



News Release

3821 West Roosevelt Road
Little Rock, AR 72204

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Christina Fowler, (501) 296-1937, christina.fowler@arkansas.gov.

2008 Arkansas Forestry Commission Employees of the Year

LITTLE ROCK, ARK. – The 2008 Employees of the Year were honored by the Arkansas Forestry Commission during a luncheon Friday, Dec. 12, 2008 at Brave New Restaurant in Little Rock.

The Arkansas Forestry Commission began the annual luncheon and awards presentation in 1996 to recognize employees who have made significant contributions to the Forestry Commission, the forestry program and their communities. The State Forester and Deputy State Forester review nominations submitted by employee peers and/or supervisors.

The Spencer Fox Award, the highest award presented, was given to John Pressgrove, County Ranger for Arkansas, Lonoke, Monroe and Prairie Counties. The award is named after Mr. Spencer Fox, chairman of the Board of Commissioners for the Forestry Commission from 1943-1979. The award is presented to the employee that has made the most overall contribution, through assistance or on-the-ground work, to landowners and communities.

Pressgrove, also recognized in 2004 as District 3 employee of the year, has led in accomplishments in the urban forestry program. Pressgrove has worked with several communities in District 3, 12 of which are certified Tree City USA communities (includes Stuttgart, Wynne, McCrory, Jonesboro, Augusta, Carlisle, Lonoke.) His work with Tree City USA has contributed to Arkansas being a national leader the past three years in the number of new Tree City USA communities. He also promotes forestry and environmental programs through numerous school and public presentations. From July 2007 to June 2008, he conducted 105 presentations to schools, communities and civic groups.

The Career Achievement Award was presented to Betty Watkins, District 2 Dispatcher. The Career Achievement award is the second highest award presented by the Arkansas Forestry Commission. Over the past 10 years, Watkins has worked to promote forestry education in schools, urban forestry in communities, and forest management training for landowners and Loggers. Watkins developed the "Trash Not" program for school-age children to teach them about recycling and the negative effects of litter. Each year, she works with the Cooperative Extension Service to host the Cossatot Forestry Clinic, during which landowners and loggers receive information on forestry issues.

As the urban forestry representative for District 2, Watkins works with communities to achieve Tree City USA certification. As a result of her efforts, Center Point, DeQueen, Dierks, Glenwood, Hatfield, Nashville and Tollette are recognized as Tree Cities USA. The National Arbor Day Foundation developed the Tree City USA program to recognize those cities that have an active

tree program. The National League of Cities, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National Association of State Foresters are cosponsors.

George Stagg, Ashley and Chicot County Forester, was awarded the District 1 Employee of the Year. District 1 serves the counties of Ashley, Bradley, Calhoun, Chicot, Cleveland, Desha, Drew, Jefferson and Lincoln Counties. Stagg had more than 30 years of experience in forest management prior to joining the Forestry Commission in 2005. Stagg is responsible for forest management and fire suppression programs in Ashley and Chicot Counties. Through his efforts and those of his employees, Ashley County has received recognition for 33 communities in the county attaining Firewise Communities/USA recognition.

James Gibbons, Polk County Ranger II, has been selected the District 2 Employee of the Year. District 2 serves Howard, Little River, Montgomery, Pike, Polk and Sevier Counties. Gibbons came to work for the Forestry Commission in 2005 with 15 years of forestry and maintenance experience. His duties include wildfire suppression and assisting with forest management programs. In 2005, Gibbons was part of a Forestry Commission dozer strike team dispatched to the Roundabout Fire in Georgia. He has also saved the agency money for building maintenance he has performed on the county and district offices.

County Forester Shane Booth was presented the District 3 Employee of the Year Award for the forest management work accomplished in his four counties (Arkansas, Lonoke, Monroe, and Prairie.) District 3 serves Arkansas, Clay, Craighead, Crittenden, Cross, Greene, Jackson, Lee, Lonoke, Mississippi, Monroe, Phillips, Poinsett, Prairie, St. Francis and Woodruff Counties. Booth has prepared 89 forest management plans on 2,664 acres, and a total of 1,141 acres were planted in his coverage area between December 2007 and April 2008. Booth supervises the AFC Stuttgart office, and is the District 3 Tree Farm chair. The Tree Farm program works with landowners in providing management assistance. Landowners that carry out multiple use management practices (forestry, wildlife, and aesthetic) on their property are recognized as Tree Farmers.

The District 4 Employee of the Year Award was presented to County Forester Josh Smith who is responsible for Forestry Commission wildfire suppression and prevention and forest management programs in Columbia County. District 4 serves Columbia, Hempstead, Lafayette, Miller, Nevada, Ouachita and Union Counties. Since June 2006, Smith hit the ground running with one of the most successful forest management programs in Arkansas. He led the state in the number of Forest Stewardship Program plans, and was third for number of certified Forest Stewards. The Forest Stewardship Program recognizes and rewards landowners that are managing their forestlands according to a multiple-use concept. Landowners have access to resource professionals to assist them in obtaining a written forest management plan addressing multiple-use management.

Garland County Ranger III Chad Noles was selected as the District 5 Employee of the Year. District 5 serves Clark, Dallas, Garland, Grant, Hot Spring and Saline Counties. His responsibilities include wildfire suppression and protection, working with communities in urban forestry, FireWise and assisting landowners with forest management activities. As a result, Noles has worked hard to provide assistance to communities and complete district-wide projects. Noles is also a chain saw safety instructor and grievance officer for the Forestry Commission.

Lewis Horn, Yell County Ranger II, was named the District 6 Employee of the Year. Horn began his career with the Forestry Commission in 2001, and since January 2002, approximately 6,000 acres have had trees established in Yell County. Horn's duties include wildfire suppression and prevention, working with communities and schools in forestry education and assisting with forest management activities. Yell County led District 6 in forest management plans with more than 4,000 acres in forest planning during the evaluation period, and more than 60 management assists were provided on 4,200 acres.

The District 7 Employee of the Year Award was presented to Shawn Smith, Newton County Ranger II. District 7 serves Baxter, Benton, Boone, Carroll, Madison, Marion and Newton Counties. Smith began his career with the Forestry Commission in September 2007. His duties include wildfire suppression and prevention, working with communities and schools in forestry education, and assisting with forest management activities. Newton County led District 7 in forest management plans with more than 2,200 acres in forest planning during the evaluation period. Since 1993, Smith has also served his community as a volunteer firefighter for the Western Grove Fire Department.

Izard County Ranger III Gary Hutson received the District 8 Employee of the Year Award. District 8 serves Fulton, Independence, Izard, Lawrence, Randolph and Sharp Counties. Hutson's responsibilities include wildfire suppression and protection, working with communities in urban forestry and FireWise, and assisting landowners with forest management activities. Following the February 2008 tornado event, Hutson and the Izard County office assisted with opening up roads and worked with forest landowners in timber salvage and reforestation operations. Izard County led District 8 in Forest Stewardship Program accomplishments with more 1,100 acres placed in the Forest Stewardship Program. The Forest Stewardship Program recognizes and rewards landowners that are managing their forestlands according to a multiple-use concept. Landowners have access to resource professionals to assist them in obtaining a written forest management plan addressing multiple-use management.

The District 9 Employee of the Year for 2008 is Lowell Altom, White County Ranger II. District 9 serves Cleburne, Conway, Faulkner, Perry, Pulaski, Van Buren and White Counties. Altom's duties include wildfire suppression and prevention, working with communities and schools in forestry education, and assisting with forest management activities. Since 1999, more than 10,000 acres have been planted in trees in White County, and Altom was recognized in 2007 and 2008 for promoting the FireWise Program in District 9. The goal of Arkansas FireWise is to work with fire departments and communities to better enable Arkansans to become more "Firewise" and fire-safe when living in or near forested or undeveloped areas

The District Forester of the Year Award was presented to William "Bill" Sprinkle, who is responsible for managing Forestry Commission operations in a seven county area of southwest Arkansas. District 4 led the state in Forest Stewardship Program plans with more than 8,700 acres enrolled. The Forest Stewardship Program recognizes and rewards landowners that are managing their forestlands according to a multiple-use concept. Landowners have access to resource professionals to assist them in obtaining a written forest management plan addressing multiple-use management. More than 4,300 acres were certified as Forest Stewards. Sprinkle is also an instructor for the advanced fire behavior course at the Arkansas Wildland Fire Academy, and an instructor for the Forestry Commission ATV safety program.

Joey Pittman, forest technician at Poison Springs State Forest, received the Program Support Employee of the Year Award. He has measured thousands of trees during his 20 year career with the Arkansas Forestry Commission. Pittman aids in managing for multiple uses, timber management, recreation and infrastructure on the more than 21,000 acres that make up Poison Springs State Forest. Pittman's other duties include forest inventory, marking trees for harvest, and maintaining roads on the state forest.

Theresa Grimmatt, Personnel Assistant at the Arkansas Forestry Commission Headquarters in Little Rock, was awarded the 2008 Administrative Support Employee of the Year. Grimmatt also received the award in 2005. Grimmatt is assigned to the Human Resources department, however she has also taken on other assignments from the Fiscal and Fire Protection sections. Her duties include handling agency time, training, invoices, and in addition, the budget for the Fire Protection section. She also works concurrently for the Arkansas Board of Registration for Foresters.

Steve Brown, Communications Manager, was presented the 2008 Program Manager of the Year Award. He also received the award in 2006. Brown was hired in 2005, and has since overseen the installation of a new repeater system for the Forestry Commission. Through his efforts installing and maintaining the Forestry Commission communications and network system has saved the agency thousands of dollars.

For more information about the Arkansas Forestry Commission, visit www.arkansasforestry.org or call (501) 296-1940.

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