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## **TPWD biologist honored by regional peers**

### **Brian Van Zee named 2015 SEAFWA Fisheries Biologist of the Year**

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – Nov. 5, 2015 – The Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies named Brian Van Zee the 2015 Fisheries Biologist of the Year at their annual meeting in Asheville this week. Van Zee is a fisheries biologist for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department out of Waco.

“It gives me great pleasure to present this year’s Fisheries Biologist of the Year Award to Brian Van Zee,” SEAFWA President Bob Ziehmer said. “His contributions to fisheries conservation that began in Texas have led to ripples across the country.”

Van Zee was instrumental in helping the TPWD deal with one of the greatest threats their fisheries resources have faced, the introduction of invasive zebra mussels to Texas waters.



Chairman of the SEAFWA Awards Committee Ed Carter presents the Fisheries Biologist of the Year award to Brian Van Zee (right). Photo by Thomas Harvey.

“Brian developed and fostered more than 40 key partnerships that helped our agency and constituents understand and address this very dynamic and complicated situation,” said TPWD Director Carter Smith, who nominated Van Zee for the award.

Through new relationships with governmental agencies, universities, non-governmental organizations, private industry and the media, Van Zee fostered collaborative information gathering and sharing, training, statewide monitoring, education and awareness, and delivery of two innovative control efforts.

“Brian has been at the forefront of our efforts to contain the rapidly expanding population and to try and keep it from threatening other waters,” Smith said. “Simply put, he has quickly become one of the state’s foremost authorities on how best to contend with this threat to our waters, aquatic habitats, and boating and fishing traditions.”

Van Zee organized innovative treatments on a 30-mile stretch of river and a reservoir marina. He worked with others to develop, fund and execute a public awareness campaign. Because of his efforts, more than 200 people have been trained to inspect boats for the mussels, and boater inspection and statewide monitoring programs have been implemented.

To keep the public informed and engaged in fighting the invasion, he authored more than 50 press releases and gave hundreds of media interviews. Because of his program's success, Van Zee has given multiple presentations and training courses to different organizations across the country that are also fighting invasive species.

Van Zee is responsible for coordinating the statewide fish-stocking plan and fisheries management and research operations in the central and western portions of Texas.

The Association's Biologist of the Year Awards are presented to two career biologists of state wildlife agencies, one each in the categories of wildlife and fisheries, who in the opinion of the SEAFWA Awards Committee have made outstanding contributions toward wildlife/fisheries conservation.