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Media Advisory

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For Immediate Release **(202) 939-3833**

Seven Wetland Stewards Win 2009 National Wetlands Awards

(Washington, DC) Seven citizens have been recognized for their on-the-ground wetland conservation efforts and decades-long dedication to protecting these important natural resources. A diverse panel of wetland experts assembled at the Environmental Law Institute (ELI) to select the winners of the 20th Anniversary National Wetlands Awards.

This year's Award winners hail from all regions of the country and exemplify the extraordinary commitment and innovation that is so instrumental to conserving wetlands in the nation's communities.

The 2009 awardees are:

Peter Bahls, an aquatic ecologist and founder of the Northwest Watershed Institute who has preserved and restored hundreds of acres of aquatic habitats in the Pacific Northwest in the Tarboo Creek Watershed;

Ken Brunswick, winner of the 2009 Sustained Contributions Award, a regional ecologist with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Nature Preserves who manages the Limberlost Swamp Remembered Project to restore a 13,000-acre wetland;

Richard Gitar, the Water Regulatory Specialist for the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa who has built a successful tribal wetlands program across 44,000 acres of wetlands in Minnesota;

Carol Johnston, a professor at South Dakota State University who has worked in the field of wetland science for over 35 years addressing the linkages between wetland processes and landscape ecology in the Great Lakes region and throughout the country;

Melissa Samet, the Senior Director of Water Resources at American Rivers who has been instrumental in restoring the wetlands and storm buffering capacity of the Mississippi River in the greater New Orleans area and in preventing the loss of thousands of acres of ecologically significant wetlands in the Mississippi Delta;

Richard Thieriot, owner of the Llano Seco Ranch who has worked tirelessly to protect 18,000 acres of contiguous wetlands, riparian forests, native uplands and wildlife-friendly agricultural lands in the Sacramento Valley of California;

Susan Vincent, a high school science teacher at The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem in New York City who has guided her students to conduct field research in local marshes and in the Mississippi River Delta in southern Louisiana.

Collectively, the award winners have conserved tens of thousands of wetland acres and have mobilized hundreds of individuals to contribute to wetland conservation. "The restoration and protection of the Nation's aquatic resources, especially wetlands, is a high priority for us," said former Assistant Secretary of the Army, John Paul Woodley, Jr. "I am excited that the work we are doing will supplement the fine wetlands work being done by the recipients of this year's awards." On May 12th, the winners will take a well-deserved break from their efforts to receive their awards at a ceremony on Capitol Hill.

"We look forward to meeting the winners of this year's awards and honoring them for their extraordinary achievements in wetland conservation," said Dr. Jim Balsiger, Acting Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NOAA-National Marine Fisheries Service. "We are proud to support ELI's National Wetlands Awards and their 20th anniversary celebration in recognizing individuals for their contributions to society and the aquatic environment. Wetlands are essential for healthy coastal and marine habitats which support valuable fisheries and protected resources. They help buffer our coastal communities from the impacts of storms and sea level rise, improve our water quality, and provide healthy recreational opportunities for public use and enjoyment."

Program administrator, the Environmental Law Institute, and supporters—U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service, Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service—hope that recognizing wetland leaders for their efforts will inspire others to follow their example. Given the national importance of wetlands, the federal agencies that sponsor the Awards welcome the opportunity to recognize and encourage voluntary wetland conservation efforts.

"Wetlands are a vital link between our land and water resources, and they provide a variety of ecological services to forests and grasslands. The Forest Service is proud to support the National Wetlands Awards program and to recognize the extraordinary work of the Award recipients," commented Abigail R. Kimbell, Chief of USDA Forest Service.

The winners of the National Wetlands Awards demonstrate how citizens and communities can—and do—make a difference. "Congratulations to these individuals, who exemplify the finest in wetland stewardship across the country," said Michael Shapiro, Acting Assistant Administrator, Office of Water, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. "Their tireless efforts to restore and protect these increasingly vital and threatened resources qualify them as true heroes. As we work together to reverse dramatic losses and advance the quantity and quality of our nation's wetlands, these winners inspire and sustain us."

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For more information on the National Wetlands Awards Program, the 2009 awardees, or the May awards ceremony, please contact Annie Brock at the Environmental Law Institute at (202) 939-3862 or wetlandsawards@eli.org. Information is also available online at www.nationalwetlandsawards.org.

2009 National Wetlands Awards Winners

AWARD FOR EDUCATION & OUTREACH
Susan Vincent, *New York, New York*
Ms. Susan Vincent is a high school science teacher at The Young Women's Leadership School of East Harlem in New York City. In addition to integrating the study of wetlands, both in theory and practice, into her senior marine science course, Ms. Vincent has also taught her students to write grants and conduct research in the field in collaboration with university scientists. She has taken her students to local marshes and to the Mississippi River Delta in southern Louisiana to teach experimental design, data collection, statistical analysis and written communication skills. Vincent and her students have an ongoing research project at Piermont Marsh north of New York City, the results of which are being provided to several National Science Foundation projects.

AWARD FOR SCIENCE RESEARCH
Carol Johnston, *Brookings, South Dakota*
Dr. Carol Johnston, who has worked in the field of wetland science for over 35 years, recently led the Wetland Vegetation group for the EPA-funded "Great Lakes Environmental Indicators" project. By identifying vegetative indicators of conditions of Great Lakes coastal wetlands and developing relationships between environmental stressors and these indicators, Johnston provided managers with much needed information. She has also developed an index embraced by the Wisconsin Coastal Zone Management Program. The first female President of the Society of Wetland Scientists and a former Director of the Ecosystem Studies Program at the National Science Foundation, Johnston is currently examining the effects of climate change on how wetlands supply dissolved organic carbon, which protects aquatic organisms from damaging UV radiation.

AWARD FOR CONSERVATION & RESTORATION
Peter Bahls, *Port Townsend, Washington*
Aquatic ecologist, Mr. Peter Bahls, established the Northwest Watershed Institute (NWI) in 2001 to restore aquatic habitats in the Pacific Northwest. With Mr. Bahls at the helm, NWI has successfully protected and restored 500 acres of floodplain wetlands, riparian areas, and estuarine habitats in the Tarboo Creek Watershed. In 2008, Mr. Bahls received a National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant allowing him to preserve and restore an additional 170 acres of estuarine shoreline and floodplain in the Tarboo Creek area. His work has helped provide improved habitats for the watershed's five species of salmon, as well as for bear, elk, waterfowl, and array of other species.
Previously Nominated 2007, 2008

AWARD FOR LANDOWNER STEWARDSHIP
Richard Thieriot, *Chico, California*
Mr. Richard Thieriot, owner of the Llano Seco Ranch in California, has worked tirelessly to protect 18,000 acres of contiguous wetlands, riparian forests, native uplands and wildlife-friendly agricultural lands in the Sacramento Valley. Through partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations, Mr. Thieriot has created a land protection plan for his Ranch that includes 13, 679 acres of land protected by conservation easements, 2,634 acres of land owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and another 1,633 acres of land owned by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Thieriot has implemented and funded restoration programs on the Ranch, including a recent project to restore 170 acres of wetlands for migratory birds and other wetland species, and begun a successful organic cattle and farming operation on the Ranch.

AWARD FOR STATE, TRIBAL, & LOCAL PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT
Rick Gitar, *Cloquet, Minnesota*
Mr. Rick Gitar, the Water Regulatory Specialist for the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa in northeast Minnesota, has worked tirelessly to build a successful tribal wetlands program that provides analysis of wetland resources and identifies management and regulatory actions across 44,000 acres of wetlands. He developed a Wetlands Protection and Management Ordinance that requires a tribal wetlands permit be issued before any proposed project affecting the reservation's wetlands can be completed. In addition to managing a complete update of the National Wetlands Inventory on the reservation, Gitar has also served on the Board of Directors of the Association of State Wetland Managers for the past four years.

AWARD FOR WETLAND COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP
Melissa Samet, *San Anselmo, California*

As Senior Director of Water Resources at American Rivers, Ms. Samet works to better the way that rivers and wetlands are managed. She has been instrumental in the passage of legislative language directing the Corps to develop a plan for de-authorizing the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, which exacerbated Hurricane Katrina's impact on the greater New Orleans area, and in restoring the wetlands and storm buffering capacity lost to the outlet. She has also successfully led nation-wide efforts opposing the Yazoo River Basin Corps of Engineers Pump Project, effectively preventing the loss of 200,000 acres of ecologically significant wetlands.

**And in recognition of his ongoing efforts and of the 20th Anniversary of the Awards program:*

AWARD FOR SUSTAINED CONTRIBUTIONS
Ken Brunswick, *Geneva, Indiana*
Mr. Ken Brunswick, regional ecologist with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Nature Preseves and manager of the Limberlost Swamp Remembered Project, is working to restore a 13,000-acre wetland that was converted to cropland. Since he began work on the project in 1993, Mr. Brunswick has acquired 1,500 acres of land, 1,200 of which he has restored. Mr. Brunswick has been involved in every aspect of the conservation efforts: writing grants, leading hikes, and organizing project volunteers. A past Wetlands Award recipient, he has raised $2 million for restoration purposes and continues to inspire community members through his dedication and hard work.

The Environmental Law Institute strengthens environmental protection through improving law and governance worldwide. ELI delivers timely, insightful, impartial analysis to opinion makers, including government official, environmental and business leaders and journalists. ELI is a clearinghouse and a town hall, providing common ground for debate on important environmental issues.

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