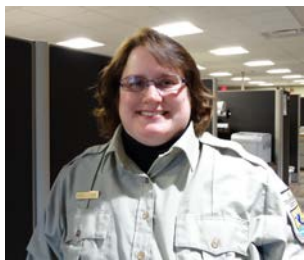


## **2018 LEGENDS HONORED BY OUTDOOR RECREATION ROUNDTABLE**

Washington, D.C. (June 8, 2018) – Seven **Legends** Awards were presented to federal managers for outstanding work to improve outdoor recreation experiences and opportunities for the American people. The Awards were presented as a signature event of Great Outdoors Month® – the national celebration of the value and importance of outdoor recreation. Initiated by the American Recreation Coalition in 1991, **Legends** Awards enable federal agencies to nominate individuals whose extraordinary efforts have made a concrete difference in enhancing outdoor recreation programs and resources. The 2018 **Legends** recipients represent the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, National Park Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Together, these agencies host nearly one billion visits annually. 2018's winners are: Denise Clay, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Samantha Grey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; Joan Harn, National Park Service; Jack Placchi, Bureau of Land Management; Francisco Valenzuela, U.S. Forest Service; John Wilson, Federal Highway Administration; and Janet Zeller, U.S. Forest Service.



**Denise Clay** is a Fish Biologist and the Outreach Coordinator for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Lower Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office in New York. As a field biologist, she has predominantly monitored aquatic invasive species in Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, and the Erie Canal. A major component of the invasive species program is prevention and education, so it was a natural transition for her to become Outreach Coordinator. For the past eight years, Denise has shown tremendous individual passion for connecting people of all ages and backgrounds with nature. She has worked to develop partnerships, engage audiences, create programs, seek continual learning and dedicate her time and effort to the sole purpose of getting others engaged in the outdoors. Denise serves as liaison to the office's Friends organization along with its partners in both the public and private sector – cities, schools and home schoolers, businesses, as well as a variety of local offices of state natural resource agencies and non-governmental organizations. In 2017, Denise coordinated 43 events of varying sizes, engaging over 28,000 people in the western New York Region. Denise believes in bringing the Service's fisheries program – and nature in general – to those who see it the least. One program in particular that she brought to a new level is Students, Nature, and Photography – SNAP! She is the powerhouse behind this program, reaching several area schools in both urban and rural settings. Since 2012, Denise has coordinated 24 SNAP! events that reached 1,269 students from grades 3 to 12. Not to be outdone by photography, last year she led a western New York Veterans' Fishing Day, working with the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge and local veteran's groups, and reached 135 veterans and their families. Denise is also a valuable resource to the Regional Office, helping to boost awareness of the Northeast Region through consistent social media posts, blogs, and a monthly newsletter review. She posts two or three captivating stories each week on Facebook and, most recently, stepped up to represent the Regional Fish and Aquatic Conservation program on the Service's Recruit, Retain, Reactivate initiative. Denise's leadership and efforts have brought the Lower Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office to an extraordinary level of organization, motivation, and commitment and helped the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reach the public in so many inspiring ways.

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## 2018 Legends Awards Add One



**Samantha Gray** is the Lead Interpretive Ranger at the Cape Cod Canal, located in the New England District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Over the past 21 years, Samantha has been a leader in the promotion of recreational and educational opportunities at the Canal. Since the opening of the Canal Visitor Center – once a Coast Guard boathouse -- in 2001, Samantha has been the force behind its transformation into a nationally renowned interpretive facility, making it the focal point of the Canal's interpretive mission and a centerpiece of the New England District's Natural Resources Program. Samantha sees opportunities and takes them. Her leadership in interpretive excellence and development of innovative programs such as Canal Kids, Sandwich Partnership for Families, and Exploring Engineering Club are helping to develop the next generation of public lands and waters stewards by reaching children from ages 1 to 17 with programs targeted to each learning level. She has also been a significant player in the promotion of partnership opportunities at her project and throughout the New England District. She was instrumental in the development of the District's partnership policy and standard operating procedures. Her efforts have made it easier for other projects to cultivate relationships with outside organizations to improve the recreational opportunities at their parks. Leading by example, Samantha set up a cooperating association agreement with Eastern National to create the Canal Visitor Center Bookstore, including the development of a contribution plan in which Eastern National can collect cash donations to purchase supplies and equipment to help support the Canal's interpretive mission. She also started an Adopt-A-Shoreline program and formed a partnership with the Sandwich Arts Alliance to display photos and artwork featuring the Canal. Her leadership and passion for imparting knowledge have resulted in devoted, life-long volunteers, longstanding partnerships with key stakeholders and the public, as well as a stellar interpretive program. Samantha continuously shows vision and effective project execution, while always taking the time to mentor and assist co-workers, volunteers and visitors. Her accomplishments and efforts bring positive recognition to the Corps of Engineers and its partners. Her commitment to excellence has established a distinguished standard for others to emulate. Samantha Gray is an asset to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.



**Joan Harn** is the Rivers Program Manager for the Conservation and Outdoor Recreation Division of the National Park Service (NPS). She has primary responsibility for Wild and Scenic Rivers and Hydropower Assistance, as well as oversight of the Rivers and Watershed work of the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance programs. Joan has made a major difference for rivers and river users throughout her NPS career, which began in 2000. She has developed guidance to improve the protection and enhancement of our nation's Wild and Scenic Rivers and the interagency and nonprofit partnerships that sustain the system. In addition, her vision and formation of a strong and respected hydropower recreation program has led to millions of dollars of recreation and conservation enhancements on rivers through hydropower relicensing efforts. She has also overseen the development of new public-facing websites for NPS Rivers, Wild and Scenic Rivers, and Hydropower Assistance, making clear, effective guidance on NPS river management and recreation available to the public and agency partners. Particularly noteworthy is Joan's leadership on the development of a National River Recreation Database in partnership with more than two dozen organizations, including the River Management Society. The database, found at [nationalriversproject.com](http://nationalriversproject.com), is unique in its capacity to provide authoritative data to enhance the ability of the public to access recreational paddling opportunities on and around NPS Wild and Scenic Rivers, as well as rivers within the user's vicinity. Without Joan championing the research, collection, and aggregation of Wild and Scenic

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## 2018 Legends Awards Add Two

River access information and securing resources to create a data dictionary for the database, this project would not be where it is now. It is especially fitting to recognize Joan's contributions in 2018 – the 50th anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, a system Joan has shaped at an agency, interagency, and nationwide level. Joan is a leader to whom NPS staff, agency colleagues, and nonprofit partners turn for both her institutional knowledge and her measured evaluation of issues facing rivers today. Joan's longstanding contributions to the Interagency Wild and Scenic Rivers Coordinating Council to develop consistent and effective guidance, policy recommendations, and technical assistance for Wild and Scenic Rivers will help sustain the system into its next 50 years.



**Jack Placchi** is an Outdoor Recreation Planner with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). A recreation professional for close to 40 years, he began his career with the U.S. Forest Service, became the State Trails Program Manager for the Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife, and then joined the BLM in 2002 as the Trails, Travel Management, Youth and Volunteer Coordinator for the Colorado State Office. Jack has provided program leadership throughout Colorado and across the BLM in trail development and travel management planning, always first considering the needs of the field and the impact any actions might have on their effectiveness. He recognized early on that, for trail development and management on public lands to be successful, both motorized and non-motorized user groups would need to be at the table and participate fully in local travel-management planning. Jack's influence on BLM trails throughout Colorado is simply immeasurable. He also strongly supports efforts to enhance public land stewardship through volunteerism and established the Colorado BLM Volunteer of the Year annual award, which provides a cash award to support a volunteer effort in the winner's field office. His leadership keeps Colorado at the forefront of the BLM's volunteer program. One of his most significant contributions to the recreation profession has been his unique ability to forge strong partnerships across user groups and agencies, which help facilitate the on-the-ground workloads for field offices, while keeping the focus on providing the best possible recreation experience for the American public. In addition to these accomplishments, arguably his single greatest contribution has been his unwavering dedication to finding and providing avenues for youth and underserved communities to be introduced to the outdoors through creative work and internship opportunities. He developed a critical partnership between BLM and the Colorado Youth Corps Association, which has resulted not only in valuable on-the-ground work, but also, most importantly, in the cultivation of a commitment to public service among diverse youth and young adults. His passionate advocacy for this partnership has helped BLM Colorado recruit and develop the next generation of BLM staff. Jack's open-minded approach, inclusive nature, and positive attitude toward everyone with whom he interacts make him a role model for the entire BLM.



**Francisco Vaenzuela** is Director of Sustainable Recreation, Tourism, Heritage and Wilderness Programs for the Southwestern Region of the U.S. Forest Service where he is responsible for the strategic direction and oversight of these programs on more than 22 million acres of National Forests, Grasslands and Monuments. During his career, he has planned and implemented more recreation projects, including trails projects, visitor centers and special areas, than any other recreation planner currently with the agency. To date, over 22 million visitors have enjoyed recreation areas that Francisco was involved with developing, including the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, the largest comprehensively planned investment in recreation infrastructure and services in Forest Service history, and El Yunque National Forest's Visitor Center and rebuilt recreation facilities and trails,

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## 2018 Legends Awards Add Three

that forest's largest recreation capital investment. His career has given him the opportunity to contribute to recreation programs on public lands across the United States and overseas in Latin America, the Near East and Africa. Francisco is committed to the concept of "sustainable recreation" which he sees as serving a diversity of people and protecting beautiful and critically important natural and cultural heritage for future generations through the development of a "virtuous relationship" between human society and nature. In 2007, he led the creation of a National Framework for Sustainable Recreation and then, in 2014, produced the Southwestern Region's Sustainable Recreation Strategy to further develop the concept, including a sustainable recreation allocation model and a set of sustainable recreation indicators and performance measures. Recognizing the importance of partnerships to sustainable recreation, he also launched and led the effort to develop a comprehensive Partnerships Strategy for the Southwestern Region. He has published professional papers, appeared on Public Television and spoken on the topic of sustainable recreation at national and international meetings. While his achievements and awards are too numerous to list, most recently, he co-led the agency's effort to develop a Sustainable Recreation Research Working Meeting in April 2018 to identify recreation research needs for public lands and develop a research agenda for the future. With 40 years of experience – most of them with the Forest Service – he is widely recognized as an outstanding leader in outdoor recreation planning and management.



**John Wilson** is a Project Manager for the Eastern Federal Lands Highway Division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), where he has worked for the last 26 years and has demonstrated a unique ability to manage the most difficult, time-sensitive and controversial projects while meeting the public's and partner agency's needs to improve recreational opportunities for facility users. His expertise in construction project contract development has led to the improvement of public access, safety, and sustainability for the public. His expertise in project delivery includes working on complex urban projects, high-speed urban and rural

parkways, low-volume rural projects, recreational roads, and marinas with numerous partner agencies such as the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army, and state transportation agencies. He has also provided damage assessments and delivery of construction repair contracts for emergency-response projects. Some of the projects he has managed, such as the historic Foothills Parkway at Great Smoky Mountains National Park in Tennessee or Hurricane Sandy relief projects in the New York City metropolitan area, including the repairs at the Statue of Liberty, are in locations with high political interest, multiple stakeholders, environmentally sensitive locations, and significant risk. Oftentimes these projects require unique partnerships, aggressive project management and multiple leveraged funding sources to complete the work – and thus benefit immensely from the exceptional management skills that John brings to every project. Regardless of the project or its size, he treats his partners and all the many aspects of his projects with equal importance and attentiveness. There is no "less important" project. His calm demeanor and experience assure FHWA's partner agencies and stakeholders -- local staff, facility visitors, facility vendors and community organizations -- that due consideration will be given to their needs and that the project's purpose and intent – to improve access in and to our National Treasures -- will be successful. In addition to his multi-faceted work for FHWA, John has been an active member of the U.S. Army Reserve since college and served from May 2007 through July 2008 in Kuwait and Iraq as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom, and later in 2012 in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. His outstanding service reflects positively on him, his family, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and our Nation.

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## 2018 Legends Awards Add Four



**Janet Zeller** is the National Accessibility Program Manager for the U.S. Forest Service. She has served the agency and the public with distinction and dedication in this position since 2001, after joining the agency in 1991 as the Accessibility Program Manager for the Eastern Region. Janet's leadership and accomplishments have been extraordinary, including the development and implementation of the Forest Service's Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines and Trails Accessibility Guidelines, which established the agency's commitment to providing accessible recreation opportunities while protecting the natural resources and settings that people come to enjoy. Janet encouraged and ensured the implementation of both sets of guidelines throughout the Forest Service, then successfully oversaw the review process that ultimately resulted in the agency's guidelines being incorporated into the U.S. Access Board's update of the Architectural Barriers Act accessibility standards for all outdoor recreation areas nationwide. Janet's efforts to nationalize the guidelines were instrumental in ensuring that all new construction and alterations of existing outdoor recreation areas (picnic areas, trails, and campgrounds) comply with these guidelines. As a result, recreation opportunities, programs and services have been expanded to include all recreationists, with and without disabilities. Janet also worked tirelessly during design and implementation of the Forest Service's travel management rule to ensure that visitors with disabilities enjoyed access to the full range of national forest lands and experiences while protecting the lands and natural resources themselves. She has conducted hundreds of training sessions throughout the country, sharing creative solutions to access challenges, while inspiring participants. She has also provided field managers across the agency with solid technical guidance, solutions-oriented direction, and rationales to better serve the 57 million Americans with disabilities and the 150 million National Forest visitors, many of whom have a disability and are recreating with their family or group. In addition, Janet has championed the development of an innovative mobile-tablet-based survey process in a GIS-based application to document current accessibility compliance and identify corrective measures. Few individuals have influenced so many positive changes for the public who use and value our National Forests as Janet Zeller through her perseverance and the sharing of her passion and technical expertise.

Further coverage of the presentation of these awards is available at [www.funoutdoors.com/2018Legends](http://www.funoutdoors.com/2018Legends). Photos of the awards presentation are available upon request.

Please visit [www.RecreationRoundtable.org](http://www.RecreationRoundtable.org) for more information on the coalition's activities and membership.

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