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NWRA/NFWF to recognize Refuge System Standouts

Washington, D.C. – The National Wildlife Refuge Association and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation will honor National Wildlife Refuge System supporters and employees in March with the presentation of the 2007 National Wildlife Refuge System Awards.

The 2007 Refuge Manager, Employee, Volunteer, and Friends Group of the Year awards recognize exceptional contributions made by refuge employees and volunteers toward protecting the National Wildlife Refuge System, a network of more than 545 refuges conserving 100 million acres of land and water set aside to conserve America's wildlife.

Two awards will be presented at a ceremony in conjunction with the 72nd North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference, March 20 through 24 in Portland, OR. 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 Hilton Portland's Grand Ballroom I.

- **Paul Kroegel Refuge Manager of the Year Award, Don Hultman, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, MN** – With management responsibilities for eleven refuges along the 261 miles of the Upper Mississippi River, Refuge Manager Don Hultman is a passionate communicator and a talented leader. Over the past four years, he led a public involvement planning process, hosting 46 public meetings and workshops attended by 4,500 people that resulted in the completion of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge's Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) in August of 2006. The final plan emphasizes the conservation of natural resources and takes a proactive and balanced approach to public use management. Hultman has also been extensively involved in such programs as the Environmental Management Program, and he wrote the recently published Service Manual Policy Chapter on Refuge Mission, Goals and Purposes.
- **Refuge System Employee of the Year, William Giese, Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge, MD** – As Fire Control Officer, Bill Giese's extensive knowledge and technical expertise from his 34 years of service to Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge have led to the protection of Little Blackwater River and the Refuge through the mobilization of more than 35,000 community members to sign a petition opposing mega-development in the region. Giese also works effectively as a biologist, law enforcement officer, equipment operator, and manager. Highly instrumental in developing partnerships with both Maryland Nutria and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Giese works to manage wetlands using prescribed fire, protect endangered squirrels and eagles, and eradicate nutria on the Refuge.

Refuge System employee awards, page 2

Two awards will also be presented at a ceremony in conjunction with the 2007 Refuge Friends “Beyond the Boundaries” workshop which runs March 2 through 5 in Washington, DC. The conservation partners will present these awards during the Awards Reception at 6:30 p.m., March 3 in the Washington Plaza Hotel’s National Hall.

- **Volunteer of the Year Award, Marion Sansing, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, MS**
– As spokesperson for the Friends of Noxubee and outdoor recreation planner for the Refuge, Marion Sansing has astounded Refuge staff and fellow volunteers with the amount she has accomplished in her relatively short time at Noxubee. She partnered with Mississippi State University to develop a Native plant garden for the Visitor Center; procured print, radio, and even billboard advertisements to attract volunteers and visitors to the Refuge; oversaw all the publicity and implementation of the now annual Noxubee Refuge Photography contest; and partnered with the Wild Turkey Federation to host “Women in the Outdoors,” an opportunity for women to learn outdoor skills from expert instructors.
- **Friends Group of the Year Award, Friends of San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges, CO** – Friends of San Luis Valley National Wildlife Refuges support Baca, Alamosa and Monte Vista NWRs. The Friends are responsible for the wildlife-observation walking trail on the Monte Vista NWR; the Alamosa NWR Visitor Center’s new Wetland Learning Center; and a Congressional earmark of \$324,000 for the Baca NWR. The Friends keep the community and visitors informed about the wildlife in the San Luis Valley through an imaginative website, quarterly newsletter *the Avocet*, and participation in monthly “work days” and annual festivals such as the Kid’s Crane Festival held during Refuge Week.

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 either awards ceremony, contact NWRA at (202) 333-9075 or via e-mail at nwra@refugenet.org.

About the Partners

A nonprofit established by Congress in 1984, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) sustains, restores and enhances the Nation's fish, wildlife, plants and habitats. Through leadership conservation investments with public and private partners, NFWF is dedicated to achieving maximum conservation impact by developing and applying best practices and innovative methods for measurable outcomes. Since its establishment, NFWF has awarded over 8,000 grants to nearly 3,000 organizations in the United States and abroad and leveraged - with its partners - more than \$340 million in federal funds, for a total of over \$1 billion in 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 125 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.