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## 55th Annual Conservation Achievement Awards Recognize 16 Statewide

*Tennessee Wildlife Federation honors leaders in conservation from across the state*

**Nashville, Tenn. (August 3, 2020)** – [Tennessee Wildlife Federation](#), one of the largest and oldest nonprofits dedicated to the conservation of Tennessee’s wildlife and natural resources, recognizes 16 recipients from all corners of the state for its [55th Annual Conservation Achievement Awards](#). To ensure the health and safety of this year’s winners, the Federation did not host an in-person award ceremony.

“We are honored to recognize this outstanding pool of recipients this year,” said Kendall McCarter, chief development officer for the Federation. “Their dedication to conserve our wild places and recruit the next generations of conservationists should be an inspiration to Tennesseans who love and enjoy the great outdoors.”

Awards spanned from Conservation by Business and Conservation Educator, to Forest Conservationist and the Z. Cartter Patten Award for many years of service to the cause of conservation in Tennessee.

The honorees of the 55th Annual Conservation Achievement Awards are as follows.

### **Z. Cartter Patten Award**

Ed Carter of Brentwood, Tenn. with work spanning nationwide

Ed Carter retired in May from his position as executive director of Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA). Throughout his career, Carter was a positive force in managing and conserving Tennessee’s fish, wildlife and public use of natural resources. He became TWRA’s first chief of the boating division when it was formed in 1990 and built it into an nationally award winning and recognized program. When he became executive director of the agency in 2009, he guided several critical reorganization efforts, including merging the boating and law enforcement divisions, reorganizing the agency’s regional management system, and realigning the agency’s information and education division into a newly established outreach and communication division.

Beyond his work at TWRA, Carter is known for his national leadership in the boating program community and the significant role he played within the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA). Carter's career is marked by outstanding accomplishments and he has achieved many honors for his effective and valuable service to conserve Tennessee's wild places.

### **J. Clark Akers, III Champion of Conservation Award**

#### The Austin Memorial Foundation of Cleveland, Ohio with work spanning nationwide

The Austin Memorial Foundation has long championed Tennessee's rivers. Specifically, the Foundation has significantly invested in the restoration and protection of the Hatchie River, which has been named one of the 75 greatest places worth saving. The Austin Memorial Foundation recognizes the importance and urgency of protecting this special river. While based in Ohio, The Foundation has given well over half-a-million dollars to conservation efforts in Tennessee since 2000. Over the last decade, the Federation has been fortunate to be a recipient of significant funding that has greatly benefited our [conservation policy](#) work and youth engagement efforts. As a generous funder of conservation work, the Foundation is making it possible for organizations like the Federation to protect wildlife and wild places, including the Hatchie River.

### **Conservation Legislator of the Year**

#### Senator Ken Yager of Kingston, Tenn. with work spanning Tennessee's 12th Congressional District and the state

Senator Ken Yager is the Conservation Legislator of the Year for his leadership to combat Asian carp in Tennessee's waters as well as his long-term commitment to the Tennessee State Scenic Rivers Program. Senator Yager worked with the Federation to raise the profile of the Asian carp issue within the Tennessee Senate and showed a commitment to ensure that the Tennessee state government maintains its focus on this issue. This leadership included seeking state funding to combat Asian carp, holding hearings on the threat of Asian carp and authoring an Asian carp resolution--which called on members of the Tennessee congressional delegation to support providing the federal resources needed to effectively manage and remove Asian carp. Senator Yager has also been a stalwart supporter of the State Scenic Rivers Program. He carried legislation in 2019 and 2020 that added Soak Creek, Duskin Creek, Little Piney Creek and the Piney River to the program. Senator Yager's favorite trail to hike is the Angel Falls Overlook within the Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area.

### **Wildlife Conservationist of the Year**

#### The Nature Conservancy of Brentwood, Tenn. with work spanning nationwide

The mission of The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. In Tennessee, TNC is doing just that. Last year, the organization acquired 100,000 acres--spanning Kentucky and Tennessee--in the Central Appalachian Mountains. A major migratory corridor, the property is a biodiversity hotspot for wildlife and home to important watersheds. On the property, TNC will maintain and improve forest health, protect critical wildlife habitat, improve water quality, expand outdoor recreation, and support local economies. In addition, TNC will manage the forests sustainably with the ultimate goal of mitigating climate change.

### **Land Conservationist of the Year**

Bucky Edmondson of Gray, Tenn. with work spanning statewide and throughout the Southeast

Bucky Edmondson is the director of natural resources for Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). For 34 years, Edmondson has done an exceptional job protecting and enhancing the natural resources, public lands, and reservoir system entrusted to TVA. Under his leadership, Edmondson has partnered with communities in Tennessee's 95 counties and implemented more than 1,400 stewardship projects totaling \$34 million to protect and conserve public lands and resources in the state. Edmondson has also been instrumental in crafting TVA's natural resource strategy, updating its natural resource plan, and securing staff and funding to support conservation efforts statewide.

### **Water Conservationist of the Year**

David Blackwood of Humboldt, Tenn. with work spanning statewide

David Blackwood is the executive director for the West Tennessee River Basin Authority (WTRBA)—a branch of the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC)—and has dedicated his career to restoring and preserving Tennessee's waterways. Not only is Blackwood a master of engineering and hydraulics himself, he effectively leverages relationships to ensure community buy-in on projects he manages. One of his most notable projects-to-date is the Middle Fork Bottom Recreation Area, which was completed in collaboration with Tennessee Wildlife Resource Agency and The Nature Conservancy of Tennessee. The 858-acre recreation area helps with flood control, improves water quality, conserves wildlife populations, and expands outdoor recreation opportunities.

### **Forest Conservationist of the Year**

Joe McGuinness of Unicoi, Tenn. with work spanning Carter, Cocke, Greene, Johnson, Sullivan, Unicoi, Washington and Counties

Joe McGuinness retired in March after an impressive 26-year career as the North Zone Wildlife Biologist for the Cherokee National Forest. Inspired by his high school biology teacher, McGuinness dedicated his career to the conservation of Tennessee's natural resources. He helped restore some of the rarest habitats in Cherokee National Forest, such as the native bogs in Shady Valley and high elevation habitats of Roan Mountain. He directly impacted the management of more than 350,000 acres. One of his most notable achievements was his leadership on the Cherokee National Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative—a decade long effort where he was tasked with building consensus among 13 different agencies with divergent views on land management. His passion for the natural world and dedication to conserve our forests can be seen in the more than 20 young natural resource professionals he mentored along the way.

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### West TN Regional Recycle Hub in Henderson, Tenn. with work spanning West Tennessee

The West Tennessee Regional Recycle Hub, and its 11 spokes scattered throughout the region, is dedicated to promoting recycling and sustainability. Through waste reduction programs, litter prevention, and environmental education and outreach the Hub has significantly increased the availability for rural populations to recycle throughout the region. The Hub has provided essential waste and recycling equipment, introduced successful recycling cart programs, and organized volunteer campaigns. The Hub also operates an observational classroom—the only one of its kind in the state—where students can see the recycling and waste process firsthand while learning about conservation initiatives. In addition, the Hub partners with other like-minded organizations to prevent litter and clean trash along roadways, wetlands, and waterways to help beautify and clean their region.

### **Conservation by Business**

#### Patagonia of Nashville, Tenn. with work spanning nationwide

For more than 40 years, Patagonia, Inc. has supported grassroots conservation work as a core aspect of its business model. In Tennessee, Patagonia has not only financially supported the Federation's work, but has also committed employee time to solving some of our state's greatest conservation issues. Through Patagonia's Action Works platform, the retailer has connected its loyal customer base with advocacy actions and conservation issues in their backyard. And because of the interests of its socially engaged staff, Patagonia recently donated outdoor clothing to the Federation's Hunting and Fishing Academy program and contributed considerable volunteer hours during the COVID-19 shutdown.

### **Conservation Educator of the Year**

#### Robert Brewer of Knoxville, Tenn. with work spanning throughout the Southeast

Robert Brewer is an associate professor at Cleveland State Community College whose work has inspired many and led to the creation of successful education programs. Based on a dare from a colleague, Brewer created a now award-winning conservation education nonprofit called Student Wildlands Adventure Program (SWAP). SWAP provides life-changing experiences to underprivileged youth by taking them on week-long adventures where they learn about wildlife conservation. Brewer also developed the first two-year forestry, wildlife, and fisheries program in the state. His passion to help his students excel has led many to achieve successful careers in the wildlife and natural resource fields. Beyond the academic environment, Brewer is active in his community events and conservation initiatives.

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### **Conservation Communicator of the Year**

#### Bill Dance of Collierville, Tenn. with work spanning statewide

Bill Dance is a nationally recognized and beloved angler and TV host. His skill with a fishing rod on the competitive bass fishing circuit earned him his first TV show in 1968. Since that time, he has used that platform to share his love both for fishing and the great outdoors. When exotic-invasive Asian carp showed up in the fisheries near his home in southwest Tennessee, he was among the first to sound the alarm about the danger the species posed to native fish, people, and economies. In 2019, Dance used his position to help drive action by federal lawmakers. In a meeting with Congressman David Kustoff, Dance talked about the negative effects of Asian carp and showed Kustoff firsthand their pervasiveness. Without a communicator like Bill Dance, the nation may not have seen the legislative wins that are now funding Asian carp management in the state.

### **Youth Conservationist of the Year**

Cash Daniels of Chattanooga, Tenn.

For the first time in the 55 years of the Conservation Achievement Awards, an award was given to the same recipient two years in a row. Only ten years old, Cash Daniels is dedicated to saving Tennessee's rivers and diverse aquatic species from trash and pollution. Commonly known as "The Conservation Kid," Daniels leads monthly river cleanups and speaks with local businesses, lawmakers and agencies to advocate for clean water policies. Daniels is also a published author of a children's book educating kids on how they can make a difference for waterways. In the past year, Daniels has removed more than 5,000 pounds of trash from the Tennessee River.

### **On Target Award**

Jerry Strom of McKenzie, Tenn. with work spanning statewide.

This year's On Target Award was presented to Jerry Strom for his years of outstanding support of the Federation's [Tennessee Scholastic Clay Target Program \(SCTP\)](#). Strom was instrumental in bringing the program to the Federation in 2005. He served as the program's steering committee chair for more than a decade and was critical to recruiting more staff to help run events. In addition, Strom helped develop some of the Federation's first hunting experiences and even pushed to get new shooting ranges built so more of Tennessee's youth could have the opportunity to participate in the shooting sports. Because of Strom's work, tens of thousands of youth have had the opportunity to compete and experience the outdoors.

### **Dan & Cherie Hammond Sharing the Harvest Award**

Chad and SaDonna Cardwell of Medon, Tenn. with work spanning Hardeman, Madison, Chester, Haywood, Crockett, Gibson, Carrol, and Henderson counties

Chad and SaDonna Cardwell manage Custom Deer Processing in Hardeman County. In the last five years, the Cardwells have greatly contributed to the Federation's [Hunters for the Hungry program](#). The Cardwells have processed 448 Hunters for the Hungry donations, providing more than 76,000 servings of lean protein to Tennessee families in need. In addition to processing donations, the Cardwells graciously offer extra freezer space to store more donations made by hunters in Unit CWD. The Cardwells also do their part to help to stop the spread of CWD in Tennessee by allowing the state wildlife agency to set up a CWD station at their facility so more deer can be tested for the disease.

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**Gedeon D. Petit Memorial Award**

Marty Griffith of Crossville, Tenn. with work spanning Marion Co.

Marty Griffith serves as a wildlife officer for the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency (TWRA). Griffith is dedicated to recruiting new sportsmen and women and keeping those who enjoy the outdoors safe. When a youth boater was stranded on rough waters, Griffith and a colleague quickly responded, successfully rescuing the boater. Griffith takes advantage of every opportunity to engage the public on the agency's work and conservation initiatives. He is especially passionate about mentoring youth through education and outreach. Griffith also seeks out additional funding and grants to enhance the quality of youth events. In his personal time, Griffith hand builds and installs fishing line receptacles where anglers can dispose of their waste line, which would otherwise pose a deadly hazard to fish and wildlife.

**Hunter Education Instructor of the Year**

Andrew Tweed of Memphis, Tenn. with work spanning Shelby County

Andrew Tweed has served as a Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency officer (TWRA) for nearly three decades. A devoted father, Tweed has a passion for engaging Tennessee's youth in the outdoors and equipping them with the training and skills to safely hunt and fish. Tweed's knowledge of the Memphis area outdoors scene is unmatched and he is beloved by many in the community.

**About Tennessee Wildlife Federation**

Tennessee Wildlife Federation leads the conservation, sound management and wise use of Tennessee's great outdoors. Since 1946, the Federation has spearheaded the development of the state's wildlife policy, advanced landmark legislation on air and water quality and other conservation initiatives, helped restore numerous species, and introduced thousands of kids to the great outdoors. To learn more, visit [tnwf.org](http://tnwf.org).

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