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MDWFP biologist honored by regional peers

John Gruchy named 2015 SEAFWA Wildlife Biologist of the Year

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – Nov. 5, 2015 – The Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies named John Gruchy the 2015 Wildlife Biologist of the Year at their annual meeting in Asheville this week. Gruchy is the private lands coordinator for the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks.

“John’s passion for putting wildlife habitat on the ground, technical abilities and gift for effectively working with partners have improved wildlife habitat on thousands of acres in Mississippi. He is clearly a leader in the realm of private lands conservation, a critical avenue for providing the habitat needs of wildlife held in the public trust,” SEAFWA President Bob Ziehmer said.

Gruchy routinely conducts more than 100 site visits each year, providing habitat management guidance for Mississippi landowners. He has been particularly influential in restoring native grasses and prescribed fire regiments to the private lands within the state’s natural prairie region. He also provides guidance for managing pine stands and hardwood forests.

“Equally important to his individual landowner assistance, John makes many public presentations on habitat management to local groups each year,” said MDWFP Executive Director Dr. Sam Polles, who nominated Gruchy for the award. “He has lectured at three Mississippi colleges and numerous high schools and conducted multiple landowner workshops and field days on habitat management.”

His outreach work extends to other natural resource professionals as well. This past summer, Gruchy partnered with the Mississippi Forestry Commission in a grant to teach wildlife habitat management principles to 94 state foresters. The partnership was an effort to improve private lands management recommendations within their Forest Stewardship Plans.



Chairman of the SEAFWA Awards Committee Ed Carter presents the Wildlife Biologist of the Year award to John Gruchy (right). Photo by Thomas Harvey.

Understanding that funding and equipment are often as limiting as expertise, Gruchy has been instrumental in securing grants and partnerships to fund habitat management on private lands in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Florida. Through his grant writing and partnership coordination efforts, five native grass drills are available to north Mississippi landowners, where previously there were none.

Gruchy sits on numerous boards, committees, and working groups focused on improving habitat across the southeastern U.S., including the Mississippi Partners for Fish and Wildlife Uplands Committee, which he chairs.

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.