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Kevin Godsea of Florida Panther NWR Receives 2017 Paul Kroegel Award – Refuge Manager of the Year

(Washington D.C.) – The National Wildlife Refuge Association is proud to award Kevin Godsea of Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge with the 2017 Refuge Manager of the Year Award. He is a visionary, an innovator, and a trustworthy advisor for fellow conservation partners, community leaders, landowners, and his staff when it comes to conserving Southwest Florida’s critically important landscape.

The award is given in honor of Paul Kroegel, the first manager of the first refuge, established in 1903 at Pelican Island, Florida. Kevin demonstrates similar dedication and effectiveness, empowering his staff to innovate, to be creative, and to think outside of the box to address important challenges.

The Florida panther is the most endangered mammal in the eastern U.S. with a population between 100-180 adults in southern Florida representing a species that once ranged throughout the southeast. Conserving panther habitat is a contentious issue in Southwest Florida as development continues to increase. Kevin has met the challenge of upholding the integrity of critical panther habitat through building strong and collaborative partnerships with researchers, non-profit partners, conservation partners, ranchers and community members.

In 2013, Kevin was appointed by the Southeast Regional Director to participate in the Florida Panther Recovery Implementation Team and he has taken a leadership role in developing approaches to address large challenges in large predator recovery efforts.

Through the current revision of the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge’s Comprehensive Conservation Program, Kevin provided opportunities for people to share ideas and concerns about the future of the refuge through an online forum that proved to be invaluable for developing a more comprehensive and effective outcome. Kevin volunteered to develop the first Landscape Conservation Design document in coordination with the University of Florida and the National Wildlife Refuge Association. He has co-developed an incentive-based approach to compensating ranchers for conserving panther habitat.

Kevin's dedication to the culture of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is demonstrated through his inspirational leadership. We are proud to present Kevin Godsea with this prestigious award.

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The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to conserve America's wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect, enhance, and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries.