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## Coleman Receives Wildlife Conservation Honor

By Margaret Morton

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Probably Loudoun's best-known wildlife promoter, Joe Coleman has received the A. Willis Robertson Award from the Virginia Chapter of The Wildlife Society.

The state chapter's annual recognition is granted to the Virginia resident who has made significant contributions to conservation activities in the commonwealth. The chapter is an affiliate of a national organization of professional biologists whose mission is to get involved in wildlife conservation at the federal and state levels.

The Bluemont area resident was nominated by Virginia State Game Warden Officer Bruce A. Lemmert, and recognized for his leadership in helping to establish and guide the Loudoun Wildlife Conservancy.

Coleman received the award from Virginia Chapter Wildlife Society President Scott Klopfer Feb. 5 at Palmyra. The award is named after the former lawyer, U.S. Congressman and Senator, who was also instrumental in the work of The Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries as a citizen and board chairman during its early years.

Robertson was co-sponsor of The Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Program or the Pittman-Robertson Act. Enacted in 1937, the program is credited with funneling billions of dollars to the states for wildlife restoration projects.

This week, Klopfer said Coleman and the conservancy "are truly deserving of this award," citing them as models for other communities.

"Without people like Joe, the continued conservation and improvement of remaining wild places simply would not occur," Klopfer said. This kind of work is particularly important "at the leading edge of development where the rate of conversion from natural types to developed [types] is most rapid."

In his nomination, Lemmert cited Coleman as a man who put action to ideas. Along with Diane Gilliam and Leslie Metzger, in 1995, Coleman "planted the seed for what has blossomed into a very active, effective, and savvy conservation organization," that now boasts 650 members, operating on a budget of \$40,000 to \$50,000, Lemmert wrote.

Coleman said this week the award was somewhat of a surprise, although he said Lemmert had tipped him off he was going to nominate him. "But, I didn't expect it," he said. The Virginia chapter is known as a "very good organization, very thorough and very science oriented," Coleman said.

Coleman was the society's first president, from 1996 to 2000, and was reelected last year.

Both his co-founders have moved out of the area, but Coleman recalled the three were neighbors, living in the Bloomfield and Airmont areas.

"All three of us were watching Loudoun begin to change drastically, and we shared the same desire [to preserve wildlife.]

Although the founders have different points of view, "we all valued wildlife and the rural landscape," Coleman said, recalling their aim was, and remains, to try to educate the public on the best ways to keep the landscape as natural as possible.

"That's our mission-the preservation and proliferation of wildlife habitat."

As part of that mission, educating residents and governmental bodies on the importance of wildlife

habitats and natural areas resulted in the conservancy's being the lead organization in getting the almost 700-acre Banshee Reeks land purchased and created as a county nature preserve by the county government-an achievement Coleman ranks as a major break through for the organization and the many groups involved in the effort.

Although Coleman acknowledges a healthy growth in membership, he said he'd still like to see more people come "to learn the wildlife habitats are special and unique, and worth preserving because they cherish it."

In the early days, the fledgling group concentrated on education-field trips and talks around the county. But, for the past couple of years, the conservancy has added a more scientific element.

"We're doing more and more in collecting hard data and identifying specifically what steps need to be taken for protection," such as creating riparian buffers for farmland streams, a pet project for Coleman who is a passionate believer in such measures as the most effective way to preserve the health and quality of Loudoun's streams. The conservancy has planted more than 200 trees and 300 shrubs on the Phillips Farm near Waterford, owned by the Waterford Foundation.

LWC also plans a five-year bird Atlas, a census of birds around the county. The last such census was taken in the 1980s, and Maryland did the whole state two years ago.

"We believe it's worthwhile," Coleman said, adding the census will begin this year, focusing on what birds nest in the county and which birds stay yearlong. "We now recognize migration stops are important to birds," but the observation and data collection needs to be very scientific, Coleman said. To that end, the conservancy is working closely with the Patuxent Research Center in Maryland, which works with Atlas projects around the country.

Also on the agenda are more habitat restoration projects, both actual projects such as planting more riparian buffers and education awareness programs for the public.

"It's difficult to convince people of that [importance]; most like fields going down to the stream's edge," Coleman said. The conservancy has found, however, that if there are large patches of woods between streams and meadows, they will protect the stream. The days when 18th or 19th century artists would paint bucolic scenes of cattle standing knee-deep in a stream are gone, Coleman said, noting the population growth has added a major component.

"There are too many people in one place," he said, adding farmers used to rotate their field plantings to replenish the soil. With today's technology and fertilizers farmers don't do that.

"We're also kicking off an amphibian program we started a year ago," Coleman said. Former LWC President Nicole Hamilton is charged with strengthening and expanding the program and trying to collect more scientific data to make the case for water quality. The organization already partners with Loudoun Watershed Watch, which collects data and monitors bacterial life in Catoclin Creek.

On the bright side, Coleman said, is that a lot more people are getting involved in wildlife and water protection programs, including the Board of Supervisors.

### Reader Comments

*The following are comments from the readers. In no way do they represent the view of Leesburg Today.*

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**daveward** wrote on **Feb 26, 2009 7:02 AM:**

" This is a well deserved honor to fanatically enthusiastic wildlife conservator. "

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