

News for Immediate Release



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Conservation Leaders Selected for Induction into Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame

*New Hall of Fame Inductees to be Recognized at Illinois State Fair Aug. 18
and at the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame Gala Sept. 21*

SPRINGFIELD, IL – The Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame will welcome as new inductees five individuals with records of exemplary service in and commitments to improving conservation efforts and outdoor recreation opportunities in Illinois.

The Illinois Conservation Foundation (ICF) today announced the selections of Diane Banta, Jerry Beverlin, David F. Grohne, Sam Oliver, and Steve Widowski for induction as the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame's Class of 2018.

The new Hall of Fame members will be recognized during a presentation at Conservation World at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield at 11:00 a.m. on Saturday, August 18, and again at the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame Gala on Friday evening, September 21 in Springfield.

Since 2002, the ICF has recognized Illinoisans for their significant contributions and unparalleled dedication in preserving, promoting, enhancing or supporting natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities with induction into the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame.

Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame Class of 2018

Diane Banta, Chicago

During her more than 35-year career with the National Park Service, Diane Banta's enthusiasm for the causes of outdoor recreation has been instrumental in bringing together partners to

advance successful initiatives throughout northeast Illinois. Those success stories range from the completion of the Cal-Sag Trail, the founding of the Millennium Reserve and the Calumet Collaborative, the formation of the Hackmatack National Wildlife Refuge, and the development of water trails throughout the region. Ms. Banta is well-known for bridging gaps between partners, for turning project skeptics into enthusiastic supporters, and for ensuring that local residents have their voices heard on projects in their communities. Ms. Banta's advocacy has expanded development of water trails on rivers, lakes, and the Lake Michigan shoreline allowing canoeing and kayaking. Getting kids and families in Voyageur canoes through the "Canoemobile" program gives novice paddlers a chance to see Chicagoland from a unique, new perspective. Diane Banta's nominators describe her as an "awesome champion" for outdoor recreation in Illinois, thanks to the breadth of her influence in bringing all parties together to expand opportunities for Illinois citizens and visitors to enjoy the outdoors.

Sylvan (Jerry) Beverlin, Petersburg

Jerry Beverlin's commitment to and passion for conservation in Illinois earned him a reputation as an ethical and responsible steward of the land, with an expansive understanding of conservation land management for the benefit of all Illinois citizens. Mr. Beverlin began a lengthy public service career with the then Illinois Department of Conservation when he was hired as a maintenance worker at Sam Parr State Fish and Wildlife Area at the age of 18. Serving later as superintendent of a number of state sites, Jerry focused on improving infrastructure, while protecting natural lands, developing hiking trails, improving park roads and day-use areas, and expanding boat accesses. He rose through the ranks of the Department to later serve for 15 years as Director of the Office of Land Management, making him the longest-serving manager of the Illinois state park system. During his tenure, Mr. Beverlin was instrumental in acquisition of what is now Lowden-Miller State Forest, development of Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area, acquisition and development of the World Shooting and Recreational Complex, securing dedicated state funding through the Environmental License Plate, expanding trails and trail funding, modernizing park maintenance equipment, expanding the hiring of seasonal park workers, and expanding the park interpreter and Department-wide education programs. In retirement, Jerry's commitment to conservation continues, as he has helped draft legislation and enact programs to further land protection and conservation programs, helped write conservation stewardship plans, and advocated for outdoor recreation programs as an officer with the United Bow Hunters of Illinois.

David F. Grohne, Wilmington

David F. Grohne, former chairman of the Independence Tube Corporation of Chicago, and his wife, Marg, are longtime passionate supporters of efforts to enhance and expand wetland habitat to benefit waterfowl and other wildlife. Mr. and Mrs. Grohne were recognized by the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service and Ducks Unlimited for their lifetime of philanthropic support, leadership, and service in 2017 with the naming of a 1,380-acre Waterfowl Protection Area in their honor. Mr. Grohne's support has helped conserve thousands of acres of critical waterfowl nesting habitat, restore and preserve crucial duck migration habitat in the Illinois River Valley, and fund numerous important waterfowl research projects in conjunction with the Max McGraw Wildlife Foundation, Delta Waterfowl Foundation, and The Wetlands Initiative. Through the Independence Tube Corporation and the D.F. and M.T. Grohne Family Foundation, nearly \$800,000 has been donated to fund nature field trips for more than 100,000 students through the

Illinois Biodiversity Field Trip Grant program managed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Mr. Grohne realizes the value in providing students and teachers with the opportunity to take their learning outside the classroom, and to experience nature. One nominator wrote: “There is no more outstanding example of a citizen conservationist than Dave Grohne; Illinois is lucky to have him, and his efforts will last for generations to come.”

Sam Oliver, Barrington

Sam Oliver, one of northeast Illinois’ best-known conservationists, directed the efforts of more than 700 volunteer members of the Barrington-based Citizens for Conservation, an organization she led as staff director from 1984 to 2015. Citizens for Conservation (CFC) is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to preserving and restoring native habitats that once covered northeast Illinois. CFC preserves and restores land with the help of volunteers and donors who want to protect the health and beauty of the land for future generations. Under Sam Oliver’s leadership, the organization expanded education programs for youth and other community members, and expanded CFC’s natural lands preservation and restoration efforts. CFC volunteers and donors have helped preserve more than 3,100 acres of open space, and acquired more than 430 acres of natural habitat in the Barrington area. One of her nominators noted that “Sam Oliver is synonymous with conservation and volunteerism.”

Steve Widowski, Vienna

Steve Widowski dedicated most of his professional career serving as a wildlife biologist for the U.S. Forest Service in the Shawnee National Forest, but his influence in enhancing wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation opportunities extends well beyond the forest in southern Illinois. The Chicago native was instrumental in the development, restoration and management of much of the critical wildlife habitat on the Shawnee, including the Big Muddy Bottomlands, and the Oakwood Bottoms Greentree Reservoir, which provides an important migration and wintering area for waterfowl. Mr. Widowski took the lead in coordinating a partnership involving the Forest Service, the HeartLands Conservancy, Ducks Unlimited and other conservation partners to acquire high-priority sites in the Mississippi River floodplain and to restore thousands of acres of wetland and bottomland forest habitat across southern Illinois. Now retired from the Forest Service, Mr. Widowski continues to work to protect and manage natural resources in the region as a special projects coordinator for the HeartLands Conservancy.

The Illinois Conservation Foundation is an IRS 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit corporation established in 1995 to help support the mission and programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The ICF inspires today’s youth – tomorrow’s leaders – by providing quality outdoor education and programs that instill interest in conservation, ecology and sustainability. Contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. For more information on the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame, or to register for the 2018 Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame Gala, check the ICF website www.ilcf.org.

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