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Hyde Farmers Win N.C. Coastal Federation Pelican Award

MANTEO -- The foresight and cooperation of the 30 landowners in the Mattamuskeet Drainage Association in Hyde County will have sweeping consequences for the health of Pamlico Sound and has earned the association a Pelican Award from the N.C. Coastal Federation.

The association is one of three recipients of 2012 Pelican Awards along the northeast coast.

They are among the 16 individuals, groups and agencies across North Carolina to win awards this year. The annual Pelican Awards recognize exemplary action to protect and preserve the coastal environment. The winners will be recognized Saturday at a luncheon at the N.C. History Center in New Bern. The federation will use the occasion to also celebrate its 30th anniversary.

“These awards are our way of recognizing extraordinary commitment to protecting and preserving our coast,” said Todd Miller, the federation’s founder and executive director. “We should never underestimate the power that many people bring to the effort of assuring that our coast remains a healthy and vibrant place. We can’t thank them enough.”

This year, in honor of its 30th birthday, the federation is giving a special award to Fred and Alice Stanback of Salisbury. Donations from the Stanbacks and their family members have had a huge effect throughout state in protecting the environment and in building the capacity of dozens of conservation groups, including the federation, Miller noted.

“In fact, over the years they have become the single most influential force in building the capacity of citizens to watch out for environmental quality in North Carolina,” he said. “Their financial support exceeds any other form of environmental philanthropic giving.”

The 42,500 acres now part of the Mattamuskeet association were intensively ditched and drained in the 1960s and ‘70s to allow for forestry and farming operations. Over the past 20 years landowners have placed nearly half the land in the Wetland Reserve Program, a federal initiative that restores former wetlands and protects them with conservation easements. By partnering with the federation through a series of projects, the easements will be further enhanced to improve water quality and reopen closed shellfishing waters in Pamlico Sound.

2011 was a benchmark year. Two landowners within the association enrolled nearly 4,400 acres in the wetlands program, bringing the total acres of land enrolled and available for restoration to over 20,000.

The Pelican Award recognizes this achievement and the cooperation of the farmers to develop a long-range restoration and management plan for the land and water, said Erin Fleckenstein, a federation scientist who heads the group's regional office in Manteo.

The cooperation of the association, the federation, the federal government and other partners is a shining example of a non-traditional alliance working toward environmental conservation that can serve as a template for other projects, she said.

Other Northeast Pelican Award Winners

Education: Pat Armstrong, Columbia. During the last four years, the federation has incorporated year-round classroom programming with Armstrong's eighth-grade science students at Columbia Middle School, which included planting a rain garden at the school. Armstrong took ownership of the garden, dedicating personal time to ensure the plantings were successful and developing a maintenance program for it. She took the weeding as an opportunity to motivate her students, devising a program that kept the students involved and the rain garden in top shape. She assigned pairs of students with their own 3x3 meter section of the rain garden to weed and maintain as part of their science project grade. Several years later, the rain garden is thriving, thanks to Armstrong.

Volunteers: Marcia and Jim Lyons, Buxton. Jim and Marcia Lyons, long-time residents of Buxton, are dedicated to protecting the environment and are a strong local voice for the ecologically sensitive areas of Hatteras Island. This dynamic and energetic couple, have long been federation volunteers, but their dedication to our project at Durant's Point was exemplary. The site is only accessible by water, and Jim was willing to donate his boat to access the project site. Marcia attended nearly every volunteer activity and was willing to get her hands dirty, planting thousands of marsh grasses throughout the spring. Not only was one or both of them at every volunteer event, they also recruited additional volunteers, bringing along friends and neighbors to help share the work.