

Chesapeake Forest Champions for 2018 Announced

From the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

The [Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay](#) and the U.S. Forest Service presented the 2018 Chesapeake Forest Champion Awards at the 13th Annual Chesapeake Watershed Forum in Shepherdstown, WV. This year's honorees included Matt Keefer of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Bureau of Forestry who received "Greatest on the Ground Impact," Jennifer Gagnon of Virginia Tech and the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program for "Most Effective at Engaging the Public," and Rick and Kathy Abend as "Exemplary Forest Stewards."

The commitments of these award winners to the critical forest habitats of the Chesapeake region serve as inspirational examples of the local action, whether through individual stewardship or collaborative efforts, necessary to ensure the restoration of the watershed's vital resources. "Forests remain the most beneficial land use for improving and maintaining the quality of our streams, rivers, and the Chesapeake Bay while also providing a host of essential public services we rely on every day," stated Craig Highfield, Director of the Alliance's Chesapeake Forests program.

Keefer is the Assistant State Forester for Pennsylvania's DCNR Bureau of Forestry where he oversees Community and Private Forest Stewardship. Keefer was instrumental in the development of DCNR's new state-funded riparian buffer grant program. Through his leadership, DCNR is exploring new incentives for buffer adoption, including the multifunctional concept focused on providing additional value to landowners. Keefer also spearheaded the formation of a statewide Riparian Buffer Advisory Committee, which provides a quarterly networking forum for the riparian buffer community.

Gagnon is a member of the Virginia Tech Extension Faculty and Coordinator of the Virginia Forest Landowner Education Program (VFLEP). In her role as VFLEP coordinator, Gagnon develops, delivers, and evaluates research-based educational programs and materials for more than 405,000 private forest landowners in Virginia, impacting 10.6 million acres of land in the Commonwealth.

Mr. and Mrs. Abend were honored as "Exemplary Forest Stewards" for their work on their 46-acre woodland in Dorchester County, Maryland, which has been part of the American Tree Farm System since 1989. In 2014, Mr. and Mrs. Abend were named Maryland Tree Farmers of the Year. They turned a piece of cutover woodland into a premier demonstration area where hundreds of visitors have seen forest management practices at their best.



Matt Keefer accepts his award from Ryan Davis, Alliance Chesapeake Forests Program Manager. (Courtesy photo by Will Parson, Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay)