



# 2020 REGIONAL FORESTER HONOR AWARDS

December 17, 2020



# Overcoming Challenges: Our Commitment Through Resilience and Innovation

Welcome .....Jim Caldwell  
Emcee, Public Affairs Officer, Kisatchie National Forest

Pledge of Allegiance .....Lisa Lewis  
Forest Supervisor, Kisatchie National Forest

National Anthem .....Recording

Regional Forester's Opening Remarks .....Ken Arney  
Regional Forester, Southern Region

**~ Presentation of Awards ~**

**Presenter: JaSal Morris, Acting Deputy Regional Forester**

**Delivering Benefits to the Public**

Group Award - Twin Ponds Rifle Range, Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests  
Individual Award - Jamey Thweatt, Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area

**Promoting Sustainable Recreation**

Group Award - Forest Recreation Management Team, Cherokee National Forest  
Group Award - Forest Recreation Outdoor Group,  
George Washington and Jefferson National Forests  
Individual Award - Kevin Massey, Wild South in partnership with  
National Forests in North Carolina

**Fostering Volunteerism and Service**

Group Award - Volunteer and Service Center of Excellence Team, Regional Office



**Presenter: Stephanie Neal Johnson, Acting Deputy Regional Forester**

**Natural Resource Leadership**

Group Award - Oakmulgee Ranger District, National Forests in Alabama

Individual Award - Robert Bastarache, Ouachita National Forest

**Diversity and Inclusiveness**

Group Award - Southeast Conservation Corps, Regional Office

Individual Award - Rosie Thomas, National Forests in Mississippi

**Sustaining Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands**

Group Award - Savannah River Fire Management Team, Savannah River

Individual Award - Daniel Stratton, National Forests in North Carolina

**Presenter: Jan Davis, Deputy Regional Forester**

**Law Enforcement and Investigations**

Group Award - Law Enforcement Pandemic Planning Team,

Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area

Individual Award - Alvin Duane Crims, Ozark-St. Francis National Forest

**Collaborative Partnerships and Engagement**

Group Award - National Forests and Grasslands in Texas in partnership with

American Youth Works and the Texas Conservation Corps

Individual Award - David Byrd, Kisatchie National Forest

**Delivering State & Private Forestry Programs**

Group Award - The Center for Heirs' Property Preservation

Individual Award - Melvin Harris, National Forests in Alabama

**Presenter: Ken Arney, Regional Forester**

**Creating a Safety Learning Culture**

Group Award - Ouachita National Forest COVID-19 Incident Management Team,

Ouachita National Forest

Individual Award - James Fowlkes, Jr., Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests

**Ranger District of the Year**

Stearns Ranger District, Daniel Boone National Forest



## Regional Forester's Special Awards Overcoming Challenges - Our Commitment through Resilience and Innovation

**Presenter: Ken Arney, Regional Forester**

- Region 8 Public Affairs Staff, Regional Office and All Units
- Calcasieu Ranger District and Supervisor Office Employees, Kisatchie National Forest
- Nantahala-Pisgah Plan Revision Process, National Forests in North Carolina
- National Forests in Florida Virtual Training, National Forests in Florida
- Ocala National Forest Special Products Initiative, National Forests in Florida
- Managing Property Boundaries through Innovation, Resilience and Partnerships,  
National Forests in Florida
- COVID-19 Incident Management Team Planning Decision Support Service Team,  
Regional Office
- Improving Wildlife Monitoring through Innovation, Savannah River
- Geodetic Control Network in the El Yunque National Forest, Regional Office
- Daniel Boone National Forest Minerals Team, Daniel Boone National Forest
- COVID-19 Incident Management Team Employee Care and Support Team, Regional Office
- Budget and Financial Management Staff, Regional Office
- Michael Keys, National Forests in Florida

**~ Special Recognition to Thomas Black, 2020 Smokey Bear Award Recipient ~**

Closing Remarks ..... Ken Arney



# Delivering Benefits to the Public Group Award

## Twin Ponds Rifle Range Francis Marion & Sumter National Forests

**Team Lead:** Rhea Whalen

**Team Members:** Billy Downer and Ted Mikkelsen (South Carolina Department of Natural Resources)

The Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests and the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR) have maintained one of the longest lasting cooperative agreements in the Nation, with a long history of working together to accomplish common goals for the natural resources and people of South Carolina. In 2016, the two agencies entered into a non-funded Challenge Cost-Share Agreement to operate and maintain the Twin Ponds Rifle Range for the benefit of the people of coastal South Carolina. Originally constructed in the 1970s, the Twin Ponds Rifle Range had become severely degraded and was a public safety concern. Under the challenge cost-share agreement, the SCDNR manages the new Twin Ponds range as a supervised range with a full-time range master and four seasoned range safety officers. Since August 2019, more than 15,000 range users have visited the range, providing a welcome diversion to the public during the COVID-19 pandemic. The range is reserved one day a week for use by veterans and active-duty members of the U.S. military and is open the remaining five days per week to the general public. The partnership between the USDA Forest Service and the SCDNR is delivering significant and lasting benefits to the public - one shot at a time!





# Delivering Benefits to the Public Individual Award

## Jamey Thweatt Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area

Jamey Thweatt serves as the Recreation Program Manager at Land Between the Lakes (LBL) National Recreation Area. Jamey led and managed a staff of 14 permanent employees, apprentices and interns along with 40 volunteer Resident Attendants in all operational aspects of LBL's recreational program delivery and COVID-19 pandemic response. He provided leadership to develop and implement mitigation measures for the unit's recreational facilities following Departmental guidance while still providing safe, recreational opportunities for the public and LBL staff. Jamey's leadership, attention to detail, and professionalism reflects great credit upon himself, Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area and the USDA Forest Service.





# Promoting Sustainable Recreation Group Award

## Forest Recreation Management Team Cherokee National Forest

**Team Lead:** Jesse English

**Team Members:** Doug Byerly, Jay Chapman, Ryan Farr, Terinda Whisenant, Brandon Burke, Cheryl Summers, Seong Hopkins and Chad Ingle

The Cherokee Forest Recreation Management Team has taken strides in strategic, collaborative, and innovative approaches to elevate their sustainable recreation program. As an action plan, their "Shift, Invest, Sustain" communication plan is a model approach towards sustainable recreation with local communities, partners, line officers and district personnel.

Decommissioning underutilized and unneeded facilities, utilizing cutting edge GPS and LIDAR approaches for comprehensive trail mapping and analysis, and understanding the value of outdoor recreation for rural economic development has positioned this unit well into the future. This team has strategically invested in its workforce pipeline through service programs such as Youth Conservation Corps (YCC), Public Land Corps (PLC), and Resource Assistant (RA) programs, including working with the Tribal Youth Conservation Corps to bring tribal youth back to their ancestral home lands to restore the Trail of Tears National Historic Trail while being immersed in their cultural history.





# Promoting Sustainable Recreation Group Award

## Forest Recreation Management Team Cherokee National Forest





# Promoting Sustainable Recreation Group Award

## Forest Recreation Outdoor Group George Washington & Jefferson National Forests

**Team Lead:** Brandon Olinger (USDA Forest Service)

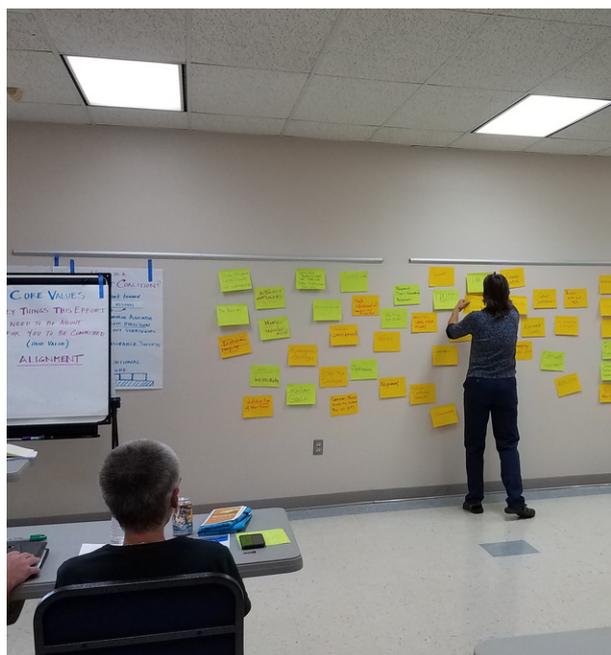
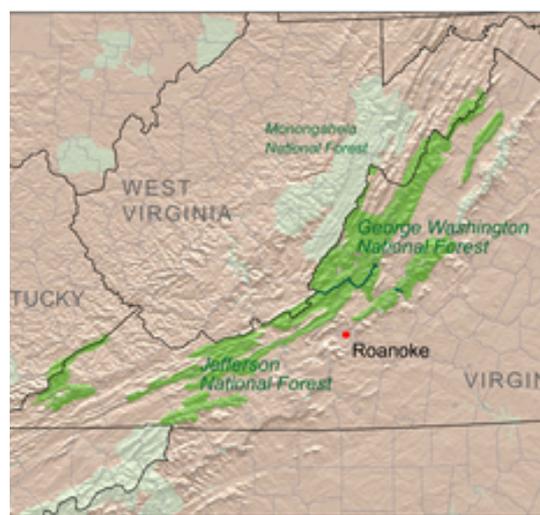
**Team Members:** Michelle Davalos, Ginelle Heller, Matt Helt, Elizabeth Lemaster, Donna Mattson, Nadine Siak, James H. Thompson, Joby Timm, and Ginny Williams (USDA Forest Service); Anne Herring (USDA); Katie Dunn and Fred Ramey (City of Norton); David Moore (Dickenson County); Dane Poe (Lee County); Rita Surratt (Dickenson County Tourism Director); Freda Starnes and Bill Dingus (Scott County); Michael Wampler and Michael Hatfield (Wise County); Kari Paschetto, Vicki Ratcliffe, and Justin Boggs (Mountain Empire Community College); Chelsea Barnes, Austin Counts, and Adam Wells (Appalachian Voices); Robbie Robbins (High Knob Enhancement Corporation); Sharon Fisher, Phil Shelton, and Martie Bell (The Clinch Coalition); Brad J. Kreps, and Angie Watlund (The Nature Conservancy); Idalina Walker (Friends of Southwest Virginia); Shawn Lindsey and Kyle Lamm (Spearhead Trails); Joe Morton and David Woodard (Heart of Appalachia); Sharon Buchanan (Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation State Parks); Seth Thompson (Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources); Conaway Haskins (Virginia Tech Extension); Gary Harris (Big Stone Gap Parks and Recreation); Chris Williams and Fred Luntsford (Town of Appalachia); Stephen Lawson and Gary Johnson (Town of Big Stone Gap); Jimmy Williams (Town of Coeburn); Debra Horne (Town of Dungannon); Ben Jones (Ruffed Grouse Society); Debbie Hale (Scott County Horseman & Wise County Tourism); Brad Mathisen (Central Appalachian Climbers Coalition); Brian Fallin (Boy Scouts of America); and Bill Ramey (Pine Mountain Trail Conference)

The George Washington-Jefferson National Forests working with the Forest Recreation Outdoor Group, better known as FROG, is an outstanding "collective impact model" of municipalities, counties, state organizations, NGO's, educational institutions, and interested user groups working to focus on a shared vision for sustainable recreation. This group has a keen understanding of what is important socially and economically to their geographic region and forest visitors so limited time and funding can be invested wisely for the greatest benefit. This collaborative group capitalizes on the strengths of various organizations to improve the health, education, and economy of the region through sustainable recreation. FROG is helping increase customer satisfaction by addressing deferred maintenance of facilities and trails; improving the environmental footprint in their recreation areas and trails; and renewing access and recreational opportunities that this progressively vibrant community values.



# Promoting Sustainable Recreation Group Award

## Forest Recreation Outdoor Group George Washington & Jefferson National Forests



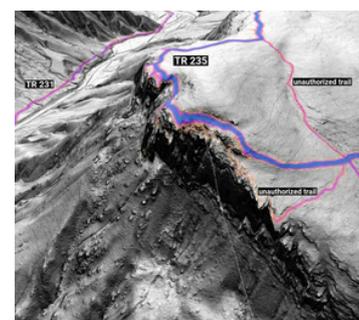
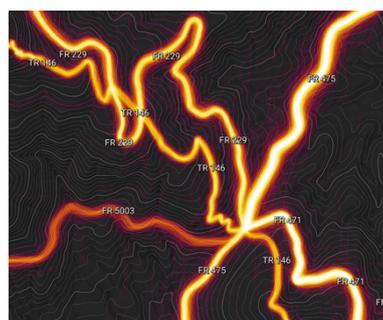
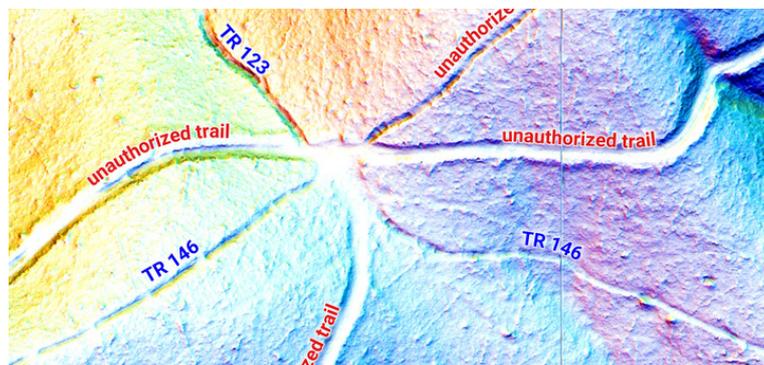


# Promoting Sustainable Recreation Individual Award

## Kevin Massey

### Wild South in partnership with the National Forests in North Carolina

Kevin Massey is deserving of recognition for his commitment to promoting recreational opportunities on the National Forests in North Carolina. Kevin has coordinated a unique service to the forest by utilizing the Strava app to track hiking, running, and mountain biking usage across the extensive North Carolina forests' trail system. Along with LIDAR data, this innovative monitoring approach provides recreation managers a heightened awareness of visitor demand and capacities for improved sustainable recreation planning. This effort has also provided a more comprehensive inventory of system (600 miles) and non-system (200 miles) routes that will provide a sustainable trail network for recreation and emergency access that improve connections to the local communities.





# Fostering Volunteerism and Service Group Award

## Volunteers and Service Center of Excellence Team Southern Region

**Team Lead:** Kelly Balcarczyk

**Team Members:** Cassie Adams, Krista Langley, and Ginelle Heller (USDA Forest Service); Jules DeFriese, Sherry Salcido, Jaina Reed, and Meredith Casper (Greening Youth Foundation)

In just the first year of their pilot program, the Center of Excellence (COE) team has proven to be extremely resilient during the pandemic by making huge adaptations in this virtual environment. The COE immediately transitioned and assisted all active service participants into a “working-from-home” partnership with local units, including creating virtual work plans for the Integrated Fire and Recreation interns and VetsWorks interns. The COE team also coordinated regional partner check-in calls with over 30 organizations to provide consistent COVID-19 safety protocols for volunteer and service participants for the upcoming field season. Due to the pandemic, the COE team successfully engaged with new partnership agreements with the AmeriCorps College Advising Corps program, as well as the Department of State Intern Program, to fill an additional 32 virtual internships for undergraduate and graduate students. These adaptive solutions, communication strategies, and expanded partnerships are truly impressive accomplishments for the COE team to achieve during their first year and under the conditions of COVID-19.



Greening Youth  
FOUNDATION



# Fostering Volunteerism and Service Group Award

## Volunteers and Service Center of Excellence Team Southern Region





# Natural Resource Leadership Group Award

## Oakmulgee Ranger District National Forests in Alabama

**Team Lead:** Mike Caylor

**Team Members:** Dustin Beaty, Jeremy Brand, Linda Chism, Destry Ford, Wendall Hallman, Melvin Harris, Jon King, John Kleciak, Robert E. Lee, Christopher McCarthy, Jason Miller, Timothy Odom, Brian Pentecost, Napoleon Reed, Larry Rhine, Devin Sanders, Chrystal Tindell, David G. Turner, Trevor Callaghan, and Larry Harris, Jr. (USDA Forest Service); Drew Tishner and Robert Simmons (Alabama Department of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries); Brandon Bobo (National Wild Turkey Federation); David Kelly and Will Brantley (Alabama Forestry Commission); Carol Denhof (Longleaf Alliance); and Alex Varner (The Nature Conservancy)

The Oakmulgee Ranger District is recognized for their outstanding leadership and teamwork in managing natural resources on the National Forests in Alabama. This 160,000-acre district has worked together to move more than 19,000 acres to the future desired condition in less than three years, burn over 70,000 acres in two years, and increase the RCW population by 23 new clusters without any relocation activity. Using a mathematical scoring system which considers attributes of long-term fire, RCW habitat, access, timber age and structure, they are able to evaluate existing landscape conditions and color-code compartments to determine their priority of work. In order to accomplish this work, the district had to earn money to pay for the increased pace and scale. They are accomplishing this through Stewardship Contracts and Good Neighbor Agreements working with partners such as: National Wild Turkey Foundation, Longleaf Alliance, The Nature Conservancy, Alabama Forestry Commission, USDA APHIS, University of Alabama and others. The Oakmulgee Ranger District is leading the way in longleaf pine ecosystem restoration and preserving natural resources.



# Natural Resource Leadership Group Award

## Oakmulgee Ranger District National Forests in Alabama





# Natural Resource Leadership Individual Award

## Robert Bastarache Ouachita National Forest

Robert Bastarache, serves as the District Wildlife Biologist for the Choctaw, Kiamichi, and Tiak Ranger Districts in Oklahoma. Robert has shown sustained leadership in his position over the time he has overseen wildlife operations on these three districts. Robert's leadership is seen most vividly by the combination of innovative natural resource management and collaboration with long-time partners at the Red Slough Wildlife Management Area. Red Slough is a 5,814-acre wetland project designed to restore hydrology and re-establish bottomland hardwoods. Robert pioneered the use of Stewardship funding from timber sales to help fund management activities on the area. He has worked directly with staff on the Ouachita to champion two Joint Chief Landscape Restoration Partnership proposals that were selected and are currently in their first and second years of their three-year span. Robert and his staff continue to restore large stream crossings with open boxes and remove old dams in order to provide sustainable passage and overall improved water quality for aquatic organisms including the Threatened Leopard Darter. In 2020, the Forest awarded a contract for replacement of the Big Cedar Creek crossing in Oklahoma that will significantly reduce sedimentation and improve conditions in the Glover River for the Leopard Darter. This project combined with two previous crossing replacements have improved habitat for aquatic species but also improved transportation infrastructure.





# Diversity and Inclusiveness Group Award

## Southeast Conservation Corps Southern Region

**Team Lead:** Brenna Kelly

**Team Members:** Lindsey Agee, James Gasaway, and Natalia Muglia

Southeast Conservation Corps (SECC) has been a trusted and strategic partner of the Southern Region for over five years. In partnership with the Southern Appalachian National Forests, SECC has been training a diverse workforce of the future through our Youth Conservation Corps (15-18 years old) and Public Land Corps (16-30 years old) and veterans (up to 35 years old) programs. In 2020, SECC launched a new partnership initiative with the Southern Region aimed at Opportunity Youth between the ages of 16 and 24. Opportunity Youth are often referred to as “disconnected” or “at-risk”, but SECC is offering the Opportunity Youth Service Initiative to help change the narrative. This initiative is designed to provide education and conservation service experience to young people experiencing barriers. During their time working on Forest Service lands, crew members can develop job skills, earn certifications, complete their high school requirements, and receive assistance for transitioning to postsecondary education or the workforce. Because of SECC’s innovation and ability to attract outside funders, the Forest Service has been able to leverage an incredible amount of resources and ensure that this partnership is sustainable into the future.





# Diversity and Inclusiveness Individual Award

## Rosie Thomas National Forests in Mississippi

As the National Forests in Mississippi's Administrative Officer, Rosie Thomas plays an integral role providing administrative and management services to the forest by assessing needs and developing plans to meet the forest's administrative and operation requirements. Rosie has led efforts to improve the efficiency of the National Forests in Mississippi's hiring process by simplifying or eliminating unnecessary steps and answering any unknown questions. Rosie developed a step-by-step guide for all hiring managers to use which included a hiring flowchart and the different roles each person plays throughout the process from start to finish. Rosie also serves as co-chairperson of the Forest Multicultural Advisory Committee and is a constant voice for diversity and inclusion at all levels of the forest. She is accessible to all employees on the forest as she serves as the central point of contact for information on a variety of administrative functions, procedures and requirements on the forest. Her exemplary customer service serves as a significant contribution that helps the forest accomplish key goals year after year.





# Sustaining Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands Group Award

## Savannah River Fire Management Team Savannah River

**Team Lead:** Andrew Pascarella

**Team Members:** Jarvis Brown, Mark Frizzell, Phyllis Smith, Kenneth Aiken, Kevin Pope, Michael Henderson, Jonathan O'Gorman, and Jenna Rooker

The Savannah River Fire Management Team has incorporated numerous partners and organizations to increase their ability to restore and maintain quality ecosystems on the site. Since 1990, Savannah River has involved the University of Georgia in long-term management and study plots. In addition, Savannah River has reached out to numerous partners to make sure data from these study plots are collected and maintained to benefit other similar ecosystems in the future for active management planning, studies, and implementation. Besides the research and unique management coordination needs on the Savannah River, the organization also invested and delivered a robust prescribed fire education and information campaign. This campaign included the University of Georgia fire ecology group which trains the next generation of managers and prescribed fire professionals on both private and public lands. Through the Savannah River's efforts, the programs they have established will help sustain our nation's forests and grasslands.





# Sustaining Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands Group Award

## Savannah River Fire Management Team Savannah River





# Sustaining Our Nation's Forests and Grasslands

## Individual Award

### Daniel Stratton

#### National Forests in North Carolina

Dan Stratton, Air Quality Specialist Technician for the National Forests in North Carolina, assisted Land Between the Lakes Recreation Area near Model, Tennessee, with deploying four smoke monitors downwind multiple prescribed fires, and insured those monitors operated satisfactorily during the burn period and throughout the night. Never before had multiple smoke monitors been deployed at the same time during a Southern Region prescribed fire operation. Particulate matter data collected in this manner gave the Forest and the Southern Region Air and Fuels Programs a unique understanding of smoke dispersion. Monitoring results will enable practitioners to have real-time knowledge of particulate matter concentrations at the monitoring sites thanks to satellite uploads. With this knowledge, practitioners may stop the prescribed fires if data indicates undo impacts to public health from smoke particulate matter.





# Law Enforcement and Investigations Group Award

## Law Enforcement Pandemic Planning Team Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area

**Team Leads:** Tina Tilley and Duane Cameron

**Team Members:** Todd Lerke, Scotty Mason, John Westbrook, Jared Baker, Jeff Laird, Jamey Thweatt, Randall Mitchell, Jason Osborne, Doug Phelps, Kyle Varel, Paul Freer, Rob Sigler, Chris Garrison, Donald Dill, Richard Conley, Chris Holland, Wyatt Wilburn, Jordan West, Anna Walla, Courtney Day, Jaqueline Clark, Michael Johnson, Andy Radomski, Chris Joyner, Carl Feagans, Jordan Crain, Carlin Lewis, Emily Cleaver, Patrick Holcomb, Greg Barnes, Matt Burnett, Richard Lomax, Jeremy Surprenant, Zack Buhler, and William Harris

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Land Between the Lakes (LBL) implemented a Pandemic Planning Team. In response to USDA and Centers for Disease Control protocols, the Pandemic Planning Team began the task of closing many developed recreation sites while still providing as many dispersed outdoor recreation opportunities as possible. The Team coordinated with outside groups which included State Representatives and County Leaders. Visitation levels were noted on many days to be over 60,000 with many visitors looking to access shorelines and the 28 boat ramps. Forest Service staff, coordinating with law enforcement, developed an incident command system with daily assignments and after-action reviews. Many Forest Protection Officers were assigned to support LEOs with enforcement efforts throughout March, April, May and June. During this time period 2,112 incident reports, 171 written warnings and 340 violation notices were issued. Collaboration and dedication from LBL Law Enforcement staff significantly reduced damage to open lands while protecting the public and providing outdoor recreation opportunities.



# Law Enforcement and Investigations Group Award

## Law Enforcement Pandemic Planning Team Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area





# Law Enforcement and Investigations Individual Award

## Alvin Duane Crims Ozark - St. Francis National Forests

Over the past 14-years, Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) Alvin Duane Crims has cultivated and maintained an excellent working relationship with the Boston Mountain Ranger District employees. Throughout the course of 2020, information provided by district employees has assisted LEO Crims with resolving at least twenty different crimes which occurred on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forest. LEO Crims has spent considerable time investigating black walnut timber thefts across the Forest. As a result of his work, the forest has recovered over \$25,000 in restitution for the stolen timber, with several other cases still pending in Federal Court. By fostering relationships with both employees and the public, LEO Crims exudes professionalism, trust and the respect of his fellow Forest Service employees, as well as the community he serves.





## Collaborative Partnerships and Engagement Group Award

### American Youth Works/Texas Conservation Corps National Forests and Grasslands in Texas

**Team Lead:** Jamie Sowell

**Team Members:** Joey Silva (USDA Forest Service); Jody Karr and David Bock (American Youth Works/Texas Conservation Corps)

The National Forests and Grasslands in Texas' (NFGT) partnership with American Youth Works and the Texas Conservation Corps is a great demonstration of stewarding the whole. This partnership has grown year after year demonstrating the unit's commitment to working with youth and growing future leaders. The NFGT invested the time and leadership for the long-term opportunity to increase capacity not just for themselves but many other units as well. The value of a true partnership is when both parties receive benefit from the relationship. Through this partnership, the NFGT was able to accomplish prescribed burning on 140,000 acres, reduce the cost per acre, and complete numerous other projects on the Angeline-Sabine National Forest. American Youth Works and the Texas Conservation Corps received quality training, mentorship, conservation education as well practical work experience.





# Collaborative Partnerships and Engagement Group Award

## American Youth Works/Texas Conservation Corps National Forests and Grasslands in Texas

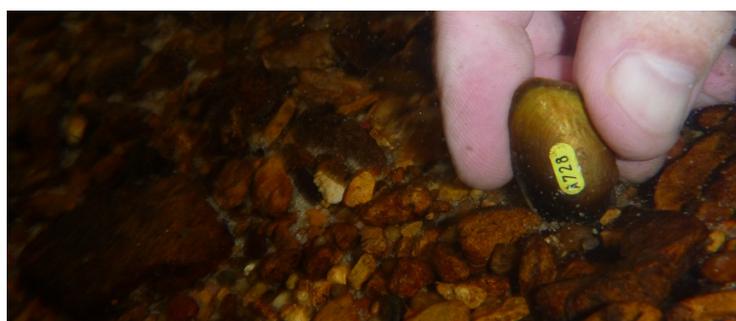
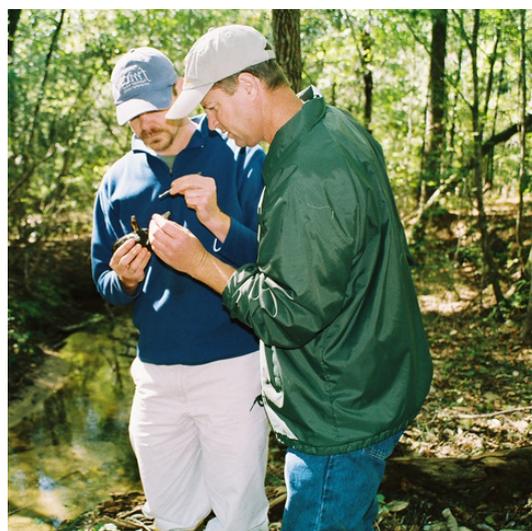




## Collaborative Partnerships and Engagement Individual Award

### David Byrd Kisatchie National Forest

Over a 20-year period, David Byrd has been collaborating with various federal, state, and private partners to create a recovery model for the federally-listed Louisiana pearlshell mussel. The benefits of this partnership are not just localized on the Kisatchie National Forest, but may be utilized nationally by all natural resource agencies. This long-standing partnership has adapted to changes in resource conditions, funding challenges and transitioning of staffing. This summer, David saw his dream realized at the release of mussels back into the wild. Through David's resilience, his collaborative efforts have overcome immense challenges to benefit the forest ecosystem.





## Delivering State & Private Forestry Programs Group Award

### The Center for Heirs' Property Preservation Sustainable Forestry & African American Land Retention Program, Regional Office

**Team Lead:** Jennie Stephens

**Team Members:** Josh Walden, Steve Patterson, David Bourgeois, Walter Whetstone, Mary Powers, Kenneth Dunn, Trey Bailey, and Sharmaine George

The Center for Heir's Property Preservation provides legal education and services and sustainable forestry education and services to low-income, historically under-served heirs' property (HP) owners and others in 18 South Carolina counties to help them stabilize their land ownership and begin to realize more income from their land, so that they may pass it down to the next generation as a wealth-building asset. Celebrating its 15th anniversary, this work's combined aspects are providing one pathway out of persistent, rural poverty while helping preserve valuable landscapes and create a healthier environment. This landowner movement has the power to unleash the cultural and natural resources of land in marginalized communities toward family wealth creation and to ecological restoration. The Center for Heirs' Property Sustainable Forestry & African Land Retention program will continue to strengthen networks that support, connect, and empower its family land owners. These networks are catalysts through which African American landowner leaders are emerging and organizing. In the long run, it is the empowered leadership of these landowners and those they influence that will define the Center and its program's enduring legacy.





# Delivering State & Private Forestry Programs Group Award

## The Center for Heirs' Property Preservation Sustainable Forestry & African American Land Retention Program, Regional Office





# Delivering State & Private Forestry Programs Individual Award

## Melvin Harris National Forests in Alabama

During FY2020, Melvin Harris acted as the District Ranger for the Tuskegee National Forest while concurrently serving as the Oakmulgee Ranger District's Timber Management Assistant. While in these positions, he stewarded two Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) timber sales with the Alabama Forestry Commission on the Oakmulgee Ranger District and one timber sale on the Tuskegee National Forest. This constituted an effective and measurable accomplishment, delivering 20% of the sales offered by the National Forests in Alabama during FY20. Moreover, Melvin prepared two additional GNA timber sales in FY20 so that the Alabama Forestry Commission would be ready to put the sales out for bid in early FY21. Through his efforts, Melvin has enhanced and advanced the State and Private Forestry programs for Alabama.





## Creating a Safety Learning Culture Group Award

### Ouachita National Forest COVID-19 Incident Management Team Ouachita National Forest

**Team Lead:** Ich Stewart

**Team Members:** Darwin Bult, Wyatt Palin, Derrick Orrell, Mary Mentz, Terence Peck, Lori Hisek, Alicia Avey, Kelly Donaldson, Judith Goodner, Kevin Wagner, DJ Johnson, Laura Patty, and Ken Caraway

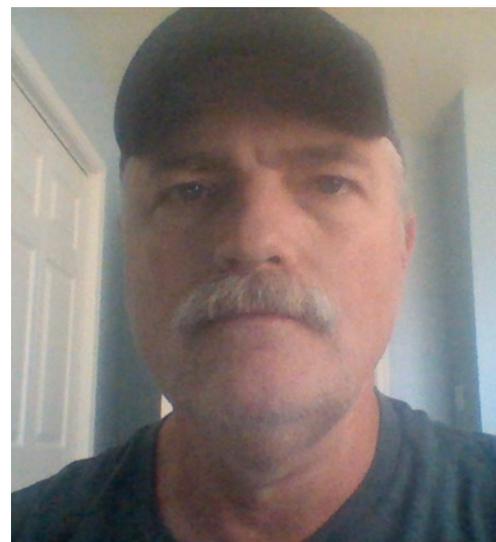
The Ouachita National Forest COVID-19 Incident Management Team (IMT) was established to manage the influx of rapidly changing COVID-19 information and to ensure forest employees received timely information. The team focused efforts on acquiring PPE; managing the budget; public information; internal messaging; fleet and employee resources; compiling national/state COVID information for Arkansas and Oklahoma, and Regional Office/Washington Office- COVID information. To keep employees apprised of pandemic information, the IMT provided a daily Situation Report in an email to all forest employees. The IMT's success was demonstrated by its ability to get information to the entire forest quickly and in one place. One-stop shopping kept employees from having to dig through emails. Fleet questions could be found quickly and easily - one click to immediately find an answer. By working together, the Ouachita COVID-19 IMT was very successful as a unit and facilitated the success of the entire forest.





# Creating a Safety Learning Culture Group Award

## Ouachita National Forest COVID-19 Incident Management Team Ouachita National Forest





# Creating a Safety Learning Culture Individual Award

## James Fowlkes, Jr. Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests

James has established a conducive safety culture learning environment for the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests. He encourages active involvement by managers, supervisors, and employees to create a safety culture that fosters accident prevention, identification of hazards, and a quick response to mitigate and eliminate risk in the workplace. Every forest employee is motivated to take an active role in the elimination of hazards and the prevention of mishaps. He developed an employee safety orientation presentation to give all new employees an overview of the safety learning culture. He diligently worked on updating the forests Pandemic and Continuation of Operations Plan during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuring critical, updated information is continuously available to Forest employees during this time of heightened stress and uncertainty. James' commitment to the Forest Safety Program has created a safer working environment for the employees on the Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests.





## Ranger District of the Year

### Stearns Ranger District Daniel Boone National Forest

**District Ranger:** Timothy O. Reed

**Team Members:** Matt Knipe, Katie Fitzsimmons, Don Daugherty, Tim Grooms, John Hull, Chris Murphy, Amanda Little, Rodney Mason, Joe Metzmeier, Jeremy Park, Melissa Ramsey, Todd Ross, Randy Sauls, Chase Sexton, Dustin Shannon, Laurie Smith, Mike Tapley, Ruby Troxtle, Dwayne Wright, and Cody Vanover

Even with challenging conditions, the Stearns Ranger District has continued to work on a wide variety of programs and resource management projects. The District implemented one of the first stewardship agreements on the forest using a 295-acre timber sale to provide approximately \$282,000 worth of services for wildlife habitat and timber stand improvements. By leveraging funding from a \$25,000 National Rifle Association grant, fees from the Recreation Enhancement Act, and help from the Pine Knot Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center, the District was able to fund a complete reconstruction of the Appletree Shooting Range. The Stearns Ranger District is also heavily involved in abandoned mine land restoration and treatments. Through partnership with the Tennessee Valley Authority, the District gated six mine portal entrances to improve safety for the public. Utilizing a Good Neighbor Authority agreement with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, over 65 acres were prepped and planted with native pollinator species, and over 200 acres of wildlife opening treatments for a diversity of habitats were completed. Even with local challenges, Stearns RD employees provided national support for fire suppression and hurricane relief sending personnel to Texas, California, Oregon and Louisiana. Through teamwork and dedication, the district has shown an unparalleled commitment to “caring for the land and serving people.”





# Ranger District of the Year

## Stearns Ranger District Daniel Boone National Forest



Barren Fork Campground, water fountain replacement-Rodney Mason and Dustin Shannon





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Southern Region Public Affairs Staff Regional Office and All Units

**Team Members:** Stephanie Johnson, Jon McMillan, Wendi Weaver, Scott Raymond, Michael Williams, Angelica Cacho, Meredith Hollowell, and Ashlee Ransom (Regional Office); Tammy Freeman Brown, Sheila Holifield, and Katherine Smith Walker (National Forests in Alabama); Judy Toppins and Steven Bekkerus (Chattahoochee - Oconee National Forests); Terry McDonald and James Ehrlich (Cherokee National Forest); Tim Eling, Mary O'Malley, and Gwen Hensley (Daniel Boone National Forest); Carolyn Krupp (El Yunque National Forest); Michelle Burnett and Susan Blake (National Forests in Florida); Pamela Baltimore, Michael Utt, and Rodney Foushee (Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests); Nadine Siak and Rebecca Robbins (George Washington and Jefferson National Forests); Jim Caldwell and Stacy Blomquist (Kisatchie National Forest); Chris Joyner, Carlin Lewis, Emily Cleaver and Brian Lewis (Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area); Mario Rossilli and Kara Davis (National Forests in Mississippi); Cathy Dowd, Adrienne Rubiacco, and Ericka Hincke (National Forests in North Carolina); Tracy Farley, Terence Peck, Mary Wood, and Ellen McWhirter (Ouachita and Ozark St. Francis National Forests); Josef Orosz (Savannah River); Gregory Deimel and Carmen Wanner (National Forests and Grasslands in Texas)

This year, the Region's communication professionals exemplified resilience and innovation in delivering information to internal and external audiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found new ways to deliver recreation and other permits to customers online; stayed in alignment with national messaging; provided accurate and constantly changing information; created virtual conservation education activities on social media; and responded to increased visitation by creating paper and digital communication products to encourage resource protection. Many of the individuals nominated for this award also served as Public Information Officers on their unit's Incident Management Teams while performing their regular duties.



# Regional Forester's Special Awards

## Southern Region Public Affairs Staff Regional Office and All Units



Southern Region Public Affairs Staff, Regional Office and All Units

**“Overcoming Challenges -  
Our Commitment through  
Resilience & Innovation  
Award”**



## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Calcasieu Ranger District and Supervisor's Office Employees Tornado/Hurricane Disaster Response Team Kisatchie National Forest

**Team Lead:** Jonny Fryar

**Team Members:** Holly Morgan, Chad Knight, Barbara Bell, Brandy Walden, Jason Nolde, Ron Fisher, John Simpson, Alvin Wells, Shane Thomas, Ed Galmon, Ched Fontenot, Conan Vallee, Travis LaCroix, Jessica Cole, Blake Prevot, Matt Pardue, Steve Shively, Cory Gordon, Cody Austell, Adam Boudreaux, Vincent Chatelain, Bobby Cochran, Kelly Donnelly, Debbie Dusza, Alleyn Friedrich, Brooklyn Frerks, Silas Hamilton, Trevor Jennings, Brittany Kailey, Rick Kugelmann, John Mayer, Michael Meryhew, Ryan Mitchell, Neal Plauche, Gary Sandell, Paul Saucier, Dave Shepard, Eric Stuart, Brandon Sultemeier, Bruce Williams, Melinda Shepard, Erica Johnson, Tristen Nicholas, Sonny Pynes, and Mason Stewart

In FY20, the Kisatchie National Forest Supervisor's Office timber staff and Calcasieu Ranger District employees worked together to respond to multiple natural disasters within a ten-month period (two tornadoes and two major hurricanes.) Through teamwork, they employed innovative ways to move and sell damaged timber, replace hundreds of Red Cockaded Woodpecker cavities, and utilize creative ways to respond, recover and complete an amazing number of projects – all during a global pandemic.





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Calcasieu Ranger District and Supervisor's Office Employees Tornado/Hurricane Disaster Response Team Kisatchie National Forest





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Adapting the Nantahala-Pisgah Plan Revision Process during COVID-19 National Forests in North Carolina

**Team Lead:** Michelle Aldridge

**Team Members:** Allison Borchers, Sheryl Bryan, Beth Buchanan, Alice Cohen, Tom Collins, Erik Crews, Brady Dodd, Cathy Dowd, Sarah Farmer, Logan Free, Joel Hardison, Gary Kauffman, Chelsea Litz, Steven Little, Heather Luczak, Ghazal Majidi-Weese, Jason Rodrigue, Adrienne Rubiaco, Eric Pullium, and Amber Vanderwolf (USDA Forest Service), and Lawrence Hayden (Contractor)

About one month into the comment period for the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests' proposed Land Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement, public involvement opportunities had to be revamped based on considerations for employee and public health and safety. The interdisciplinary team moved to virtual public engagement, extensively employing new tools to reach the public and seek input, garnering meaningful input in the process. All interdisciplinary team members plus the forest public affairs staff, GIS analysts, and the National Forest Foundation were critical in the successful transition to virtual public involvement.





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Adapting the Nantahala-Pisgah Plan Revision Process during COVID-19 National Forests in North Carolina





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Providing Virtual Training during COVID-19 National Forests in Florida

**Team Lead:** Charlie Patterson

**Team Members:** Jennifer Anderson, Ava Young, Jack West, Jason Martin, Mike Strange, Jessica Vincent, David Quisenberry, Ryan Hopkins, Byron Hart, Shawn Kinghorn, John Ramsay, Marlene Hudson, Will Lucas, Wes Woodrome, Kathy Bronson, Michael Papa, Debbie Beard, Steve Parrish, and Alan Kirby

The Virtual Training Team in Florida was innovative in adapting multiple in-person trainings to online sessions during COVID-19. Training ranged from fire-specific competencies, GIS training, Bloodborne Pathogens, resume writing and interview techniques. The team did this work to help employees continue career development, keep and advance a variety of qualifications and expand their knowledge of critical Forest Service programs. In total, the Virtual Training Team coordinated 49 virtual training sessions, which included 78 days of training to 1,220 registered participants from Regions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 9, the Washington Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and multiple state partners across the Southeast. The work of this team served as a role model which was adopted by the Regional Office, other Regions and other agencies.





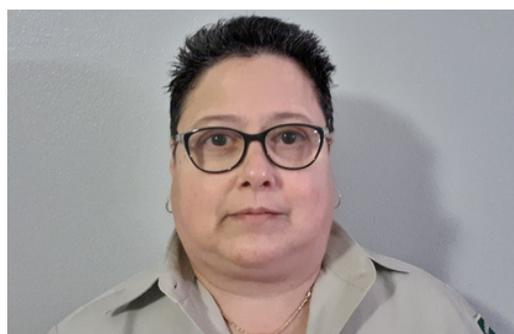
## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Special Forest Products Initiative Team Ocala National Forest

**Team Lead:** Leigh Ostin

**Team Members:** Gordon Horsley, Susan Blake, Jamie Salmon, William Harris, Rosie Burlock, and Suzanne Stehle

The Ocala National Forest Special Forest Products Initiative Team modernized forest products delivery from face-to-face customer interactions and paper copies to an online service that was non-existent before COVID-19. This allowed the Ocala National Forest, the largest producer of special forest products in Florida, to continue to provide a reliable source of raw products that supports local, national and international economies and export markets. The Team was able to overcome the challenges of a virtual work environment to collectively solve a problem as a One USDA team. The impact this had on our diverse publics is incalculable; with bilingual online electronic forms, we were able to overcome obstacles and help the community and local businesses. Each Team member contributed their opinions, expertise and skills to get ahead of the anticipated issues while continuing operations to serve a diverse community during COVID-19.





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Managing Property Boundaries through Innovation, Resilience and Partnerships National Forests in Florida and Greening Youth Foundation

**Team Lead:** Adrien J. Rodriguez

**Team Members:** Kurt Rardin, Randolph Stoddard, Heather Ellison, Pablo Juarbe, David Reems, Eve Shackleton, Kyle Titus, Christopher Raney, Randall Barefoot, Cory Hammond, John Stephens, Travis McCullough, Fernando Chen, Jeray Norman, Kelly Updegraff, Mark Miller, Elizabeth Ramirez, Chalonda Jasper, and Erika Davis (USDA Forest Service); Kennedy Reddick (Greening Youth Foundation)

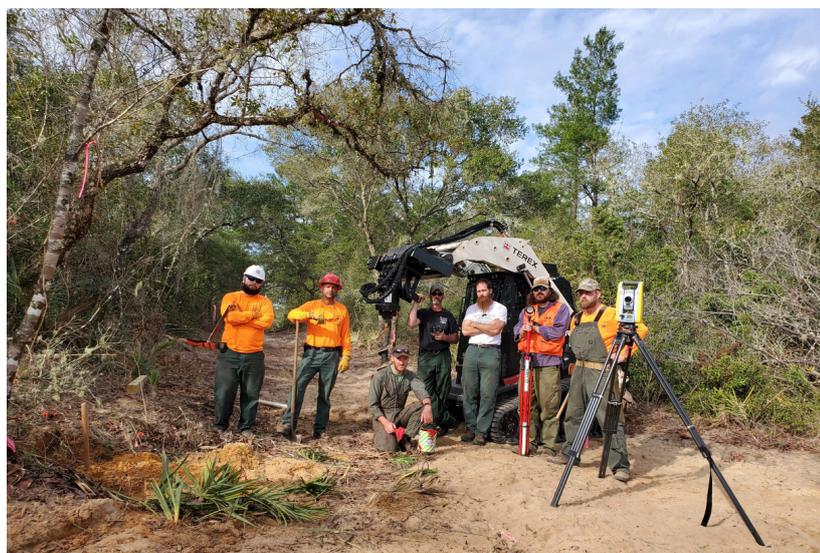
Employees from the National Forests in Florida and Greening Youth Foundation worked to survey antiquated landlines after Hurricane Irma by updating outdated processes, reducing costs significantly, increasing corporate knowledge and improving efficiencies. Over two years, they surveyed more than 75 miles—a 50% increase over the number of miles originally funded—and developed a “one-size fits all” approach to landline contract rates, reducing costs by an average of 50 percent. They also mechanized work associated with surveying property boundaries which allows a skilled maintenance crew to increase surveying from 500-1000 feet per day to one mile per day or two to three miles per day for maintenance. This team revolutionized the way the National Forests in Florida restore damaged property boundaries. They also transferred their knowledge and best practices to other employees, volunteers and interns across the Southern Region so that other forests with similar terrain could adapt these timesaving and cost-saving practices.





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

**Managing Property Boundaries through Innovation,  
Resilience and Partnerships  
National Forests in Florida and Greening Youth Foundation**





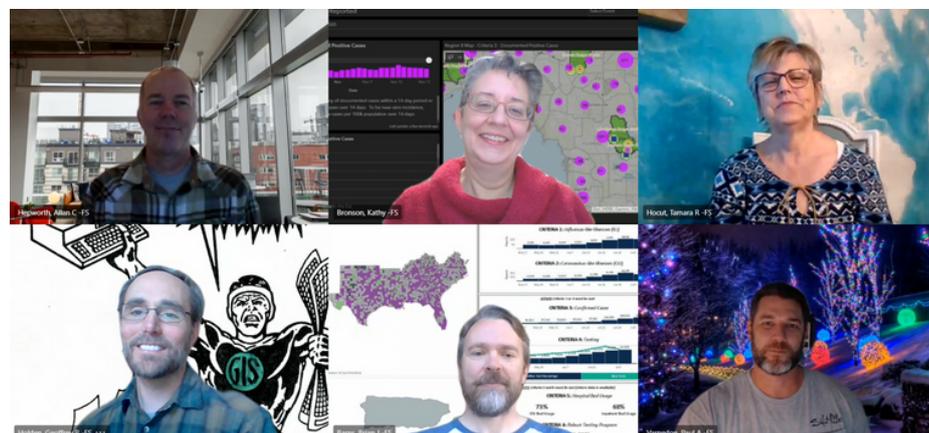
## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### COVID-19 Incident Management Team Planning Decision Support Service Team - Developing the R8 COVID-19 Dashboard Southern Region

**Team Lead:** Allan Hepworth

**Team Members:** Paul Varnedoe and Geoffrey Holden (Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests); Kathy Bronson (National Forests in Florida); Brian Barns and Tamara Hocut (Ozark-St. Francis National Forests)

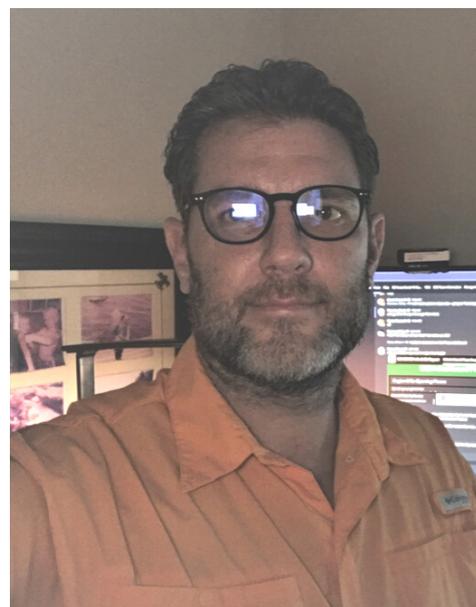
The Regional Office Planning Decision Support Service (DSS) Team was tasked with developing a way to distribute COVID 19 information and to help the information flow on the Re-opening Facility phases. This task required gaining licenses to the USDA COVID-19 Dashboard and then finding a way to serve similar information to a larger audience. The USDA COVID-19 Dashboard was of limited use to Regional decision makers due to the limited number of licenses in the Region as well as the USDA Dashboard data being updated only once a week. Variations during the week could not be captured. To alleviate this issue, the DSS Team created the R8 COVID-19 Dashboard, allowing the COVID-19 Incident Management Team (IMT) to give anyone access, thereby allowing a larger audience than the USDA Dashboard allowed. The R8 COVID-19 Dashboard also updated County case numbers daily, provided state level data for certain criteria, including the County Re-Opening phase. The new dashboard allowed local units to select their Forest and even further navigate to specific buildings, then view trends for COVID cases and influenza type illnesses.





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### COVID-19 Incident Management Team Planning Decision Support Service Team - Developing the R8 COVID-19 Dashboard Southern Region





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Improving Wildlife Monitoring through Innovation during COVID-19 Savannah River

**Team Lead:** Tal Mims

**Team Members:** Raymund Geroso, Charles Davis, Ed Messerlie, and Kurt Buhlmann

This team worked with the University of Georgia, engineers and scientists to develop an innovative, unique, cost-effective technique to monitor wildlife using cameras, which means employees no longer must check and service live traps daily. Instead, they can monitor species from afar and only need to maintain the cameras a few times a year. The camera images serve as time and condition stamped data to support future management decisions. This innovative monitoring technique has saved large amounts of staff time and fuel, while ensuring positive identification of all animals in the images. When COVID-19 hit, employees were able to keep agency goals on track. The team has also shared their innovative technique with federal and state cooperators to improve their efficiencies as well.





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Improving Wildlife Monitoring through Innovation during COVID-19 Savannah River





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Geodetic Control Network in the El Yunque National Forest Regional Office

**Team Lead:** Randy Stoddard-Ramos

**Team Members:** John E. Matthews, Fernando Chen and USDA Forest Service contractors Héctor M. Sanabria Valentín, Julio C. Soto Serrano Javier O. Escobales Medina and Luis S. Berrios Montes.

The Regional Office's Lands-Minerals-Special Uses unit designed, planned, and executed the first-ever, forest-wide, geodetic control network in the El Yunque National Forest after Hurricane Maria. A geodetic control network is a network measured precisely by techniques of terrestrial surveying or by satellite. It provides the framework for surveying and mapping that improves the accuracy of projects especially in the absence of natural landmarks after a significant storm event. It can also help prevent land management conflicts that arise from inaccurate information. Areas such as Engineering, Recreation, Heritage, and Natural Resources can use this information to transfer geospatial data. It is also available to all professionals through the National Geodetic Survey website which will benefit private property owners adjacent to National Forest Systems lands. The impacts from Maria were devastating to the forest and the people that live in Puerto Rico. This innovative work will help to re-establish the boundaries of the forest effectively and efficiently.





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Daniel Boone National Forest Minerals Team Daniel Boone National Forest

**Team Lead:** Shiloh Benton

**Team Members:** Theresa Bodus (Region 9) and Paul K. Hunter (Applied Intellect)

Through a partnership with other regions, the Daniel Boone's Minerals Team developed and is improving upon the daunting task of mapping and assessing hundreds of abandoned oil well sites on the forest using a relatively new technology—drones. Looking at how industry deploys drones for inspection across difficult terrain, the interagency team has developed and will be implementing the plan to identify, map, and monitor the emissions and level of degradation of these wells while significantly reducing costs and personnel time in the process. This partnership has many potential opportunities to be used by other resource areas and other regions as the techniques and mapping systems become more refined and improved.





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### COVID-19 Incident Management Team Employee Care and Support Team Regional Office

**Team Members:** Todd Lerke, Amanda Gee Walrod, Jennifer Hennigan, Rhea Whalen, Danny Bryant, Brett Loomis, Beth Christensen, Marcie Jones, Rebecca Peter, Carlin Lewis, and Meredith Hollowell

The Employee Care and Support team (EC&S) was assembled as part of the Region 8 COVID-19 Incident Management Team in response to an overwhelming need to support regional employees during the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. These are difficult times, and employees need to know that it is okay to not be okay. The EC&S team identified barriers to employees in understanding and accessing existing initiatives, programs, and products available to those in crisis. To overcome these barriers, they developed a SharePoint site that is now available to regional employees and houses resources that augment existing programs and easily connects people with these resources. The EC&S team has delivered pre-incident education sessions to Forest and Regional Office staff and worked 19 clinically supervised cases that have included suicide intervention, fatalities of co-workers, anxiety, depression, and fatigue. EC&S strives to promote dialogue and connection, provide support and resources, and increase understanding and capacity to aid resilience of all employees. The work done by this team has served as a role model for other Regions and for the Washington Office.





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### COVID-19 Incident Management Team Employee Care and Support Team Regional Office





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Budget and Financial Management Staff Regional Office

**Team Lead:** Sherry Reaves

**Team Members:** Claudette Bryant, Daniel Cha, Vickie Harris, LaShanda Holliman, Lajuana Lovelace, Jason Millott, and Debra Sheriff

The Regional Office Budget and Financial Management unit faced several challenges in FY2020, specifically preparing for the implementation of Budget Modernization in FY2021 and managing a multi-million-dollar risk. The Budget and Finance staff developed new processes and procedures that aligned with the new budget structure and worked in collaboration with program staff on new allocation strategies. The team was able to overcome the challenges of communicating these changes to the Region in a virtual work environment by following the One Region, One Team, One Budget with One Approach philosophy.





# Regional Forester's Special Awards

## Budget and Financial Management Staff Regional Office





## Regional Forester's Special Awards

### Michael Keys National Forests in Florida

In 2018, National Forests in Florida embarked on a mission to create an alternate workflow for Red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) data collection using ArcGIS Online and ArcGIS Collector. This effort was completed in FY20 and is ambitious and timely. To implement this strategy, Michael Keys conducted a great deal of communication among users, administrators and technology managers prior to introducing the technology. He had to custom engineer elements of this alternate workflow to be able to deliver the technology. Michael Keys has developed innovative and cost-effective geospatial workflow that clearly improves internal assessment capabilities and tracks evidence-based measures. This effort has improved our overall analytical capability in that these tools and products are incorporated into daily district workflows that allow for true data-driven decisions to efficiently plan and prioritize management and fire activities across millions of acres of public lands. Through his efforts, Michael has delivered a quality product even in the face of challenges.





## Smokey Bear Award

### Thomas Black Chatahoochee-Oconee National Forests

Thomas Black has worked for the USDA Forest Service for approximately 19 years. He began his career with a three-year stay at a Job Corps Center in North Carolina and over the past sixteen years has honed his skills and developed a unique prevention program for the Chattooga River Ranger District in Northeast Georgia where he is now employed. He assists the Chatahoochee-Oconee National Forests Fire Staff and other organizations at events small and large. Thomas is known for his dependable performances while wearing the Smokey Bear suit and is called upon for special occasions. Examples include being Smokey Bear for the Ad Council's Public Service Announcement taping with Jeff Foxworthy in Atlanta and appearing as Smokey Bear for the U.S. Capital Christmas Tree tour whistle stop in Lawrenceville, GA. Thomas' passion, dedication, and ability to selflessly work with partners has led to the development of a consistent fire prevention program which has made a difference in Georgia and beyond.





~ Acknowledgements ~

Special thanks to the following individuals who provided support and contributions to this event:

Lisa Lewis, Jim Caldwell, Chris Spori, David Torok, Cavan Fitzsimmons, Tina Tilley, Will Santiago, Michelle Burnett, Mike Miller, Wanda Hebert, Angelica Cacho, Carlin Lewis, Steve Bekkerus, Judy Toppins, and Stacy Blomquist.

