

Awards Luncheon June 24, 2013

Members of the Awards Committee are: Ed Boggess, Minnesota; Terry Steinwand, North Dakota; Jeff Vonk, South Dakota; Mark Reiter, Indiana; and myself. I want to thank them for their assistance in choosing the winners. We had 18 nominations for the five main awards.

Award winners are:

The Law Enforcement Officer of the Year award is given to the individual who in the past year has shown superior leadership, initiative, and dedication in their duties. This person should personify achievement, public service, education, and above all natural resource conservation. This award goes to **Russ Fell, Wisconsin**; award accepted by Scott Gunderson.

The Wildlife Biologist of the Year award is given to the individual who has shown an unparalleled initiative towards the better understanding of wildlife and their conservation. This award goes to **Jim Pitman, Kansas**; award accepted by Joe Kramer.

The Fisheries Biologist of the Year award is given to the individual who has shown an unparalleled initiative towards the better understanding of fishes and their conservation. This award goes to **Michael J. Hawkins, Iowa**; award accepted by Chuck Corell.

The Spirit of the Shack award is given to the individual who exemplifies the ideals of the great conservationist and educator, Aldo Leopold, and who has contributed to conservation in a superior way. This individual should epitomize stewardship and dedication to fish and wildlife conservation. This award goes to **Christopher B. Vitello, Missouri**; award accepted by Tim Ripperger.

Excellence in Conservation award is given to the agency that has shown excellence in conservation through a specific project. Each member agency would select one project completed in the awards year that exemplifies the goal of fish and wildlife conservation.

The Wildlife Division Staff of South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks 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; this group was nominated by South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks – award accepted by Jeff Vonk, SD Game, Fish & Parks Director.

Restoring Lake Erie Hydrology and Coastal Marsh at Middle Harbor, OH 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. – award accepted by Scott Zody.

Sagamore of the Forest, Fields and Streams – NONE

“A sagamore is the head of northeastern Native American tribe. The word is generally synonymous with sachem, although sometimes a sachem is considered a chief of the first rank, and a sagamore one of the second rank. Sagamore can also refer to great man among the tribe to whom the chief would look for wisdom and advice.” This honor is bestowed on any Director or upper level staff member that has contributed significant service to MAFWA. To qualify for this recognition, recipients must provide 4 years of service to MAFWA, have a 75 percent meeting attendance and serve on one or more committees. This award goes to:

The Past President's Award is given to **Jon Gassett, Kentucky** who has served as the MAFWA President for the past year. Jon will receive this award at the business meeting on Wednesday.

President's Award – (presented by Jon Gassett, Kentucky) – National Conservation Leadership Institute, presented to Sally Guynn.