

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Caption: Ranger Toni Westland with nominator Erin Myers

Ranger Westland accepts state conservation educator award

On April 21, Toni Westland, supervisory refuge ranger at the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge, traveled to Crystal River, Fla., to accept the Florida chapter of The Wildlife Society’s (FLTWS) 2018 Outstanding Educator Award.

Erin Myers, Partners for Fish & Wildlife biologist at Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge east of Naples, along with “Ding” Darling Refuge Manager Paul Tritaik, nominated Westland for the award, writing: “Her work at ‘Ding’ Darling ranges from leading education programs for kids and adults to overseeing visitor services for over 930,000 visitors a year and initiating new and innovative projects (i.e. Learning Lavatories) that garner national attention.”

The Wildlife Society’s web site describes thusly: “The Outstanding Educator Award honors an individual who has developed and implemented educational tools relating to Florida’s native wildlife. Educational tools may include any items, techniques, or programs used for effective public outreach. Application of the tools should strengthen relationships between natural resource professionals and the citizens of Florida, partnerships necessary to accomplish the FLTWS resource management, conservation, and education mission. The intended audience of the educational tools may be any age, and award nominees may include any wildlife professional or wildlife conservation educator.”

“I am so honored and surprised by this,” said Westland. “I love the work I do at ‘Ding’ Darling, and the pleasure I get from seeing kids of all ages discovering nature here is reward enough.”

“At a time when federal staffing cuts have meant the loss of the so-important refuge educator position, Toni has had to step up her education role by filling in on various programs and training a new

conservation educator that the ‘Ding’ Darling Wildlife Society was able to hire through donor funding,” said DDWS executive director Birgie Miller. “She richly deserves this award.”

ABOUT DDWS

As a non-profit 501(c)3 organization, DDWS works to support J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge’s mission of conservation, wildlife and habitat protection, research, and public education through charitable donations and Refuge Nature Shop proceeds.

To support DDWS and the refuge with a tax-deductible gift, visit dingdarlingsociety.org or contact Birgie Miller at 239-472-1100 ext. 4 or director@dingdarlingsociety.org.

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