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## **Richard Esker of Ohio River Islands NWR Receives 2017 Volunteer of the Year Award**

(Washington D.C.) – Richard Esker, a volunteer at the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge, has been announced as the 2017 Volunteer of the Year recipient. This award recognizes outstanding accomplishments of volunteers in support of the operation and management of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Since 2003, Dick has been a dedicated volunteer at the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge in West Virginia. The same week he retired as a chemical engineer Dick was at the refuge door signing up as a volunteer. Since then, he has logged over 11,500 hours of volunteer service over the course of more than 14 years and is a regular and reliable presence on the refuge at least three days per week. Dick embraces challenging tasks that require new ideas and elegant solutions because innovation and critical thinking come naturally to him.

Prior to volunteering on the refuge, Dick was a visionary member of DuPont's Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Committee, where he helped lead the re-introduction of osprey to the mid-Ohio River Valley region. Using his extensive GIS software skills Dick has designed nearly all of the maps that visitors and staff use for the refuge. He is also a valuable mentor to new employees and seasonal interns. Over his many years volunteering at the refuge he has been successful in an amazing variety of undertakings, including wood working projects, kiosk construction, safety improvements, visitor center aquarium re-design, building aquaculture systems for mussel holding, motor boat operation, designing and building a tree nursery bed, invasive plant management, trail maintenance, sign construction and maintenance, bird and bat box construction and monitoring their use, osprey and bald eagle nest monitoring, breeding bird surveys, acoustic bat surveys, maintenance of buildings, boats, and shop equipment.

Dick is an essential asset to the team at the Ohio River Islands National Wildlife Refuge. His creativity, positive attitude, patience, and diligence are an inspiration to all who are privileged to work beside him. We are proud to present this award to the very deserving Dick Esker.

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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.*