

The Table Rock Lake NFHI project builds upon a long-standing public/private partnership in southwest Missouri to improve and restore fish habitat in Table Rock Lake, Lake Taneycomo and their watersheds through cover augmentation, watershed management and other water quality-related projects. This project has proven to be an excellent opportunity to proactively maintain and enhance fish habitat in and around two of the Midwest's most popular sport fisheries and is providing a national example for sustaining and improving reservoir sportfish populations through large-scale habitat improvements.

Another example of Chris's leadership on a national level includes his work with the Fishers and Farmers Partnership. The Fishers & Farmers Partnership for the Upper Mississippi River Basin works in collaboration with landowners, government agencies, and non-governmental agricultural and conservation

organizations. Chris's leadership and "can do" attitude has brought federal grant money to Missouri allowing MDC biologist to work with Missouri landowners to add value to farms while restoring aquatic habitat on site and downstream on the Mississippi River Basin. Projects are led by landowner committees, with flexible cost-share funding and technical support from conservation partners.

Through his careful consideration of issues, willingness to share innovative solutions and his technical skills, Chris is seen as a valued member of the Missouri Department of Conservation as the leader of the Fisheries Division. His energy, enthusiasm, honesty, leadership by example, charisma and quiet confidence is a magnet for his staff and his peers.

Chris takes his role as a leader and mentor seriously and has included leadership succession as a part of his annual work plan. Within MDC, Chris led the charge in development of staff as he played a critical role in the development of the Individual Development Plans (IDPs) for staff and he compiled the competencies for staff to help them plan for future growth opportunities. His Division and Department leadership working with the budget are unmatched. The efficiencies gained and new initiatives started under his leadership have allowed Fisheries Division to focus on several critical issues like: Angler Recruitment and Retention, ecological flow and priority watersheds. Even prior to the Department's development of "stretch goals", Chris has always stretched himself and his staff to new heights and his list of conservation accomplishments is long. Status quo is never good enough and he is continually looking back at accomplishments and experiences to help guide aquatic resource management progress forward into the future.

Just having the opportunity to work with and alongside of Chris makes his staff want to perform at a higher level. Although he may not be aware of it, Chris serves as an inspiration and mentor to many. He is always willing to take the time to listen, teach, and guide. He is open to discussing difficult topics and provides feedback and insight along the way.

It is well known that if you need something done, Chris is the man to have on your side. Everything he does is done with class, professionalism and a little fun. When you ask Chris to get involved, you can rest easy and know that it will be done and done well the first time. Chris has tremendous organizational skills and has the ability to accomplish more work in given period of time than should be humanly possible.

"*Excellence*" is a word that can best describe Chris's passion and abilities and we are fortunate to have him in Missouri. I can think of no one that is more deserving of the "*Spirit of the Shack*" award than he.

Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Awards

Nominations Form 2013

Award Categories (check only one per form)

I want to nominate: SD GFP Wildlife Division staff for

☐

Spirit of the Shack

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Wildlife Biologist of the Year

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Excellence in Conservation

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Fisheries Biologist of the Year

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Law Enforcement Officer of the Year

Nominator information

Name: Jeffrey R. Vonk

Organization: South Dakota Game, Fish, and Parks

Title: Secretary

E-mail:

Phone number:

1. Provide a brief (one page or less) overview explaining why the individual/agency meets the criteria for the award:

In 2009, South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks – Wildlife Division (SDGFP) initiated a first ever Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) that not only applied the soil and water conservation benefits of the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to the James River Watershed, but also included public access for hunting and fishing as a key feature of the program.

Administered by the Farm Services Agency (FSA) and delivered by SDGFP, the James River Watershed CREP offers incentives to farmers and landowners to enroll in the program. In addition to the enhanced financial benefits realized by enrollees, the larger benefits are realized by the hunting, fishing, and wildlife conservation public. The habitat created by CREP not only results in more pheasants, waterfowl, nongame birds, and numerous other species of wildlife, all CREP acres are open to public hunting and fishing at no charge (free public access is a requirement to enroll in this CRP program).

Recognition for the for-sight and innovative approach in designing this CREP to the implementation of the program is well deserved. SDGFP wildlife and habitat staff coordinated with USDA in constructing the program and has done an excellent job of coordinating the administrative components of the program with department staff, USDA, and Pheasants Forever (PF) Farm Bill biologists. Habitat biologists, Conservation Officers, and PF Farm Bill biologists work year round promoting, explaining, and most importantly assist landowners with enrolling in the program.

Another often overlooked yet a critical aspect of the James River Watershed CREP is the partnership of organizations that make the program a success. This partnership between the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), SDGFP, and Pheasants Forever not only is critical to the success of CREP, but it also leads to cooperation and conservation success in many other arenas. The strength and success of these partnerships is a credit to our staff that continuously work with our natural resource partners.

2. Please list and/or describe specific projects, work or accomplishments relevant to the award. Please limit your information to one page.

Sign-up for the James River Watershed CREP began in November 2009. Since then, CREP has help make significant progress in expanding habitat on the ground as well as opening high quality areas to public access.

By December 2012, a total of 74,896 acres had been enrolled. Half of the CREP acres enrolled are through CP37 - duck nesting initiative.

In addition to providing needed habitat and access to private land for hunting and fishing, enrollment of CREP acres has also enrolled over 20,000 additional acres in the state's Walk-In Area (WIA) program. These additional WIA acres include odd area round-outs adjacent to CREP acres and in some instances providing access to the CREP acres that may not have direct public access. Acres enrolled in the WIA program are private lands where landowners receive an annual payment allowing free access to hunt big game, upland game, and waterfowl.

Most areas enrolled in CREP consist of wetlands and associated buffers, reducing the effects of flooding in the James River Watershed, in addition to filtering pollution and sediment from runoff. Pollution from sediment, nitrogen, and phosphorus runoff has been reduced by as much as 97.5% on the nearly 75,000 acres of cropland that are now or will be in grass and wetlands through enrollment in CREP.

SDGFP has received numerous accolades and comments of appreciation from hunters for providing additional public hunting opportunity on quality wildlife cover.

Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Awards

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Award Categories (check only one per form)

I want to nominate: __Restoring Lake Erie Hydrology and Coastal
Marsh at Middle Harbor, OH_ for

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Spirit of the Shack

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Wildlife Biologist of the Year

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Excellence in Conservation

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Fisheries Biologist of the Year

☐

Law Enforcement Officer of the Year

Nominator information

Name: Scott Zody

Organization: ODNR, Division of Wildlife

Title: Chief

E-mail: Scott.Zody@dnr.state.oh.us

Phone number: 614.265.6304

1. Provide a brief (one page or less) overview explaining why the individual/agency meets the criteria for the award:

See attached.

2. Please list and/or describe specific projects, work or accomplishments relevant to the award. Please limit your information to one page.

See attached.

MAFWA Excellence in Conservation Award
"Restoring Lake Erie Hydrology and Coastal Marsh
At Middle Harbor, OH"
Submitted by Scott Zody, Chief
Ohio Division of Wildlife

1. Provide a brief (one page or less) overview explaining why the individual/agency meets the criteria for the award:

The project "Restoring Lake Erie Hydrology and Coastal Marsh at Middle Harbor, OH" meets the criteria of the MAFWA Excellence in Conservation Award because the project brings together federal, state and non-profit organizations to accomplish a habitat restoration project that will have broad benefits across both fish and wildlife, and will provide for enhance recreational opportunities at Ohio's largest State Park with 1.3 million visitor occasions per year. Restoring hydraulic connectivity of coastal wetlands has been identified as a priority by numerous state and federal planning initiatives in the Lake Erie basin such as the Lake Erie Lakewide Management Plan and the Lake Erie Committee Environmental Objectives. The currently funded project proposes to reconnect the coastal wetland to West Harbor, OH, which is directly connected to Lake Erie. Objectives are to increase hydraulic connectivity which should increase circulation and water quality in Middle Harbor, re-establish submerged and emergent aquatic vegetation in the unit, and increase fisheries and wildlife values for Middle Harbor. The restoration of Middle Harbor will aid the Division of Wildlife in meeting fish management strategic goals by restoring important fish spawning and nursery habitat in Lake Erie, wildlife management strategic goals by restoring coastal wetlands in the Lake Erie Marshes Focus Area, and State Parks strategic goals to enhance quality of life through exceptional outdoor recreational experiences. The Division of Wildlife, State Parks, The Nature Conservancy, and Ducks Unlimited have partnered to develop the project and received funding through a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant to implement the project. The project will restore a 390 acre coastal wetland to benefit both fish and wildlife resources, and improve water quality and recreational experiences in Lake Erie by: 1) Increasing coastal emergent wetland acres; 2) Improving hydrologic exchange between East Harbor, West Harbor, Lake Erie and Middle Harbor; and 3) Improving habitat and water quality for a diversity of fish and wildlife including mammals, birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, mussels, insects and other invertebrates. The project will restore vegetation-dependent food web dynamics and fish spawning and nursery habitats that have been absent for decades. Over 80% of Lake Erie historical coastal wetlands have been lost and most of those remaining are diked or have degraded physical or chemical properties. Additionally, the project will contribute to high quality recreational experiences for many State Park users. Each partner brings their experience and expertise to the table to accomplish this project. The project will restore the wetland at a cost of \$1,800/acre which is a very economical price.

2. Please list and/or describe specific projects, work or accomplishments relevant to the award. Please limit your information to one page.

This project will restore a low-functioning wetland to a high quality coastal marsh with open hydrologic exchange to Lake Erie. The 390-acre Middle Harbor area of East Harbor State Park, Ohio is impounded by Park and County roads, or extensive Lake Erie beach areas. Middle Harbor is adjacent to Lake Erie, but currently has almost no water exchange, fish access or aquatic macrophytes. The infrastructure for water conveyance through the area has collapsed, and high turbidity and frequent re-suspension of sediments in the 3 – 5 ft. deep waters suppress plant growth. The project installed a water control structure to facilitate water management in the wetland area and reconnect Middle Harbor with Lake Erie hydrology. The wetland will be dewatered and planted to Japanese millet to prevent the colonization of aquatic invasive plant species. The unit will then be reflooded after the millet has grown however the water control structure will not be opened to Lake Erie at this time to allow the re-establishment of aquatic macrophytes. Once the aquatic macrophytes have been re-established the stop logs in the water control structure will be removed to allow water levels to fluctuate with Lake Erie levels and allow fish passage. It is estimated the wetland will need to be drawn down every 5 – 6 years to allow for the regrowth of the aquatic macrophytes and to remove common carp from the wetland.

The project was funded by a \$628,988 NOAA Great Lakes Restoration Initiative Grant and \$31,200 of partner matching funds with an overall project cost of \$660,188. The project is located at East Harbor State Park which is managed by the ODNR, Division of Parks and Recreation. Ducks Unlimited was the lead agency to submit and manage the project. Ducks Unlimited engineers designed the water control structure and oversaw the project management. ODNR, Division of Wildlife personnel provided technical information and assistance for the wetland design and management; pre and post construction fish community sampling, and hydrological data. The Nature Conservancy will provide additional post construction monitoring of vegetation communities.

Restoring Lake Erie Hydrology and Coastal Marsh at Middle Harbor

Middle Harbor has been identified by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) as a high priority for restoration due to the degraded nature of the impounded wetland, its large size, and strategic location on the Lake Erie shoreline. Ducks Unlimited has partnered with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Ohio Division of Wildlife, and Ohio Division of Parks and Recreation to secure a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant to restore the hydrologic connection between Middle Harbor and Lake Erie. Contractors are installing a new water conveyance structure that will allow ODNR managers to restore native marsh plants, mimic natural hydrologic flows, and allow for passage of economically important fish species to breeding and nursery habitats. The project will restore 350 acres of vital coastal wetland habitat for over 300 species of fish and wildlife, improve water quality, and provide increased public use benefits.



