



For Immediate Release
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Conservation Leaders Selected to Receive 2010 Refuge System Awards

The National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) and National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) have selected recipients of the 2010 Refuge System Awards. These annual awards recognize refuge conservation professionals, volunteers and Friends groups that exemplify outstanding dedication and passion for wildlife conservation in advancement of the mission and purposes of the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS).

Kevin Foerster has been selected to receive the **Paul Kroegel Refuge Manager of the Year Award** for his outstanding management of the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge Complex in California. Mr. Foerster oversaw the growth and restoration of some of the most important wintering waterfowl habitat on the West Coast. His recent accomplishments include implementing a sophisticated inventory and monitoring system and forging partnerships with private landowners to restore the landscape of the Sacramento Valley. He has exhibited his skill, passion and commitment as a leader in the Refuge System, and was recently named as the project leader at Upper Mississippi River Fish and Wildlife Complex.

Vernon Byrd, a biologist at Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska, has been selected to receive the **Refuge System Employee of the Year Award** for demonstrating dedication and vision protecting marine species of coastal Alaska such as auklets, puffins, storm-petrels and other seabirds. Mr. Byrd's innovative inventory, monitoring and research programs have resulted in data that is now used to influence everything from commercial fishing to climate change models. He has been instrumental in efforts to recover species such as the Aleutian cackling goose by eradicating invasive predators, and has been a dedicated champion for conservation in the harsh and far-flung environment of maritime Alaska.

Zeeger de Wilde will receive the **Volunteer of the Year Award** for his unwavering support and commitment to the Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex in Maryland and Virginia. Truly dedicated to the Refuge System, Mr. de Wilde has volunteered more than 12,000 hours on refuges over the past 20 years. Drawing extensively on his background in horticulture, he is leaving a lasting mark through helping create butterfly gardens that showcase native plants.

The **Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges** will receive the **Friends Group of the Year Award**. Founded in 2005, the Friends of Alaska have the colossal task of protecting and raising awareness for over 75 million acres of lands in Alaska's 16 national wildlife refuges. The Friends have undertaken projects to remove invasive plants, reduce invasive horse populations, and educate both local communities and national decision-makers on the importance of Alaska's wildlife refuges. They have had outstanding results and continue to grow and reach out to new communities.

Awards will be presented at the 2010 Refuge System Awards Reception sponsored by NWRA, NFWF, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement (CARE) in the Cannon Building Caucus Room in Washington, DC on the evening of Tuesday, March 9th.

ALSO AVAILABLE TO JOURNALISTS:

- **Detailed information about recipients**
- **Photos**

For more information on the National Wildlife Refuge Association visit:

<http://www.refugeassociation.org>

For more information on the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation visit:

<http://www.nfwf.org>

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