

THIS ISSUE OF IGW, WE ARE MIXING THINGS UP A LITTLE BIT. TYPICALLY THIS COLUMN HIGHLIGHTS A PUBLISHED WORK BY A FELLOW GAME WARDEN. HOWEVER, AT THE RECENT NAWEOA CONFERENCE IN ERIE, PA, ONE OF OUR ORGANIZATION'S FOUNDING FATHERS GAVE A SPEECH AT THE CLOSING BANQUET. I WANTED TO PAY HOMAGE TO OUR ROOTS AND OFFER MR. TOM BIVINS THE FLOOR.

NAWEOA: *The Dream Came True*

In the winter of 1976, the annual meeting of The Association of Midwest Fish and Game Law Enforcement Officers was held in Edmonton, Alberta. AMFGLEO comprises 23 member jurisdictions from the US and Canada. The Association was started in 1944 as a professional non-profit organization dedicated to furthering professionalism in the field of fish and game wildlife law enforcement and is run by the enforcement chiefs/administrators of the member jurisdictions.

John D Fallows, who at the time of the meeting was a veteran Alberta Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Officer, was asked by his agency to help plan and assist with hosting the meeting. John was enthusiastic about his assignment until the opening social event when a chief from one of the attending jurisdictions asked John if he would go get him a drink.

At that point It became painfully aware to John that his involvement amounted to not much more than the role of an errand boy. John did not forget his experience and soon he began to imagine if it would be possible to form a similar professional organization of field Game Wardens? In the coming years John did a lot of networking with his fellow officers and officers from neighboring jurisdictions bantering around the feasibility of forming a field officers professional society.

And so it was, John organized a meeting to be held in Great Falls



Tom Bivins

Montana in July of 1980 to further explore the feasibility of his dream. The meeting was attended by 15 officers from Alberta, Montana, British Columbia, Idaho, Saskatchewan and Wyoming. The meeting lasted for 2 days and featured a high level of enthusiasm, participation, and an abundance of ideas. Never once did anyone say this is not possible or we just can't pull off such a lofty

undertaking. The evening session featured dinner, story telling, beer drinking and further reflection on the idea of forming a field officers professional association. A common theme that emerged was that it didn't matter much what jurisdiction an officer served in all faced similar job related challenges and dangers.

The second day was mostly discussing all of the ideas and possibilities and when to hold the next meeting to identify and begin to implement the details and steps for such an undertaking. Some wanted to extend the meeting and immediately begin the necessary work, however, the decision was made to hold the next meeting in the winter of 1981 in Lethbridge, Alberta.

Was this amazing get-together of field game wardens the end of a seemingly impossible dream or could this actually become a reality?

An amazing thing happened when the attendees gathered for the winter work session featuring delegates from the six original jurisdictions and five additional

states and provinces who attended and participated. The officers present tirelessly began the task of organizing and prioritizing the necessary steps:

1. Create a charter- registered as a non-profit corporation in Montana in 1982
2. Write appropriate bylaws
3. Organizational structure, officers, regional representatives and membership definition and eligibility
4. Establish Annual Convention locations on a rotational basis between the US and Canada when possible
5. Fully discuss and settle on the official name and logo THE NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ASSOCIATION
6. Establish committees to work on and refine these first needs
7. Funding had emerged as a real priority, the officers could not reasonably continue to fund the progress out of their own pockets

Many great ideas were discussed, such as an annual officer exchange program, an international game warden museum, helping jurisdictions start wildlife crime stoppers programs, establish or expand covert and undercover investigations, producing a wildlife forensics manual, creating an officer memorial for those fallen from the ranks and starting some form of regular communication such as a newsletter and eventually a magazine.

These were the main issues that emerged but certainly not all of the great ideas discussed. Clearly the thought process of the officers assembled was very progressive for the time and reflected frustration with their respective agencies for not aggressively addressing the future needs of the

profession. Reflecting back 45 years ago how could this even have been possible without today's miracle communication devices such as PC's, email, the internet, cell phones, and cheap international phone rates and the list goes on. The first winter meeting again featured bonding in the form of epic story telling, poetry, cigar smok-ing, tobacco chewing, song and the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Those Canadians really know how to party!

The first summer Convention of the newly named North American Wildlife En-forcement Officers Association was scheduled for Jackson, Wyoming. There was so much work to accomplish that the Convention more closely resembled

A winter work session. The next winter work session was schedled for Great Falls, Montana where the fledgling NAWEOA really started to put the pieces in place to solidify the beginnings of what was to become an unbelievable success story. The second annual convention was held in Regina, Saskatchewan in the summer of 1982 and amazingly the list of representatives in attendance now ranged from Cali-fornia to Ontario and the Yukon to Texas, it truly was beginning to look like an inter-national association. Winter work continued with the rotation back to Lethbridge, Alberta.

The summer of 1983 saw the NAWEOA convention back to the US and it was held in Pocatello, Idaho. It was well attended with over 300 of-ficers and many brought their families. The founders were pleased to be sure, but were beginning to wonder how big can this get and still be able to man-age the number of attendees? The first formal elections were held and the 1984 Convention site was selected to be at one of North America's premier ski destinations, Whistler, British Columbia.

The Whistler Convention was a great location for families, with over 300 officer del-egates in attendance and the list of officer jurisdictions in attendance continued to grow. The convention featured the first North



American Warden Games now called Warden Skills Competitions.

The new dilemma continued to emerge regarding how big did we want NAWEOA to become? The Board decid-ed to roll the dice and try for a location somewhere near the east coast of North America in an ongoing effort to truly develop a North American organization. It was good fortune that an Ontario Of-ficer and Regional Representative, Bob Easton, was in attendance.

Bob graciously agreed to organize and host the meeting in Niagara Falls, Ontario. With that monumental deci-sion the Whistler Convention wrapped up business and NAWEOA headed 2800 miles to the east. Niagara Falls proved to be another highly success-ful con-vention with well over 300 officers and many new jurisdictions in attendance. Similar to former conventions, the opportunities for not only officers but their fami-lies to meet and develop new lifelong friendships and enjoy travel/ family vacations across North America continued. To date, NAWEOA Conven-tions have crisscrossed the continent from British Columbia to New Found-land, Manitoba to Texas and California to Virginia.

In the interest of not boring you I would like to summarize my belief of the

incredi-bly positive outcome NAWEOA has provided not only for Game War-dens through-out North America and beyond and their families as well.

NAWEOA has welcomed and facili-tated officer participation and associa-tion within their profession that was not previously possible. The Association has increased professionalism, markedly improved public awareness of the Game Wardens role in preserving wild places and wild things, created a better work-ing environment not only for the officer but their agency, and most importantly has expanded officer awareness, pride, and the belief that all their efforts truly make a difference.

In conclusion I would like to point out that all of the founders' lofty goals I outlined at the beginning of the ar-ticle have not only been accomplished, but with far greater expectations than originally envisioned. My best guess is that game wardens have contrib-uted millions of volunteer hours over NAWEOA's 45 years to create the incredible organization that exists today. Nine thousand members and growing, you can't imagine how lucky and proud I feel to have been one of the original founders of NAWEOA and a member of the best law enforcement fraternity found anywhere.👊

👉 Author Tom Bivins:

Montana State Game Warden Retired served 31 years (1967-1998), Past President Montana Game Warden Association. Original Founding Member, Past President, and Honorary Lifetime Member NAWEOA

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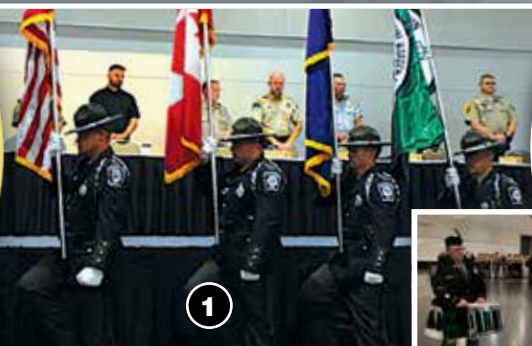
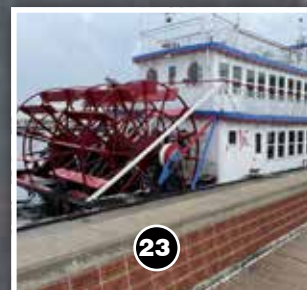
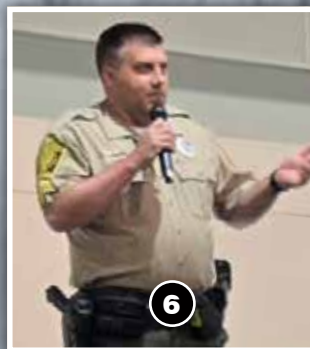


PHOTO KEY

- 1, 2: Opening Ceremony
- 3: NAWEOA President and Conference Chair Larry Hergenroeder
- 4: Keynote Speaker Colonel Grey Berrier II
- 5: Alone Game Warden Contestant Isaiah Tuck
- 6: COPA Emcee Sgt. Matt Kramer
- 7: Warden Skills
- 8: Female Officer Group Photo
- 9: Attendee Map Pins
- 10: Torch Run at Presque Isle State Park
- 11: Monday Activity - Lake Erie Walleye Charter
- 12: Warden Skills
- 13: Torch Run Winners
- 14: NAWEOA JReps
- 15: Black Bear Conflict Management
- 16, 17: Vendors
- 18: NAWEOA Officer of the Year Kirk Kiefer - Presented by Chris Maier
- 19, 20: Bayfront Conference Center
- 21: Presque Isle State Park Beaches
- 22: Monday Activity - Niagara Falls Tour
- 23: Victorian Princess Evening Dinner Cruise
- 24: NAWEOA 2025 Officer Group Photo



n a GREAT LAKE!



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