

## Howe resident named NWTF 'best of the bunch'

Written by From the NWTF  
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NASHVILLE, Tenn. — A Howe resident was named “the best of the bunch” in a recognition program at the annual National Wild Turkey Federation convention.

Steve Gage is the Indiana state president for the NWTF. He was presented with the “Roger M. Latham Sportman, Wild Turkey and Conservation Service Award for his contributions to the NWTF’s conservation legacy.

“Volunteers are the lifeblood of the National Wild Turkey Federation,” the NWTF said in a press release. “Dr. Roger M. Latham was a pioneering advocate for ecosystem management before the term was created. His work on deer and turkey research and management began in 1938. In a lifetime of speaking and writing about his love of nature and the sport of hunting, he educated the public about the need for a scientific basis for managing wildlife.”

NWTF chief executive officer, George Thorton, and James Earl Kennamer, Ph.D., the NWTF’s chief conservation officer, presented the award.

“The NWTF’s volunteers are the worlds best without a doubt,” said Dr. Kennamer. “But Steve Gage stands out because he goes far beyond the call of duty to promote conservation, hunting and the wild turkey.”

The Latham Service Award is given to NWTF members who are not employed as professional wildlife managers, but have made significant contributions to the wild turkey and conservation. Winners are chosen from a field of the NWTF’s nearly 500,000 volunteers across the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

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"The Federation, the wild turkey, and turkey hunting are passions in my life." Gage said. "To get an award for doing work I feel so strongly about and love is wonderful. My state and local chapters are just as excited for me to win this award as I am to receive it, and without their dedication and hard work it would not have been possible.

"I am blessed to have such great volunteers working with me!"

Gage, founder of the local Pigeon River chapter of the NWTF, is now serving his second term as NWTF Indiana State President. He is known for his excellent leadership and ability to keep volunteers focused on the NWTF's mission according to NWTF field staff.

"Steve Gage knows hunters were the first, and best, conservationists," Dr. Kennamer said. "He is one of our most dedicated volunteers, and we are proud to recognize all he does to ensure that hunting and conservation last for future generations."

The NWTF is a national nonprofit conservation organization that was founded in 1973 and has worked with wildlife agencies to restore wild turkey populations from 1.3 million wild turkeys in 1973 to over 7 million today. Now, NWTF volunteers raise funds and work daily to improve critical wildlife habitat, increase access to public hunting land and introduce new people to the outdoors and hunting.

"The NWTF has tremendous outreach programs such as the Jakes and Extreme Jakes for youth 17 years old and younger. The state and local chapters of the NWTF spent over \$55,000.00 on the youth of Indiana in 2008 and will again in 2009" said Gage.

"The 'Women in the Outdoors' and the 'Wheelin' Sportsman' for the disabled are other examples of programs aimed at giving individuals the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors that may not otherwise have the chance."

Gage and the Pigeon River chapter have held eight Hunting Heritage banquets in LaGrange County and have raised over \$150,000. With a portion of the proceeds the chapter has distributed educational boxes to local teachers to be used in the classroom, purchased a

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Kubota 4X4 unit for the Pigeon River Fish and Wildlife Area and a dry-ground drill to plant prairie grasses in the county.

In addition, they have supplied over 1,400 hardwood tree saplings to be planted, awarded over \$4,000 in scholarships to local graduating seniors, and assisted the Department of Natural Resources with Indiana's youth dove and turkey hunts on Pigeon River Wildlife Area.

The NWTF is a supporter of the 4-H Shooting Sports at the national, state and local levels. The local 4-H club has received over \$2,000 from the Pigeon River Chapter. LaGrange NWTF chapter president Bob Bond was instrumental in bringing the nationally acclaimed "Archery in the Schools" program to Lakeland School Corporation.

To date, the NWTF and its partners have spent more than \$1.5 million in Indiana and \$286 million nationwide upholding hunting traditions and conserving nearly 14 million acres of wildlife habitat.