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Cooperative Conservation Awards Presented by USDA

Bangor, Maine—March 14, 2007—Joyce Swartzendruber, State Conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Maine, recently presented two Cooperative Conservation Awards for 2006. Mark McCollough of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and Steve Koenig of Project SHARE, were the recipients.

“This award is given to conservation partners in recognition of their exceptional contributions toward achieving the goals and objectives of NRCS,” said Swartzendruber. “Partnership is important to NRCS, and we want to take the time occasionally to thank and recognize just a couple of the many individuals and groups that work with us in accomplishing some of our conservation efforts.”

Mark McCollough, Endangered Species Biologist with the USFWS located in Bangor, provided invaluable assistance to NRCS in the successful delivery of the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP). The HFRP was funded by Congress for the first time in 2006 and Maine was selected as one of three states nationally to pilot the program. The primary focus of the HFRP in Maine was to enhance the management of Spruce-Fir and Northern Hardwood-Spruce forests to promote the recovery for the federally-threatened Canada lynx and to enhance biodiversity and environmental quality using sustainable forest management practices. McCollough conducted outreach to environmental groups, state agencies, and the forest industry, as well as provided information at several national and state meetings. He provided scientific literature and completed reviews of the Canada lynx, in addition to completing key documents required under short timelines. McCollough assisted NRCS in making the program work for conservation in Maine, keeping the Canada lynx and the landowner in mind. As a result, more than \$470,000 funded three contract agreements in Maine to manage nearly 500,000 acres of working forest lands for the benefit of the Canada lynx.

“The Fish and Wildlife Service recognizes that the key to recovery of the Canada lynx is working cooperatively with forest landowners in northern Maine,” said McCollough. “The Healthy Forest Reserve Program was just the right program at the right time. It was our pleasure to work with the Natural Resources Conservation Service to make this pilot program a success.”

The second award recipient, Steve Koenig, Executive Director of Project SHARE (Salmon Habitat and River Enhancement) located in Washington County, provided outstanding leadership in the development of a conservation partnership to identify, plan and implement fish passage restoration efforts for Atlantic salmon listed as an endangered species in five watersheds in Washington County. Koenig coordinated with partners to identify, prioritize and secure funding to plan, design and implement salmon habitat restoration activities in Downeast Maine. Existing undersized, hung and damaged culverts in watershed streams were replaced with open-bottom arch culverts or removable crossing structures. His outreach and conservation efforts resulted in five priority sites planned and \$156,000 of funding provided through the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program. All five projects were installed in September and October of 2006. More than 20 other sites have been identified as priorities for planning and implementation through the NRCS Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program for 2007 and 2008. Thirteen other habitat restoration sites were planned and installed using funds from other partnership sources.

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Through Koenig's efforts, Project SHARE received a \$50,000 Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative grant from NRCS in 2006 to assess and prioritize fish passage restoration in the Downeast Atlantic Salmon Watersheds. A strategic plan, technical tools and assessment protocol will be developed under this grant to further the conservation effort that is already underway.

"SHARE acts as a catalyst to focus capacity at these identified threats," said Koenig. "The capacity comes from stakeholders' commitment to this restoration effort. NRCS is a great partner in this endeavor."

For information about NRCS programs, go to www.me.nrcs.usda.gov.

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