



NEWS RELEASE

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Four receive honors at Chesapeake Watershed Forum for dedication to restoring bay health

ANNAPOLIS, MD— Four Chesapeake Forest Champions were honored last weekend at the 2011 Chesapeake Watershed Forum held at the National Conservation Training Center in Shepherdstown, WV. The U.S. Forest Service and Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay sponsored the inaugural Chesapeake Forest Champion contest in honor of the International Year of Forests. The awards recognize groups or individuals that have made a difference to people and/or the Bay through their promotion of trees and forests.

The Chesapeake Watershed Forum brings together representatives from local watershed organizations and governments to learn the latest restoration science and direction, network with other groups facing similar challenges, and be inspired to continue the work of preserving and restoring the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

“There are four categories for which a Forest Champion could be nominated. They are: 1) most innovative program, 2) most effective at engaging the, 3) greatest on-the-ground impact, and 4) exceptional forest steward/landowner” said Chesapeake Forest Service Coordinator Sally Claggett.

The “most innovative” award went to the team of Adam Downing and Michael Lachance of Virginia Cooperative Extension and Michael Santucci of Virginia Department of Forestry in Virginia for helping tackle a critical land conservation challenge.

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Virginia – like other states--is on the cusp of the largest intergenerational transfer of family farms and forests ever and landowners need to know how to protect their land. The Virginia team developed an innovative program called the Virginia Family Farmland Short Course. Over 21,000 acres of Virginia’s forestland are expected to remain sustainable, family-owned, and intact as a result of the program.

The “most effective at engaging the public” champion was ecologist Carole Bergmann from Montgomery County who created the Weed Warrior program in response to the non-native invasive plant problem. To date, more than 600 Weed Warriors have been trained and have logged over 25,000 hours of work. It is Carole’s gift for engaging and challenging the public that has made the Weed Warrior program such a success.

For greatest-on-the-ground impact, the award went to David Wise of Chesapeake Bay Foundation for his leadership in restoring streamside forest buffers through the Pennsylvania Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Partnership.

Since 2000, Pennsylvania CREP has restored more than 22,000 acres of forested buffers (more than all other Bay states combined), bringing roughly \$100 million in cost share, incentive and rental payments to over 4,000 streamside landowners to restore riparian forests. This level of restoration has resulted from the combined efforts of a long list of partners, including USDA’s Farm Service Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Service, Pennsylvania’s Department of Environmental Protection and other organizations. However, key to the partnership’s success has been the innovative outreach and technical assistance team that the Chesapeake Bay Foundation has built.

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And the forest landowner who models exceptional stewardship was Susan Benedict of Centre County, Pennsylvania. Susan manages a certified Tree Farm on her family's property, implementing many conservation projects on the land including planting pollinator habitat in a forested ecosystem. As a local activist, Susan heads the Centre County Natural Gas Task Force where she advocates for responsible gas drilling to minimize the negative impacts on Pennsylvania's forests and other natural resources. She is a board member of Woodland Owners of Centre County, a trained Pennsylvania Forest Steward volunteer, and a member of a long list of other forest organizations. No one knows better than Susan that forests provide wood products, clean water and air, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and a host of other benefits to people. She acts on her knowledge by educating and assisting anyone who will listen.

The United Nations General Assembly declared 2011 as the International Year of Forests to raise awareness on sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests. Forests in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed not only provide clean air and filter our water; they also support the livelihood of hundreds of thousands of residents.

The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay works to develop partnerships to address issues that affect the Bay and its streams and rivers. The alliance engages, educates, partners and inspires through work with other organizations, communities, businesses and individuals.

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Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay <http://www.alliancechesbay.org/>