

Dave Brownlie

David “Dave” J. Brownlie was selected as the 2014 NWRs Wilderness Employee of the Year. The award recognizes outstanding accomplishments by a refuge employee in the protection and stewardship of national wildlife refuge wilderness areas. Dave assumed manager responsibilities at Monomoy NWR in December 2009 and from day one was an advocate for the wilderness purposes of the refuge as well as its other establishing purposes. He strived to, and encouraged his staff to, preserve and improve the wilderness character at Monomoy by applying the minimum requirements analysis process. This ensured that actions taken in the Monomoy wilderness area were both necessary, had the least impact to wilderness character, and were in keeping with the principles of wilderness stewardship. Dave embraced the refuge system’s effort to obtain baseline wilderness character monitoring data by enthusiastically welcoming the assignment of a Wilderness Fellow to the refuge who assisted the staff in establishing program. Dave demonstrated his desire to ensure that wilderness preservation would continue at Monomoy by including wilderness in the goals and objectives and compatibility and appropriateness determinations in the CCP and by supporting the overall purpose of the Wilderness Act by completing a wilderness review and proposing adding acres to the National Wilderness Preservation System at Monomoy NWR. Finally, Dave spent a lot of personal time and effort to promote wilderness both on a national and local level by participating in the Aldo and Leonardo Wilderness Science and Art Collaboration and developing and presenting a 6-lecture series presented locally to promote understanding and appreciation among the local community.

Bill Koch

William “Bill” Koch was selected as the first recipient of the NWRs Wilderness Legacy Award. This award is presented to individuals for their tireless support of wilderness throughout their career. Through their actions and accomplishments, they preserved the wilderness character of National Wildlife Refuge System wilderness areas. They have continued the legacy of wilderness heroes Aldo Leopold, Howard Zahniser, and Olaus Murie.

For the past 30 years, Bill oversaw stewardship of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge Wilderness Area (GSWA). The GSWA was established in 1968 as the first Wilderness Area in the entire Department of the Interior (DOI). This distinction is even more astounding given that GSWA lies in the heart of the most heavily developed, densely populated State in the nation just west of the nation's most populous city. Bill ensured the preservation of GSWA in the face of significant external threats. The entire periphery of the Wilderness Area is ringed by residential development. Further development throughout the watershed led to significant water quality and quantity issues. Bill worked closely with local political leaders and conservation partners such as the Great Swamp Watershed Association and Ten Towns Watershed Management Committee to implement model ordinances to address the greatest threats. He was respected by all for his honesty, integrity, and commitment to natural resource protection. Historically, swamps, including Great Swamp, were treated as wastelands. Upon establishment, the

refuge inherited several highly contaminated dump sites, two of which were later designated as Superfund sites. Under Bill's leadership, one site in Wilderness (Operable Unit 3 [OU-3]) was successfully remediated and delisted. The site was restored to native conditions and today provides excellent habitat for a variety of wildlife. Throughout his career, Bill was strongly supportive of refuge efforts to better understand and preserve wilderness values. The GSWA was among the first NWRS Wilderness Areas to develop a wilderness character monitoring plan. Great Swamp NWR was also among the first refuges to develop an in-house "Strike Team" to prevent the spread of invasive species by employing early detection-rapid response methods. Hurricane Sandy caused massive blow downs and significant blockage of wilderness trails. Bill pushed back against efforts to rush in with chainsaws and instead supported a plan to develop traditional tools skills. Bill Koch's personal commitment to wilderness is evident, if not obvious, in nearly every facet of the GSWA. From regulations to infrastructure, from messaging to public use, DOI's first Wilderness Area is much better than it ever would have been were it not for Bill's 30 years of hard work and dedication to wilderness preservation.

Sara Aicher

Sara Aicher was nominated for the NWRS Wilderness Employee of the Year Award. With staffing shortages and increasing demands of remaining staff at the refuge, Sara stepped up to help wherever needed to assure the success of the wilderness program. She often provided briefings and trainings for new staff, volunteers, and interns unfamiliar with wilderness administration. She spent considerable time managing the increasing number of interns, scientists, biologists, university faculty visiting Okefenokee's wilderness, while ensuring their contribution would sustain wilderness character and contribute to management objectives. Sara helped with several interagency wilderness programs. She facilitated a dynamic program combining science, conservation, and monitoring comprehensively. She recently presented a case study on managing wildlife at Okefenokee wilderness as part of a webinar series conducted by the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center, and she helped initiate the Wilderness Fellows program in the region and coordinated their work to conduct wilderness character monitoring and contribute to other aspects of the wilderness program. And, she was instrumental in ensuring wilderness stewardship was first and foremost stressed in the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Sara has helped in all aspects of wilderness stewardship at Okefenokee wilderness to perpetuate experiences for present and future generations.

Steve Henry

Steve Henry was nominated for the NWRS Wilderness Employee of the Year Award. Steve has worked on wilderness refuges for most of his career with the Service to date. He brought a wealth of wilderness knowledge to the Great Swamp NWR in New Jersey from his experiences as a biologist at Charles M. Russell NWR in Montana and Cabeza Prieta NWR in Arizona. In 2005 he was nominated and served as the Service representative on the original interagency team that the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research

Institute developed for the Forest Service's national framework of wilderness character monitoring protocols. He is one of the co-authors of this published framework, which served as the basis for Keeping It Wild II, the monitoring protocols now used by all four federal wilderness management agencies. Steve has also been an active member of the Service's Wilderness Character Monitoring Team that developed the NWRS' approach to wilderness character monitoring. A particularly impressive accomplishment that demonstrated innovation and personal dedication was Steve's response to a huge blowdown of trees that resulted from Hurricane Sandy in 2013. Many large trees blocked access to one of the few trails through the refuge wilderness. The easy thing to do, and in fact what many of the staff preferred to do, was to remove the trees using chain saws. But Steve saw an opportunity to comply with the spirit of the Wilderness Act. He purchased crosscut saws and axes and arranged and paid for Forest Service employees to come to the refuge and conduct training in the use of these traditional tools for employees and volunteers. The training was a huge success and serves as a model for other refuge managers who may brush off using traditional tools in similar situations for lack of the tools and training. Steve went the extra mile to preserve the wilderness resources and is serving as a model and change agent for others. Steve was also nominated to serve on the interagency Ecological Restoration Workshop held this year by the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute. As a deputy refuge manager, Steve has experience with wilderness restoration and maintains an interagency network of colleagues. Again, he made important contributions to the thinking of the team and assisted in editing the conclusions and guidance resulting from the Workshop. Another on-the-ground issue that Steve has dealt with recently is Search and Rescue within the Refuge wilderness. Being located in a highly suburbanized area, it is not unusual for visitors or trespassers with few outdoor skills to become disoriented in the wilderness, especially after sunset. With the ubiquity of cellphones these days, people are quick to make emergency calls to be rescued from the refuge. Local law enforcement agencies would respond by immediately driving ATVs into the wilderness to locate lost individuals. After trying to work one-on-one with ever-changing law enforcement agents, Steve finally set up a training meeting with local law enforcement agencies to explain the values of wilderness and our responsibilities under the Wilderness Act, and to develop better approaches to conduct search and rescue operations. These new procedures are being followed, leading to better protection of the wilderness, while allowing emergency rescues to still take place. Not only does Steve work to protect and restore wilderness character on refuges he has worked on, but he repeatedly accepts invitations to contribute to improved interagency stewardship of the entire NWPS. He is recognized at both the Carhart Center and Leopold Institute for his expertise and dedication that he is requested to assist on projects over and over again. In so many ways, Steve has worked to perpetuate the wilderness for present and future generations in ways that most refuge wilderness managers have never even considered.