

Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards

2015 Winners

Conservationist of the Year - Tom Harrison (Plymouth) - Harrison is a life-long wildlife enthusiast and steward of the land. Harrison's passion for black bears, educating the public, and giving back to his community led him to create and execute the highly successful NC Black Bear Festival in Plymouth, NC. He is also the Chairman of the Executive Board of the outdoor Christian Ministry group Cross Trail Outfitters where he teaches youth to hunt, fish, and appreciate nature. Harrison has also participated in implementing a Wetland Reserve Program in eastern NC, a species recovery program, numerous conservation projects, and is a long-time hunter and wildlife advocate.

Wildlife Conservationist of the Year - John D. Groves (Asheboro) - the first curator of amphibians and reptiles for the NC Zoo, Groves is a leading researcher in many wildlife fields including alligator, eastern box turtle, and Cape Fear shiners. He established the eastern hellbender conservation program as well as the hellbender captive breeding program.

Sportsman of the Year - Robin Hayes (Concord) - a lifelong hunter and angler Hayes is a champion for sportsmen and conservation. As a Congressman, he chaired the Congressional Sportsmen's Caucus and was a leading advocate for federal wildlife funding programs. From working his own land for wildlife and sporting opportunities to leading current charges for marine resources and wild deer protections, Hayes is the epitome of a sportsman conservationist.

Land Conservationist of the Year - Thomas A. Berry (Greensboro) - a pioneer in conservation easements, his 400 acre nature farm in Caswell county is protected and managed for wildlife. Berry's leadership as the Chair of the Land Use Committee for the Wildlife Resources Commission has bolstered elk habitat expansion and waterfowl impoundments in NC. Under his tenure since appointment in 2013, over 12,000 acres valued at over \$60 million have been protected by fee purchase or landowner cooperative agreements.

Water Conservationist of the Year - Grady McCallie (Raleigh) - an expert in policy evaluation and analysis, McCallie provides the data and interpretation of water quality and quantity issues to the conservation community, tracks state and federal legislation regarding water issues, educates decision makers on pending legislation and serves as the hub for all who advocate for water quality in North Carolina.

Environmental Educator of the Year - Whitney Greene (Laurel Springs) - This County Extension Agent is transforming the 4-H Youth Development program in Wilkes county and beyond. From bee pollination and worm composting to the effects of beaver dams, Greene's solid science background fuels her passion for inspiring kids to get involved with hands-on stewardship projects that make a difference.

Conservation Communicator of the Year - Lisa Rider (Sneads Ferry) - an expert in all forms of recycling, Rider created the Onslow County Earth and Surf Fest and the annual NC Marine Debris Symposium. Whether leading presentations in elementary schools and national conferences or training volunteers to create new programs in their communities her articulate voice and her daily demonstration have convinced thousands of North Carolinians to act with conservation in mind.

Legislator of the Year - Rep. Jay Adams (Hickory) - Representative Adams is a leader for public trust resources, wildlife and sportsmen issues. Adams is a staunch and valiant voice for proper deer management, ethical hunting, keeping wild deer wild and bringing to bear the serious issues of importation, exportation of wild animals and the diseases associated with these activities.

Forest Conservationist of the Year - Dan Ryan (Wilmington) - is the long leaf pine program manager with The Nature Conservancy. Through his work, thousands of acres of long leaf pine habitat has been restored, preserved, and protected. Ryan has successfully collaborated with private timber managers to put acreage into conservation, to convert acreage into long leaf, and to manage lands in a sustainable fashion.

Municipal Conservationist of the Year - City of Rockingham - a city with the vision and commitment to natural resources highlighted with the first Urban Wildlife Conservation Area in the State being implemented with focus on walking trails, boating, fishing and wildlife viewing. The Hitchcock Creek Blue Trail is another city-planned gem of 14 miles of paddling through Rockingham to the Pee Dee River.

Wildlife Volunteer of the Year - Kayne Darrell (Wilmington) - Titan Cement announced it was abandoning plans to construct the fourth largest cement kiln in the country on the northeast Cape Fear River in New Hanover County. This plant would have required a massive open pit mining operation in low lands and wetlands in New Hanover and Pender counties and Darrell was the tireless, dedicated leader of Citizens Against Titan.

Hunter Safety Educator of the Year - Link Grass (Denver) - has literally educated thousands of new hunters on hunting safety and conservation. Grass instructs tirelessly through the years and introduced hunter education into the Lincoln county school system. He has evolved web-oriented teaching in an evolving technological landscape while incorporating elaborate visuals and displays for in person trainings. He is the sought out mentor for newly certified hunter education instructors.

NCWF Chapter of the Year - Pamlico Albemarle Wildlife Conservationists (Washington) - Building community for conservation is the hallmark of this wildlife chapter. They accomplished many endeavors including building a handicapped hunting blind, pollinator plant sales, advocating for watershed protection, incorporating beekeeping and organic gardening into the curriculum of their local community college, fighting industrialized pollution from degrading the area waters and wildlife refuges, and raising awareness about the value of endangered species on the landscape.

NCWF Affiliate of the Year - Cabarrus Soil and Water Conservation District - a leader in farmland preservation and model for a natural resources conservation district-while also contributing a Prairie tract to the NC nature preserve system as well as being a leader in youth conservation education and amphibian and reptile sustainability.

Natural Resources Scientist of the Year - Christopher S. DePerno, Ph.D. (Raleigh) - a research scientist and educator in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology at North Carolina State University who is dedicated to sound science, mentorship, and the conservation and management of NC's natural resources. DePerno has conducted research on numerous species including white-tailed deer, black bears, coyotes, Canada geese, river otters, raccoons, woodcock, feral hogs, wild horses, and elk while preparing many graduate and undergraduate students for careers in wildlife and conservation biology.

Conservation Organization of the Year - Save Blounts Creek (Chocowinity) - Beaufort county is the site of a proposed 50-year open marine limestone pit mine that would see 12 million gallons of ground and stormwater pumped out of the mine and discharged each day into this pristine, brackish water gem that supports herring, flounder, and red drum. This community group has been working diligently each step of the way on behalf of this aquatic treasure.

Business Conservationist of the Year - ReVenture Park (Charlotte) - this innovative Brownfield restoration site is transforming over 600 acres of superfund site land into a hub for renewable energy, recycling and wildlife habitat restoration including vast wildlife meadows, riparian buffers, a conservation easement protecting land yet allowing the public to use its nature trails and utilizing prescribed burns for management.

Wildlife Enforcement Officer of the Year - Isaac R. Hannah (Casar) - representing District 8, in Cleveland County Officer Hannah demonstrates a professional and profound demeanor dealing with the public he serves and engages with the local community to educate them on hunter safety, boating safety, and assistance with wildlife related issues. He was instrumental in initiating what became the establishment of the largest public shooting complex in the southeast and led poaching cases and search and rescue operations while leading the way on boating safety and community engagement with youth, disabled, and other law enforcement agencies.

Marine Fisheries Enforcement Officer of the Year - Gene Maready (Columbia) - made many cases involving the illegal use and/or abandonment of commercial gear, violations of size and creel limits related to fish and crabs, recreational and commercial license violations, the illegal sale of seafood, larceny of gear and has participated in undercover operations. He also saved a capsized fisherman from dying of hypothermia this winter.