

2019 Governor's Conservation Achievement Award Winners

Conservationist of the Year - **Wilson Laney (Raleigh)**, Dr. Laney turned a childhood interest in fish and wildlife into a 39-year career with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service dedicated to the conservation of fish, wildlife and their habitats. His career can only be described as illustrious, with widespread recognition for his leadership on a diversity of conservation issues including hydropower relicensing, striped bass conservation, and the interstate management of marine fish populations. His broad knowledge of biological resources and commitment to their conservation continue to generate a strong demand for his guidance and participation in numerous scientific councils and conservation organizations.

Wildlife Conservationist of the Year - **Debbie Roos (Sanford)**, Roos is an Agricultural Agent for the Chatham County Center of N.C. Cooperative Extension whose professional focus is supporting small farmers in the area and hosting educational seminars and field days on sustainable agriculture. In her early work to support beekeepers, she became aware of the more than 500 native bee species in the state, changing her career trajectory. Her position has grown to include support for the wider audience of gardening and wildlife enthusiasts, which culminated in the establishment of the Pollinator Paradise Garden in Chatham County.

Sportsman of the Year - **Rocky Carter (Swansboro)**, Passionate about hunting and fishing, Carter epitomizes paying it forward by working for better management and enforcement of rules for fish and wildlife. Carter works to engage youth in fishing, spearheads Wounded Warrior events, and champions habitat restoration projects. He relishes and practices the responsibility as a sportsman to make sure our public trust resources are there for future generations to enjoy.

Land Conservationist of the Year - **Three Rivers Land Trust (Salisbury)**, As a reputable and dynamic land conservation organization, Three Rivers Land Trust has conserved thousands of acres of land for the benefit of wildlife, habitat protection, water quality, cultural significance, and the public. Not only does the land trust raise funds to protect lands for ecological purposes, but this organization values and implements unique ways to connect the public with natural resources, such as through its Sportsman Access Program.

Water Conservationist of the Year - **Coharie Tribe (Clinton)**, After hurricanes and decades of neglect closed off access to the Coharie River, a cultural and community touchstone for this southeastern North Carolina tribe, Native American leaders marshalled grant funding, community involvement, academics and scientists to help clear the river for small-scale boat navigation, and reconnect the tribe to its ancestral waters. Bringing together cultural, historical, and natural assets, the tribe spent three years logging 5,000 volunteer hours to restore access to the river.

Environmental Educator of the Year **Lily Dancy-Jones (Asheville)**, The high school biology teacher has elevated pollinator habitat and awareness in the Asheville area by connecting students, community members and local businesses. While Dancy-Jones was encouraged by pollinator efforts in urban Asheville, the lack of interest and action for pollinators and habitat conservation in the surrounding rural areas troubled her. She founded an Eco Club at the high school where she works, coordinated workdays to establish several gardens through grants on school grounds, complete with native flowers, "bee hotels" and educational signs, and chairs the steering committee for Youth for Environmental Stewardship in Asheville.

Legislator of the Year - **Carla Cunningham (Charlotte)**, Representative Cunningham is the House minority whip. An avid angler, she is in her 4th term in the General Assembly, and has proven a steadfast champion for wildlife and habitat. Cunningham sponsored bills to revamp coastal marine fisheries management and licensing and led the chorus within her caucus and the wildlife committee on the way to successful passage of fish reproduction legislation.

Marine Resources Conservationist of the Year - **Larry Yarborough (Roxboro)**, Fully understanding the value of and opportunity for North Carolina's marine fisheries to be the envy of the Atlantic and Gulf Coast states, this avid fisherman worked tirelessly for marine fisheries reform. Knowing first hand the great fishing in Mississippi and Florida that came out of reforms, Yarborough, undeterred by previous failed attempts in North Carolina, focused on the resource to help pass historic legislation in the House.

Wildlife Volunteer - **Larry Capps (Gastonia)**, An avid sportsman and wildlife enthusiast, Capps leaves his conservation mark wherever he goes. He has transformed hundreds of acres into wildlife sanctuary, has led the charge in installing wood duck boxes, osprey platforms, pollinator gardens and fish attractors to promote healthy wildlife and habitat in Gaston County and beyond. Capps is tireless in his efforts to promote conservation and getting youth and others involved in the outdoors.

Public Lands Conservationist of the Year - **NC Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers**, Established in April of 2018, this state chapter of the North American public lands advocacy organization has been a whirlwind of conservation action. Kicking off its charter with a mountains-to-sea pint night tour of the state, NC-BHA has engaged in statewide public lands cleanups, led campaigns to contact state legislators, created a fund to aid fishing and hunting guides impacted by Hurricane Florence, and created a deeply active and vital network of public lands advocates across the state.

NCWF Chapter of the Year - **Charlotte Reconnecting Ourselves with Nature (CROWN) (Charlotte)**, From leading family nature walks to organizing community paddling events, this dedicated group has led the way for environmental awareness and wildlife conservation in Charlotte. Celebrating its fifth year as a wildlife chapter, CROWN achieved recognition as a Community Wildlife Habitat, installed several pollinator gardens in schools and created venison recipe kits for those in need in Mecklenburg County.

NCWF Affiliate of the Year - **North Carolina Herpetological Society**, As a strong advocate for amphibians and reptiles, the NC Herpetological Society specializes in providing science-based information, research, and educational opportunities to working professionals, its members, and the public. This organization is dedicated to conserving North Carolina's native species and biodiversity through on-the-ground herpetological work including Project Bog Turtle and Project Simus, documenting the natural history and distribution of numerous species including the southern hognose snake, bog turtle, and eastern chicken turtle.

Natural Resources Scientist of the Year - **Dottie Brown (Raleigh)**, As a Senior Bat Ecologist at VHB Engineering in Raleigh, Brown's research focuses on data collection and permitting related to numerous federal and state-listed species including northern long-eared bat, gray bat, and the Virginia big-eared bat. Brown has spent countless hours of research and field study uncovering the devastating effects of the White-Nose Syndrome, on bat colonies. While her unwavering commitment to bats is a personal passion, she is intensely interested in the conservation of northern flying squirrels, bog turtles, hellbenders, and peregrine falcons.

Forest Conservationist of the Year - **Bill Kane (Cullowhee)**, A longtime advocate for forest conservation, Kane served on the original forest management plan stakeholder team for the Nantahala-Pisgah national forests and is currently working on its updated plan advocating for wildlife and healthy habitats within these 1.1 million acres. Kane has been a long-time volunteer with the Nantahala Hiking Club Appalachian Trail maintenance crew and a leader in forest conservation and management for over four decades.

Conservation Organization of the Year - **Cape Fear River Watch (Wilmington)**, Protecting and improving the water quality of the Lower Cape Fear River Basin through education, advocacy and action, this group was at the forefront when dangerous levels of the contaminant GenX were discovered in the river and, ultimately, in the drinking water of hundreds of thousands in the Wilmington area. CFRW assisted with public meetings for residents, provided support for official inquiries and demanded full funding for the Department of Environmental Quality to address the issue. As a result, discharges of GenX have ceased and recovery efforts are being pursued.

Business Conservationist of the Year - **Kellex Seating (Valdese)**, Kellex Seating's commitment to conservation is evident not only by their commitment to using recyclable and renewable materials in its manufacturing processes, but also by its significant financial contribution to Valdese Lake Park to purchase 300 acres for a public recreational park. Taking it further, employees committed hundreds of hours towards cleaning up debris, removing invasive plants, installing pollinator gardens and improving wildlife habitat on the site of the future park.