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Conservation partners to recognize Refuge System employees

Washington, D.C. – The National Wildlife Refuge Association and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation will honor National Wildlife Refuge System supporters and employees next month with the presentation of the 2006 National Wildlife Refuge System Awards.

The awards recognize exceptional contributions made by refuge volunteers and employees toward protecting the National Wildlife Refuge System, a network of over 540 refuges conserving over 100 million acres of land and water set aside to conserve America's wildlife.

The ceremony will take place in conjunction with the 71st North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, which runs March 22 through 25 at the Hyatt Regency Columbus, 350 N High St, Columbus, OH. The conservation partners will present the following awards during the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation/U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director's Reception at 7 p.m., March 23 in the hotel's Franklin A-D room.

- **Paul Kroegel Refuge Manager of the Year Award, Glenn Carowan, Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, MD/VA** – As manager of one of the most diverse refuge complexes in the Refuge System, Carowan has been instrumental in employing strong partnerships and sound science to protect and restore the wetlands, forests and islands of the Chesapeake Marshlands. Through a successful collaboration of agencies, the highly invasive and destructive nutria has been removed from the refuge and surrounding Chesapeake Bay area, allowing native vegetation and wildlife to make a rapid comeback. As a result of Carowan's leadership, the refuge complex hosts scientific meetings and supports a multitude of ecosystem research projects, such as using clean dredge material to restore marsh and wetland habitat lost to invasive species and saltwater intrusion.
- **Refuge System Employee of the Year, John Schomaker, Division of Conservation Planning, Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region, MN** – Refuge Planning Specialist John Schomaker has made significant contributions to streamlining the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) process on a regional and a national basis. Each national wildlife refuge is required to complete a 15-year CCP to provide a framework for ensuring refuge management decisions are compatible with fulfilling the established purposes for that refuge and the Refuge System as a whole. Schomaker's accomplishments include establishing a user-friendly computer interface for tracking CCPs; involving public focus groups in the long-term planning process; using GIS and teleconferencing to effectively and efficiently promote strong CCPs; and developing the visitor services sections of the national CCP handbooks.

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- **Volunteer of the Year Award, Tim Anderson, Seal Beach National Wildlife Refuge, CA** – Anderson has been instrumental in finding innovative ways to bring Seal Beach NWR and the community together while respecting the wildlife management needs and the security requirements of the only national wildlife refuge completely enclosed within a naval weapons station. Some of his most notable contributions include producing educational videos and discovery exhibits; designing and constructing platform nests for endangered light-footed clapper rails; spearheading a program to upgrade Friends school presentations to conform to the California State Science Standards; making presentations to college biology classes on the local salt marsh ecosystem; and training docents to give refuge tours.
- **Friends Group of the Year Award, Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, NJ** – The Friends of Great Swamp NWR have demonstrated an extraordinary dedication to public outreach and environmental education in support of their urban refuge. The group developed the refuge’s Wildlife Tour Route guide and the “Discovery Den” activity room. In addition to welcoming and answering questions for thousands of refuge visitors each year, the Friends host at least two public educational programs a month on the refuge and partner on events hosted by other conservation organizations in the surrounding Great Swamp Watershed. Their extensive education and outreach program includes classroom loan of a “swamp in a box” kit containing videos and identification guides researched, written, and produced by the Friends.

To learn more about the National Wildlife Refuge System Awards and the incredible conservation work performed nationwide, visit www.refugenet.org and click on “Events.” For more information about the awards ceremony, contact Evan Hirsche at (202) 333-9075 or via e-mail at ehirsche@refugenet.org.

About the Partners

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is a nonprofit organization established by Congress in 1984 and dedicated to the conservation of fish, wildlife and plants, and the habitat on which they depend. The Foundation creates partnerships between the public and private sectors to strategically invest in conservation and the sustainable use of natural resources. The Foundation awarded more than 900 grants in 2005 and has leveraged more than \$350 million in federal funds since its establishment, for a total of more than \$1 billion in on the ground conservation. For more information, visit www.nfwf.org.

A nonprofit established in 1975, the National Wildlife Refuge Association is the only organization dedicated exclusively to protecting, enhancing and expanding the National Wildlife Refuge System, lands and waters set aside by the American people to protect our country's diverse wildlife heritage. With the support of more than 100 refuge Friends group affiliates and individual members in all states, we have worked to make the Refuge System stronger and better able to address the growing challenges of conserving wildlife in our country. By combining policy, grassroots development and public education objectives, the Refuge Association seeks to ensure our country continues to support a diverse spectrum of plants and wildlife well into the future. For more information, visit www.refugenet.org.