



Annual conservation grants are announced

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EASTON - The Waterfowl Festival has announced the 2006 recipients of its annual Conservation Grants. Proceeds from the event and the Waterfowl Festival Donor Program are distributed each year to projects furthering Eastern Shore conservation efforts.

The Waterfowl Festival has awarded over \$4.6 million to more than 50 organizations since 1971. A total of \$131,000 has been granted this year to eight recipients in support of projects benefiting wildlife, the environment and conservation education.

Waterfowl and wildlife benefit directly from two of three Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage projects that will receive \$57,000 from the Waterfowl Festival. The Wood Duck Nesting Box Program replaces depleted natural nesting habitat with manmade boxes, adding an estimated 25,000 ducks to the fall flight. Overwintering Canada Geese gain safe resting havens and food resources through the Waterfowl Festival Goose Sanctuary Program.

A third funded project, the CWH Chesapeake Care Program, develops partnerships with private landowners to restore wildlife habitats.

Additional natural habitats are restored or preserved through grants to three other organizations. Ducks Unlimited will receive \$30,000 in support of its Habitat Stewardship Program, working with Delmarva landowners to conserve habitat in critical waterfowl breeding, migrating and wintering areas. Stewardship is also the focus of Eastern Shore Land Conservancy efforts to sustain the Eastern Shore's rich landscapes by targeting the region's most critical farm and habitat properties for strategic conservation and sound land use planning. ESLC will receive \$10,000 in Waterfowl Festival funding for its program.

Adkins Arboretum has been awarded \$3,500 to support a three-fold project to remove invasive species from a wetland, restore a paved area to a native meadow buffer zone, and create a new bog habitat as a demonstration garden.

Getting kids out of the classroom and into the field is one of the best ways to introduce them to environmental issues and create the next generation of conservationists. Three organizations providing such opportunities have received Waterfowl Festival support this year.

Fair Hill Environmental Center will receive \$4,000 for its "Who's for Dinner" program, introducing Cecil County fifth-graders to the food chains found in freshwater wetlands and streams. Pickering Creek Audubon Center has been awarded \$17,500 in support of its Watershed Experience. The program engages Talbot County's tenth-grade biology students in birdwatching and fishing, at the same time teaching ecological principles. A mentoring component allows the students to transfer their knowledge and skills to a younger class, further expanding the program's reach.

Talbot County's fifth-graders benefit from a \$4,000 grant to Talbot County Public Schools in support of two programs. Students are immersed in Chesapeake Bay ecology for three days and two nights during a visit to Echo Hill Outdoor School in Worton. They also receive transportation to the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's Skipjack Program, providing students with an unforgettable on-the-water experience of the Bay and its role as wildlife habitat.

Finally, compensating for a growing gap in funding for field trips, Environmental Concern takes the wetlands to the students with the help of a \$5,000 Waterfowl Festival grant. Its Wetlands on Wheels program takes the organization's mission on the road to visit schools, libraries, civic organizations and events.

Festival President Albert Pritchett expressed his thanks for these organizations' efforts. "It is through projects like these," he noted, "and through the contributions of our generous donors in helping us to support them, that the Waterfowl Festival has been able to have such an important impact in protecting our unique Eastern Shore habitat for the past 35 years."

The 2006 Waterfowl Festival will be held in Easton November 10, 11 & 12. For more information, to volunteer or to make a donation, contact the Waterfowl Festival office at 410-822-4567 or visit its website, www.waterfowlfestival.org.