

Forest Champions

Awards Recognize the Promotion of Trees and Forests in the Bay

The Challenge

The Chesapeake Bay is the largest estuary in the United States, spanning six State jurisdictions and the District of Columbia. The key to the Bay's health are the trees and forests in its watershed, which perform an essential cleansing role in the water cycle. More than 900,000 private forest landowners own nearly 19 million acres, or 80 percent of the forest within the watershed. These forests are often highly parcelized, and a single stand of trees can be owned by multiple landowners.

The role of the private forest landowner in the health of the Bay cannot be overstated. However, educating nearly one million landowners about the important role they play can be a challenge.

The Solution

In honor of the United Nation's declaration of 2011 as the International Year of Forests, the U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry partnered with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay to start a Chesapeake Forest Champion contest. This contest recognizes groups or individuals that have had a positive impact on people and/or the Bay through their promotion of trees and forests.

There are four Forest Champion award categories for which groups or individuals can be nominated. The Most Innovative award goes to a creative individual or project that reflects a new, effective way of promoting trees and forests. The award for Most Effective at Engaging the Public can be given to someone who demonstrates insight in social engagement or has reached a mass of people. The Greatest on-the-Ground Impact award goes to people or programs that have been extraordinary at restoring the ecological functioning of forests in the Bay watershed. And finally, the Exceptional Forest Steward award recognizes a landowner who is just that—an exceptional forest steward.

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Sally Claggett, U.S. Forest Service (far left) and Al Todd, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay (far right), present inaugural Forest Champion Awards to David Wise, Pennsylvania Chesapeake Bay Foundation; Michael LaChance, Virginia Cooperative Extension; Susan Benedict, landowner, Centre County, PA; and Carole Bergmann, Montgomery County, MD.

Resulting Benefits

- Over 21,000 acres of Virginia's forest land are expected to remain in family ownership as a result of the Virginia Family Farmland Short Course program.
- More than 600 Weed Warriors have been trained in Maryland in response to non-native invasive plant problems.
- The Forest Champion awards help make people aware of the importance of forests and the people who work with them. Recognizing well-deserving Champions is not only worthwhile, but it also encourages others to follow suit.

Sharing Success

- Since 2000, the Pennsylvania Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program has restored more than 22,000 acres of forested buffers, bringing roughly \$100 million in cost-share, incentive, and rental payments to over 4,000 streamside landowners for restoring riparian forests.
- Exceptional forest landowner stewards are educating and helping other forest landowners become better stewards.



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For more information, contact:

Tony L. Ferguson, Director
11 Campus Blvd., Suite 200
Newtown Square, PA 19073
Phone: 610-557-4103
E-mail: tferguson@fs.fed.us

Robert Lueckel, Field Representative
180 Canfield Street
Morgantown, WV 26505
Phone: 304-285-1540
E-mail: rlueckel@fs.fed.us