

OUR **40th** ANNUAL CONFERENCE

TENNESSEE 2022

North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association

In 1980, a contingent of fifteen Game Wardens from the United States and Canada met in Great Falls, Montana to establish an International Association of Game Wardens. These highly motivated wardens met under the pretense to build a working cooperative for disseminating information regarding the unlawful harvest of wildlife. The political boundary known as the US / Canadian border wasn't deterring wildlife thieves from committing atrocities against North America's valued wildlife resources. Through diligent investigations, wardens from US and Canada found they were dealing with the same violators on both sides of the border who were repeatedly committing serious wildlife crimes.

THE inaugural meeting in 1980 gave birth to the North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association (NAWEOA). The association's founding fathers comprised of Lew Ramstead, John Fallows, Syl Pompu, John Edwards, Richard Hoar, Tom Bivins, John Babcock, Ed Comly, Stan Peck, Jerry Baltazor, Lee Frost, Kit Christensen, Dennis Almquest, Chuck Oakly and Chuck Thornton laid the ground work by writing the association's constitution accompanied with by-laws that would govern the actions of the Executive Board.

In 1981, along with the definition defining who would be eligible to be a member, annual dues, meetings, conferences, structure, policies, awards including many other items were established and formally adopted operating under Robert's Rules of Order.

In 1982, the first of the now forty-year tradition, commenced in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. Following the inaugural NAWEOA Summer Conference, several US States and Canadian Provinces placed their bids to host the annual conference. A private gathering in July consisting of hundreds of Game Wardens sharing information, training opportunities and comradery would only flourish every year thereafter. At the time, jurisdictions hosting bids would actually have to go to a vote by the attending membership due to the number of interested jurisdictions. Mostly sponsored by the host State or

In 1971, the Raccoon was adopted as Tennessee's official wild animal.





Province Officer’s Associations, many gained support from their State or Provincial Agency to provide a one-of-a-kind experience for their game warden guests. All attendees would have to be a regular member of NAWEOA as individual members or included in a group membership sponsored by their officer’s association. Even though every North American State, Provincial, and Federal Wildlife Agencies whose “Lead Role” as the primary law enforcement entity to enforce wildlife and /or fishery laws/regulations, qualify to host the NAWEOA conference, some jurisdictions have hosted the annual event more than once, whereas others have yet to make the commitment.

Conceived by fifteen game wardens, NAWEOA’s membership now numbers over 9,000 conservation officers from

the US and Canada. What once was an officers only conference for sharing information, soon blossomed into a family affair. Although many of the traditional events remain the same, some of the newest opportunities have become part of the great comradery that embodies NAWEOA. The normal schedule of events now includes attendees arriving a few days early before the opening ceremonies to embark on adventures to sight see local landmarks, charter a local fishing vessel or play a round of 18 holes of golf. The day prior to the opening ceremonies is reserved for registration and the mandatory NAWEOA Executive Board meeting where wardens (elected by their peers of the general membership) conduct NAWEOA business for the betterment of the Association.

Opening day, better known as the

“Opening Ceremonies,” commences with “Uniform Day.” Wardens don their agency uniform gathering for the annual officers’ march leading to (in most cases) a specific landmark where a group photo is taken. Once back to the host hotel, wardens are greeted by the President of NAWEOA followed by hosting agency brass and local dignitaries to stand for the posting of the US and Canadian colors. A strike of the gavel by the NAWEOA President declares the conference officially open. A roll call of jurisdictions is announced and those in attendance from a specific state, province or federal agency stand as one to be recognized. Retirees and Veterans are then called to their feet honoring those that paved the path for those currently active in this profession. In the event of the tragic loss of one of our own, a fallen

The following is a list of the past hosts of the annual NAWEOA Conference after the 1980 and 1981 organizational meetings.

- 1982: Regina, Saskatchewan
- 1983: Pocatello, Idaho
- 1984: Whistler, British Columbia
- 1985: Niagara Falls, Ontario
- 1986: Reno, Nevada
- 1987: Kerrville, Texas
- 1988: Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 1989: Herndon, Virginia
- 1990: Jackson Hole, Wyoming
- 1991: Red Deer, Alberta
- 1992: Ottawa, Ontario
- 1993: Rapid City, South Dakota
- 1994: Halifax, Nova Scotia
- 1995: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

- 1996: Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
- 1997: Colorado Springs, Colorado
- 1998: Huron, Ohio
- 1999: St. Louis, Missouri
- 2000: Albany, New York
- 2001: Omaha, Nebraska
- 2002: Columbus, Indiana
- 2003: St. John’s, New Foundland-Labrador
- 2004: Winnipeg, Manitoba
- 2005: Penticton, British Columbia
- 2006: Mt. St. Anne, Quebec
- 2007: St. Paul, Minnesota
- 2008: Great Falls, Montana
- 2009: Moncton, New Brunswick

- 2010: Cranberry Twp, Pennsylvania
- 2011: Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
- 2012: Tucson, Arizona
- 2013: Boise, Idaho
- 2014: Reno, Nevada
- 2015: Columbia, South Carolina
- 2016: Burlington, Vermont
- 2017: Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario
- 2018: Cheyenne, Wyoming
- 2019: Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
- 2020: Nashville, Tennessee (Postponed)
- 2021: Nashville, Tennessee (Postponed)
- 2022: Nashville, Tennessee

officer's tribute is performed honoring those that made the ultimate sacrifice during the past year. Spouses or Command Staff are presented with a flag folded in honor of those fallen. The annual "Officer of Year" honors follow to reinvigorate spirits of those in attendance. Recognizing the work of so many through the diligent efforts of one, it renders a sense of pride to be fortunate enough to work in the same profession. A Keynote Speaker wraps up the ceremony as the officers move to one of the favorite events, the Officers Luncheon. As part of the evolution of the conference to accommodate family, (the unsung heroes of the profession) are the spouses that endure the lifestyle of missed birthdays, daily suppers and all that make up the game warden normal. The spouses are treated to their own luncheon along with guest speakers and raffles to give back for their sacrifices.

At the Officers Luncheon, several awards are presented for those top performers in their respective category. NAWEOA honors not only the association's "Officer of the Year" but also presents the "Torch Award" to the newest up and coming warden in each of the seven Regions setting an example for the latest graduates. The "Life Saving Award" is presented to those whose actions provided life saving measures to those in distress or imminent danger. The "Valor Award" is presented to an officer whose actions placed the officer in serious threat of bodily injury or even death in order to uphold their oath to serve. The "Muddy Boots Award" is presented to the Jurisdictional Representative (JRep) for their work in communicating between the NAWEOA Region Director and their officer's association disseminating information and contributing to the bi-annual NAWEOA Newsletters. The "Loyal Partner Award" is presented to the Officer and their K-9 partner for outstanding contributions in Wildlife Law Enforcement. The "Outstanding Service Award" is presented to outgoing



Executive Board members or those that have provided many years of quality service to the profession.

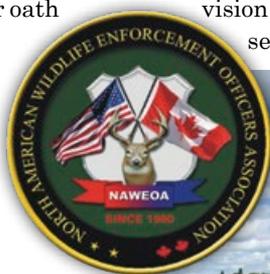
One of the most anticipated events at the Officers Luncheon is the Officer Exchange drawing. Each year, NAWEOA sponsors two officers with up to \$1,000.00 in travel reimbursement. One Officer from both the US and Canada are drawn to participate in the Officer Exchange program that began in 1983. The US Officer must choose a Province in Canada and the Canadian Officer must choose a State in the US to visit and ride along with officers from that jurisdiction (no, I haven't won it.... yet!). Along with the two officers selected to participate, there are two alternates drawn in the event the winners cannot participate. Although extremely rare, the 2017 US alternate, Mike Reeder from Pennsylvania was able to experience the once in a lifetime opportunity as he visited New Brunswick, Canada. Each winning officer that embarks on the adventure agrees to present the membership with a powerpoint presentation of their experience at the next year's conference.

In 2001, at the Omaha, Nebraska conference, Mark Webb of the Federal Wildlife Officers Association (FWOA) established the popular 5K Torch Run. Proceeds from the event are donated annually to the North American Game Warden Museum (NAGWM) located in the International Peace Gardens on the North Dakota/Manitoba border. Webb's vision for raising funds for the Museum's operations and growth,

was passed on to the NAGWM Board members in 2013 and has yielded over \$10,000 in sponsorship over the past two decades. Each year NAWEOA attendees register for the event where each registration donation affords participants a t-shirt and meal for attending the event. There are competitive classes for runners and walkers alike. You can compete or you can take a leisurely stroll around the 5K course. In the end, fun is had by all and awards are presented for those that crossed the finish line first through third in several classes.

Throughout the week, the host provides attendees with excellent structured training opportunities. Being the main reason agencies provide officers with on the clock options to attend, officers can take advantage of accredited trainings with certificates of completion available. Some of the most notable trainings include wildlife forensics, digital forensics, interview and interrogation techniques and law enforcement case studies. Sheriff Michael Neal, (Former Arkansas Game Warden that stopped the Sovereign Citizen father and son rampage in the West Memphis, Arkansas Walmart parking lot), has presented his use of force application to the NAWEOA membership. Most trainings are offered more than once during the week so attendees can take advantage of all trainings offered when there is a scheduling overlap. Along with several trainings, vendors set up booths for the week promoting some of the equipment utilized in the trainings or simply the latest and greatest in law enforcement or outdoor gear.

Although many meals are provided at various engagements during the conference, attendees are still on their own from time to time. Local food hot spots are quickly identified where old friendships are rekindled and new ones are formed over a greasy burger and an order of fries. Speaking of forming life-long friendships, my favorite NAWEOA event is "Hospitality Night". The nightly gathering of wardens and their spouses where games of chance (where permitted) and snacks along with a beverage or two are the big draw. The one-time purchase of the conference challenge coin gains you admission into the nightly event. Building relationships





by exchanging business cards, emails and phone numbers solidifies the original intent of the founding fathers. I have employed these contacts dozens of times to conduct investigations that stretch over state lines and country borders. This is where the trading of agency patches and challenge coins commence thus personal collections flourish. Some of the go to guys in the trading game are recognizable by the famous Hawaiian style shirt or just by the crowd around the table where cherished collections of game warden memorabilia are on display. Most of the time, hotel personnel need to remind attendees that the doors are closing but that just bolsters the good time had by all when losing track of time.

The NAWEOA Executive Board presents two business meetings during the week. The first is a review of association business and the annual budget seeking a motion and a second to accept it. Jurisdictions have the opportunity to present bids to host a future NAWEOA conference whereas most bids are usually about three years in advance. Some of the Executive Board actions require a vote of the majority of the membership in attendance and those who are passionate about the association are usually seated



Any regular member in good standing can nominate their peers who are also a regular member in good standing for open Executive Board positions. Nominees for one of the seven (three Canadian and four US) Region Director positions, must hail from the Region they are nominated for. The President and Vice-President positions are eligible to those who have served at least one term as a Region Director. Those successful in their bid hold a two-year term for all elected



well in advance. The call for nominees for elections and their nomination speeches are also conducted during this time. Elections for Executive Board positions are held in opposite years for US and Canadian officers.



positions. There are four other positions, Past President, Secretary/Treasurer, Newsletter Editor/Webmaster and Conference Liaison which are appointed positions with various term limits.

The Jurisdictional Representative (JRep) breakfast is held later in the week exclusively for those that hold the position. This is NAWEOA's way to give back something to those that hold the link between NAWEOA and the Jurisdictions that make up the membership. Without them, NAWEOA simply would not exist. There is also a Retirees Luncheon and the Female Officers Luncheon where those in each category get some one-on-one time with members that share the same distinction.

As the conference is reaching its third day, what do you do with a bunch of



competitive Type-A personalities? You hold the "Warden Skills Event." Earlier in the week, a signup sheet is placed at registration where four to five wardens come up with a creative name for their team. Each event usually contains five stations where wardens are tasked with game warden related duties and the occasional nonwork-related task such as catching water balloons in a laundry basket that were launched from 50 yards away. The event will definitely test your knowledge of wildlife and dexterity with associated tools of the trade. In the end only, one team is named the Champion and unique awards are presented for their efforts. So in case you're interested in competing at the next conference, my advice is to go ride your toddler's tricycle as much as you can! The final day begins with the struc-

tured trainings that each day prior had provided beginning after the Officers Luncheon. The second NAWEOA business meeting to complete any final actions also takes place. The final election votes are tabulated from the 2.5 days of voting by the membership present at the conference. Following the meeting is the "Closing Ceremonies" where representatives from the current host pass the NAWEOA flag and lit candle to the next year's host. The retirement of the National and Canadian colors from their weeklong post is followed by a strike of the gavel from the NAWEOA President declaring the conference officially closed.

The final evening plays host to the Grand Banquet. Bring your wallet and appetite. Social hour starts off the evening's festivities followed by a delicious meal. Bucket raffles, silent and live auctions commence where donated items are up for bid. Some incredible deals are afforded to the attendees that would cost exponentially more under normal cir-

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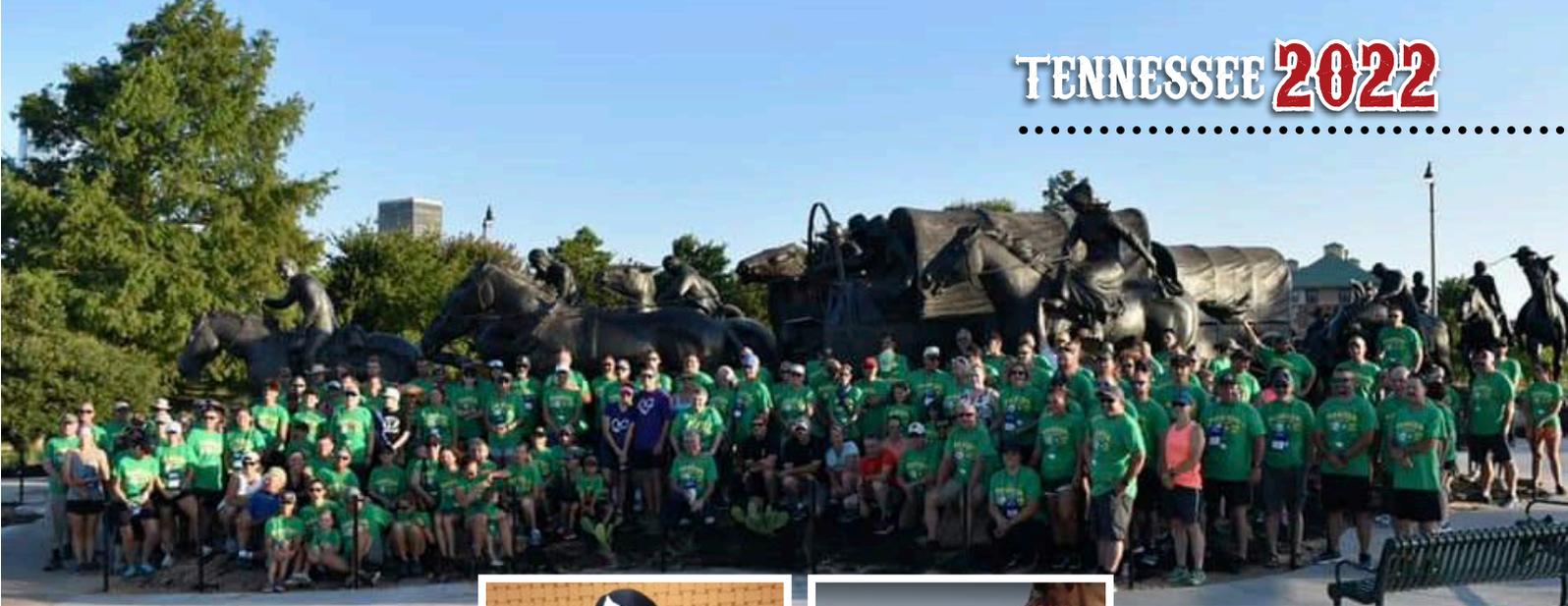
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cumstances. Donating parties are incredibly generous in support of the association. A presentation follows dinner for those earning the “Outstanding Service Award” or “Certificate of Appreciation” from NAWEOA and the much-anticipated naming of the newly elected Executive Board members. The entertainment of a live band or DJ is on hand for plenty of socialization and dancing where all have a great time until the lights come on and the “you don’t have to go home ... but you can’t stay here” announcement is heard. Many attendees are scheduled to catch early flights home the next morning thus calling it a night, but those that extend the comradery to the next day often continue on into the game warden hours of the night.

Mentioning how this is a family event. Many wardens bring their family and NAWEOA has accommodated this graciously as a nightly youth room has been established for every evening during hospitality hours. Games, exhibits and crafts entertain the youth attendees. The 5K has its own class for the youth competitors as well. During the Grand Banquet the youth room is known as “Pizza and Movie Night”, so the younger attendees have something of their own to look forward to.

I hope I have sparked your interest! To stay at a four to five-star hotel at a greatly reduced group rate is a benefit in itself. When considering to attend an upcoming conference, attendees can be as involved as they’d like to be. This is a game warden only conference with the



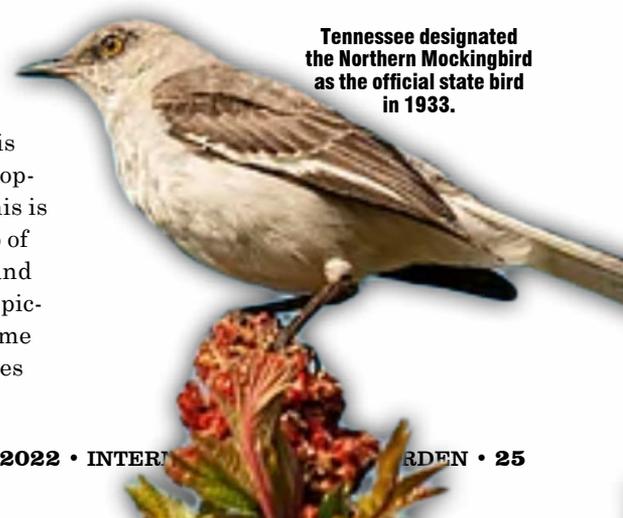
opportunity to spend time with those who share in your lifestyle and chosen profession. You may opt to skip a training and take one of the many side trip excursions offered to spend time with your family as many officers attending utilize their annual leave and make it a family vacation. We have seen many youngsters grow into young adults over the past four decades.

The final words I will leave you with regarding the NAWEOA conference are simply this: “If you attend once, you will want to attend again and again.” It’s not your traditional work-related conference. Attendees don’t just sit in a room getting lectured for hours on end. Host jurisdiction staff can barely fit everything into four days and most attendees aren’t ready to leave at the end of the final day. NAWEOA is different and continues to broaden opportunities for the membership. This is your exclusive association made up of and for Game Wardens. Members and your family may even get to have a picture taken with one of the many game warden television show personalities that attend the conference.

Check with your local officer’s association for possible sponsorship to attend the next conference. In Pennsylvania, Conservation Officers of Pennsylvania Association (COPA) offers its members (officers only, who are in good standing) the opportunity for sponsorship each year in the form of a drawing to win reim-

bursement for travel expenses (actual funding amount is determined annually by the COPA Board of Directors). Good luck and come join in the fun. I hope to see you at the next NAWEOA conference scheduled in Nashville, Tennessee in July 2022. ☺

☞ *By: State Game Warden
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NAWEOA Region 7 Director
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Tennessee designated the Northern Mockingbird as the official state bird in 1933.