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Media Advisory

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Arkansas Conservationist Wins 2005 National Wetlands Award

Tom Foti of Little Rock, Arkansas, has won the 2005 National Wetlands Award for State, Tribal, and Local Program Development. He will be honored for his work identifying and protecting Arkansas' wetlands in a ceremony on May 18th in Room B339 in the Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, D.C.

"Tom's understanding of the ecology of Arkansas is unsurpassed. He brings his expertise to bear on every major wetland and biodiversity issue in the state, acting as a catalyst for accomplishing seemingly impossible results, and effectively advocating for wetland research, stewardship, and conservation," says Elizabeth Murray, coordinator of the Arkansas Multi-Agency Wetland Planning Team. Murray's sentiments are echoed by Karen Smith, Director of the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, who emphasizes that "the enormous respect for Tom Foti as the premier ecologist in Arkansas reaches well beyond the borders of the state. Tom has an uncanny ability to share his wealth of knowledge and we all are truly fortunate to have the opportunity to learn from him every day."

Foti's early career efforts helped save the Cache River from channelization. This area is now a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance and home of the recently-rediscovered Ivory-Billed Woodpecker. Foti conducted the first inventory of natural areas in Arkansas and more recently coauthored the hydrogeomorphic classification of Arkansas wetlands and the five regional guidebooks for HGM assessment in the state. He has also worked with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to subdivide and clarify Arkansas's ecoregions and with NatureServe to refine the U.S. National Vegetation Classification to better reflect the state's wetland diversity.

"Because of his research, conservation planning, interpretation, and instruction, thousands of acres of priority wetlands in Arkansas have been conserved for the benefit of future generations. Tom is a great conservation partner," says Scott Simon, Arkansas State Director for The Nature Conservancy.

Since 1989, the National Wetlands Awards program has honored exceptional individuals who have demonstrated extraordinary effort, innovation, and excellence in wetland conservation, research, or education through programs or projects at the regional, state, or local level. The program is co-sponsored by the Environmental Law Institute, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, USDA Forest Service, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Federal Highway Administration, and NOAA Fisheries.

"This year's awardees, who are at the forefront of efforts to protect America's valuable aquatic resources, provide a sense of confidence that we have the leadership, talent, and commitment to realize the challenging goal that we have established of moving beyond 'no net loss' to achieving an overall increase in the Nation's wetlands," said U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Assistant Administrator for Water, Benjamin H. Grumbles.

For more information please contact Maria Placht at the Environmental Law Institute at (202) 939-3860 or wetlandsawards@eli.org, or visit <http://www2.eli.org/nwa/nwaprogram.htm>.

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