



NORTH AMERICAN WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS ASSOCIATION

THE VOICE OF RESOURCE LAW ENFORCEMENT



2026 Officer of the Year

KEVIN E. WEBB

Senior Conservation Officer
Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources
Conservation Police

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NAWEOA Conference 2027

Join us for the 2027 NAWEOA Conference in
Sharonville, Ohio!

The conference will run from July 26-31st, 2027
(Opening ceremonies on July 27th and the closing
banquet will be the night of July 30th.)

NAWEOA Executive Board Members

President Chris Maier	Saskatchewan, Canada	president@naweo.org
Vice President Jesse Gehrt	Kansas, US	vpresident@naweo.org
Past President Larry Hergenroeder	Pennsylvania, US	ppresident@naweo.org
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Director Region 7 Kris MacCabe	Maine, US	region7@naweo.org
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Conference Liaison James Zucchelli	British Columbia	conference@naweo.org

The President's Report

By Chris Maier



It is an honour to introduce myself as the 23rd President of NAWEOA. Over the past 22 years working as a Conservation Officer in Saskatchewan, I've had the privilege of working alongside dedicated officers across our province, and across

North America. Saskatchewan has had deep roots in NAWEOA, and I follow the footsteps of 3 other Saskatchewan officers as President behind (John Edwards, Kerry Wrishko & Kevin Schoepp). Stepping into this role is both humbling and energizing, and I want to thank you for trusting me to represent and support this incredible association.

During the past few conference, I've noticed a low number of Canadian attendee's. I hope to enhance Canada's involvement within NAWEOA, ensuring our officers continue to play an active and influential role in the association's future. Regardless of what side of the border you are on, we all share the same challenges, values, and commitments to protecting the natural resources.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to Larry Hergenroeder for his time as President. Larry's leadership has been steady, thoughtful, and deeply appreciated. As the previous Vice President I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Larry, and spending countless hours on the phone discussing different NAWEOA concerns, but also talking about our personal lives as well. Being involved in NAWEOA isn't just a position, you quickly make lifelong friends with others on the executive. I'm grateful that he will continue to be a vital part of NAWEOA for the next two years.

I also want to thank Kurt Henry for his tenure on the executive, It seems like just yesterday Kurt approached us Saskatchewan officers (In Oklahoma) and asked us to wear a shirt that said "Vote for Kurt", which we quickly changed to "Vote for Kevin" (Harrison). Kevin wasn't running for a position that year, but ended up being elected into Region 1

director this past July. The winter meeting won't be the same without hearing Kurt's latest tale of entry into the united states.

A special thank-you goes to Jason Sherwood for his work as Conference Liaison. Jason's efforts behind the scenes have been instrumental in keeping our conferences running smoothly. I'm also grateful to James Zuchelli for stepping up and putting his name forward as the new Conference Liaison. NAWEOA is stronger because of people willing to take on these roles.

To all our Region Directors—both outgoing and incoming—thank you for your dedication. Your work is critical to keeping NAWEOA connected and responsive. I want to welcome Kevin Harrison and Alex Haesenauer, w as new Region Directors. I look forward to working with you both.

Congratulations to our new Vice President, Jesse Gehrt. I've known Jesse for a few years now, and I consider him a good friend. That friendship, combined with his professionalism and commitment, gives me confidence that we will work extremely well together as we look after NAWEOA's interests.

I also want to give a big, heartfelt thanks to Mike Reeder and Steve Beltran. The work these two do is truly what keeps NAWEOA running. Behind the scenes, there is always a tremendous amount of effort going into the website, newsletters, banking, transfers, investments, and countless other tasks that most people never see. Their dedication is the backbone of this association.

Looking ahead, I'm excited for next year's conference in Ohio. I know that Chris Gilkey, Brian Bury, Kirk Kiefer and the rest of the Ohio crew out there is going to put on a great conference.

If you, your association, or your agency are interested in hosting a future conference, please reach out to me or any member of the executive. Hosting is a rewarding experience, and it plays a major role in keeping NAWEOA strong and connected.

Also, I couldn't write this article without giving a huge thanks to Alex Hasenauer and the NCOA with hosting the conference this past July. The work put into it by the officers and their spouses was tremendous, and they were able to highlight the beautiful

The President's Report

By Chris Maier

state of Nebraska, while also showcasing their association and agency. Thank you all for the hard work!

As we move into fall—the best time of year to be a game warden—I want to remind everyone to make time for your loved ones and to stay safe. This season brings long days, heavy workloads, and plenty of challenges, but it also brings the moments that remind us why we chose this profession.

Thank you again for your trust, your support, and your dedication to NAWEOA. I look forward to serving you and working together to strengthen our association for years to come.

Chris Maier

The Vice President's Report

By Jesse Gehrt



Greetings from Kansas, in NAWEOA's Region 5, to all of my friends and fellow officers across North America. I hope this finds you all safe and in good health, and ready for the Fall hunting seasons. I would like to send out a big THANK YOU to all the Region 5 J-reps for the work that they have done throughout this past year, making sure

updated information flows throughout the NAWEOA membership.

Summer is still here, and that means lingering heat and humidity in the Midwest, with the hope of Fall getting here not soon enough. Here in Kansas as deer seasons get closer, the flood of calls from non-residents roll in, about where to hunt and can we help them out on a great buck. KDWP has made it through our second year of a Records Management system (SMARTCOP) with computers in patrol trucks using digital ticketing, as well as some mounted on our patrol boats. Officers have welcomed the change, especially the expedited process for issuing citations to violators on our waterways. We just wrapped up our first full year with the Taser 10. Kansas, like many states, has been plagued with multiple officer vacancies this year, but we are now only a few spots from being fully staffed! In my new role as CPT, I am fortunate to be involved in the hiring process, so I see the

new recruits firsthand. Their eagerness to go catch bad buys is great to see.

The 2026 NAWEOA annual conference in Omaha, NE just wrapped up in July. Once again, what a great conference. A big THANK YOU goes out to conference chair Alex Hasenauer, and the whole Nebraska officer team, on pulling together another great summer conference! I strongly encourage officers that have never attended a conference, please consider coming to one. Your NAWEOA Board is diligently seeking out new ways to improve and to attract new attendees, as well as new states and provinces to host a future conference. The networking each of you will gain is invaluable for you, and it will benefit your agency/organization. Attendees gain valuable training, as well as potential new technology and ideas to bring back to your job. In late July 2027 we are headed to Ohio to see what their delegation has in store for us. Knowing them, it will be different, fun, and exciting. I hope to see you all there!

As usual, we have several changes in the board this year, saying goodbye to some and welcoming in some new faces. At this year's conference, the President, Vice President, and Canadian delegation (Regional Directors) were up for election. Jason Sherwood, the most recent NAWEOA Conference Liaison, had reached the end of his contract term, and was looking for an opportunity to pass the torch to another. Jason, thank you for all that you have done for NAWEOA to date, you have been a great asset! With the hiring process now complete, I would like to welcome James Zucchelli to his new role. With his recent conference hosting in 2024 in BC, he brings a great base of knowledge and experience to this new role. Plus, Ja-

The Vice President's Report

By Jesse Gehrt

son has agreed to stick around and mentor him for a bit as well. James, GOOD LUCK! We all expect big things from you. With that selection, the Region 1 director spot came open. I would like to personally welcome Kevin Harrison, from Saskatchewan, as the new Region 1 Director. Kevin is no stranger to NAWEOA, attending several conferences over the years, and always brings that Canadian comedic relief wherever he goes. Re-elected to their respective regions were Jason Pink, the Region 2 Director, and Shane Hellyer, from Region 3. Welcome back, fellas, good luck to everyone, and I wish you continued success in your roles. This year marked the end of the 2-year terms for VP, PRES, and Past PRES as well. Thank you, Kurt Henry, for your time spent as recent Past President and on the NAWEOA Executive board. You can take a break and enjoy retirement now. Larry Hergenroeder moves into the Past President role, one that he will do great in as he mentors newer directors and will keep the rest of the board in check. I personally thank you for your time as President. Your leadership is inspiring. Con-

gratulations to Chris Maier, as you move into your new role as the "Big Boss," President of NAWEOA. I am humbled as I was elected as your new Vice President. I look forward to working for ALL of NAWEOA in this new role. NAWEOA is in great hands, with a bright future ahead!

As summer boating season winds down, this brings in one of the busiest times of the year for many officers; Hunting seasons. Even with a few months still left in 2026, now is a great time to be thinking about recognizing your peers for their accomplishments, by nominating them for our NAWEOA Officer awards. Please consider submitting your fellow officers for their efforts thus far. Your NAWEOA board looks forward to recognizing deserving officers at the annual conference next year. Everyone, be safe, and I hope to see you all in Cincinnati, OH in 2027! It's gonna be great!

The Past President's Report

By Larry Hergenroeder



Parks Commission for supporting their officers in this endeavor and many accolades to the Nebraska Conservation Officer's Association (NCOA) for hosting this year's conference. Conference Chairman Alex Hasenauer and his team of NCOA members provided the NAWEOA membership with countless opportunities to engage in specialized trainings as well as the platform to build lifelong memories with all in attend-

ance.

As I continue my journey serving on the NAWEOA Executive Board as your Past President, I cannot think of a better send off from the President's role than the fantastic week of training, networking and camaraderie experienced at the 43rd Annual NAWEOA Conference held in Omaha, Nebraska. My sincere appreciation to the command staff of the Nebraska Game &

Reminiscing about the past two years as your 22nd NAWEOA President, I'm confident the NAWEOA Executive Board put forth our best effort keeping this forty-six year Association of professional Wildlife Enforcement Officers moving in a positive direction. This year's Executive Board elections resulted in the following: Congratulations to Chris Maier from Saskatchewan, elected as the 23rd NAWEOA President. Congratulations to Jesse Gehrt from Kansas, elected as the Vice President. Due to a recent change in the association policy, Jesse was the first to be appointed to a third term as Region Director. Jesse is vacating the Region 5 Director position mid-term due to the election rotation guidelines in order to serve as your Vice-President. Canadian Regions 1, 2 & 3 Director positions were up for election in 2026 with Region 1 being awarded to Kevin Harrison from Saskatchewan, Region 2 incumbent Jason Pink from Ontario was re-elected to his second term. Region 3 incumbent Shane Hellyer was re-elected to his second term. Alex Hasenauer from Nebraska accepted appointed as the Region 5 Director to complete the third term vacated by Jesse Gehrt. US Regions 4, 5, 6 & 7 will be up for

The Past President's Report

By Larry Hergenroeder

election at the 2027 summer conference. The Association is in very capable hands as we move forward in joining the Ohio Wildlife Officers Lodge #143 as the host of the 2027 NAWEOA conference in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Congratulations to the 2026 NAWEOA Wildlife Officer of the Year, Senior Conservation Police Officer Kevin Webb from the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources – Conservation Police. Officer Webb was awarded this prestigious honor being selected from twenty-two outstanding and detailed nominations. This type of recognition only solidifies the importance of the training and networking provided each year at the NAWEOA conference leading to the outstanding work being performed on a daily basis by game wardens across North America.

Join me in extending our appreciation to Past President Kurt Henry as he completes his final term on the NAWEOA Executive Board. It seems fitting that Kurt would fulfill his commitment on the Executive Board in the same location that he began attending NAWEOA conferences some twenty-five years ago. Our continued appreciation to exiting Region 1 Director James Zucchelli after fulfilling his two year term commitment being elected to the Executive Board in 2024 in Penticton, B.C. Canada.

Special recognition is in order for Jason Sherwood as

he vacates the Conference Liaison position after serving the maximum term length permitted. Jason's unwavering commitment to NAWEOA began in 2017 being elected as the Region 4 Director in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, then immediately serving as the 2018 NAWEOA Conference Chairman in his home state of Wyoming. In 2020, Jason signed on as the Conference Liaison taking the lead in the marketing and modernization of the NAWEOA brand and current Association logo. Over the next 6 years, his vision incorporated sound changes to the operational aspects of the annual conference. The introduction of Conference Direct's DayDay Howe for conference host location consulting and the popular conference mobile app are just a couple examples of the initiatives implemented by Jason while serving as the NAWEOA Conference Liaison. NAWEOA welcomes Jason's successor, former Region 1 Director James Zucchelli as he graciously accepted appointment from the NAWEOA Executive Board to serve as the next Conference Liaison. James is already soliciting Officer Associations to be a future conference host.

As we prepare for the busy upcoming 2026 hunting seasons, the 2027 NAWEOA conference venue is set with planning well underway for a memorable event at the Delta Hotels Marriott in Sharonville, Ohio. Please mark your calendar and reserve your room as soon as possible committing to your attendance at another great conference filled with accredited trainings

The Secretary/ Treasurer Report

By Steve Beltran

Another NAWEOA conference is behind us, and I would like to thank everyone who attended in Omaha and everyone who continues to support the Association throughout the year.

As Secretary/Treasurer, much of my work happens behind the scenes. In addition to maintaining the Association's financial records, the position includes maintaining our 501(c)(6) business operations, preparing information for taxes and the IRS, maintaining official documents, handling reimbursements and account reconciliation, updating membership rosters, processing payments, maintaining backups, and handling NAWEOA correspondence.

Membership

NAWEOA continues to represent a very large membership across the United States and Canada. Our membership records currently show 10,279 members, including 9,125 Regular members, 141 Life-Regular members, 90 Associate members, and 30 Deputy members, along with our other membership categories.

Keeping records accurate for an organization of this size requires cooperation from everyone. Regional Directors and Jurisdictional Representatives remain our primary link for roster updates. When officers retire, transfer, change agencies, or when association leadership changes, please make sure those changes

The Secretary/ Treasurer Report

By Steve Beltran

are forwarded.

Dues renewal notices continue to be sent to all membership categories, with additional reminders sent throughout the year.

More government agencies are also moving toward electronic payment systems. This has resulted in additional work completing direct-deposit forms, W-9s, custom invoices, and other documentation required by individual agencies. Texas and Florida, for example, require specific information before payments can be processed.

Financial Update

The Association remains in a solid financial position. Our June 30, 2026 balance sheet reports total assets of approximately \$174,690. Approximately \$88,846 was held in current assets, with the Association also maintaining approximately \$27,115 in equipment and other fixed assets.

Those fixed assets include items that have been accumulated over many years and continue to support NAWEOA conferences and operations, including our conference and opening-ceremony flags, the patch, badge and buckle display, computer and projection equipment, and the Warden Skills Trophy.

The balance sheet also continues to track conference-related funds and loans separately. At the end of the fiscal year, approximately \$63,120 was reflected in conference-related accounts before other adjustments, representing funds associated with current and previous NAWEOA conferences.

At our summer Executive Meeting, I also reported the balances of the individual U.S. and Canadian accounts. As of July 13, those accounts and investments totaled approximately \$277,515 USD and \$19,335 CAD.

These figures are presented differently from the year-end balance sheet because the balance sheet includes

assets, receivables, conference accounts, equipment, retained earnings and other accounting entries. I will continue to make the detailed financial records available to the Executive Board and membership.

Fallen Officer Fund

The Fallen Officer Fund continues to be administered by NAWEOA but remains separate from NAWEOA's general operating funds. Fallen Officer Fund payments do not come from our general fund, although NAWEOA does cover certain administrative costs associated with operating the program.

Shawn Farrell continues to coordinate Fallen Officer Fund requests and payments, with balances forwarded to the accountant at the end of the fiscal year.

Looking Ahead

One of my priorities continues to be making our operations more efficient. Most of our financial activity is now handled electronically, which improves record-keeping while reducing postage, printing, banking travel and other expenses.

There are also some financial decisions for the Association to consider moving forward, including whether we should reinvest funds into CDs, consider additional Canadian investments, or pursue additional fundraising opportunities.

As always, if you have questions about membership, dues, a reimbursement, a specific expenditure, or where Association funds are being held, please ask. I believe strongly that the financial operations of NAWEOA should remain transparent to its membership. Thank you again for trusting me to serve as your Secretary/Treasurer. It is a responsibility I take seriously, and I appreciate everyone who helps keep our records accurate and our Association moving forward.

Steve Beltran
Secretary/Treasurer
NAWEOA

Region 1 Director Kevin Harrison



Growing up in Saskatchewan hunting, fishing, enjoying the outdoors and having two uncles that were game wardens, I knew at some point in my life I too wanted to be one. Shortly after high school I had filled out the application to enroll in the Resource and Environmental Law (REL)

Program. For whatever reason, probably making a full-time wage at the time, I never did send in the application. Then as the stars aligned, the company I was working for was bought out. They wanted to keep on but I wasn't interested and told them instead of a severance package, if they laid me off, I could get school paid for. At that point, the application sent in and the rest is history.

Before the commencement of REL in 2011 I was given the opportunity to work in the dispatch center where all the conservation officers would call to log in and out, ask for history checks, license plate information and so on. I gained valuable experience for the two summers I was employed there. Following the completion of school, I was successful in being a seasonal conservation officer in the Saskatchewan Provincial Park system. I worked a total of three summers in both Moose Mountain and Loon Lake Provincial Parks. During my last summer I was successful in the full-time competition that would send me to the Western Canadian Law Enforcement Academy in Hinton, Alberta. After the 17-week academy, I was posted in Dorintosh, Sask. It was a great location that I knew quite well having hunted and fished it a lot over the years.

In 2015, an opportunity arose that I couldn't pass up. I always enjoyed the training part of the job and knew at some point I wanted to be an instructor. I then transferred to Prince Albert, SK to join the Safety, Education, Recruitment and Training unit. For several years I would be the education coordinator and media

spokesperson (a step in the door of the training unit). Also, when I arrived in the unit, I was asked to assist with the seasonal hiring process, which I basically took over that first year and did for another seven years. Although, with the unit being told that I would not be an instructor and strictly education and media when they hired me, I was soon asked if I would like to become a firearms instructor. That was an easy decision, and I was soon qualified to instruct pistol, carbine and shotgun. In the last couple years, I have received my certificate to certify people to become a firearms instructor.

Eventually the education and media roles were dispersed amongst the field areas and my title changed to a provincial training officer. Along with being a firearms instructor, I currently teach ice rescue, emergency vehicle operations, active threat deployment, tire deflation devices and formerly a human wildlife conflict instructor and very first lead of the provinces Wildlife Human Attack Response Team. I also became a member of the branches Honour Guard team.

Over the course of my career, I've become very involved with our own Saskatchewan Association of Conservation Officers. I began as the seasonal rep my second year of seasonal work. Shortly after becoming full time, I became the Meadow Lake area rep and again soon after transferring to Prince Albert, I was the rep for that area. I have hosted our officer associations annual golf tournament for the last seven years and have expanded it from 12-14 teams to 25 teams this year. I recently stepped down as the area rep when I was asked and agreed to run for the NAWEOA Region 1 Director position. It's a honor to be on this board with the rest of the fine folks that wear the uniform and are asked look after our natural resources and public safety.

As for my first experience with NAWEOA, it was bittersweet but great. As a seasonal officer I didn't know much about NAWEOA. But in May of 2013, a close friend of mine Justin Knackstedt, who was also a seasonal officer, was struck and killed by a drunk driver while assisting RCMP with traffic control at a scene of an accident. Being close to Justin I was asked to be a liaison between the family and ministry. It was a very tough time for our agency and especially the Knackstedt family. NAWEOA was being

Region 1 Director Kevin Harrison

held two months later, and I was asked to attend on behalf of the ministry. The Knackstedt family also attended, and it was great to see how much they were taken care of and the number of officers and their families that approached them to express their condolences and appreciation. It's something I'll never forget. That conference showed me how wonderful NAWEOA is and what it stands for. I met many great people at that conference that I still talk to today. It meant a lot to me, and I still talk about that first con-

ference for the reasons I mentioned. I recently returned home from my eighth conference and love seeing the old friends from past conferences but also making new ones each year I attend.

My hope is to try and have more Canadian attendees at the NAWEOA conferences. If we don't have any Canadians attend, then we don't have a North American Officer Association....simple as that.

Thanks,

Cpl. Kevin Harrison
Government of Saskatchewan

Region 2 Director Jason Pink



Greetings membership! The Nebraska conference may be behind us, but its success is still worth celebrating. I would like to acknowledge the tremendous effort put forth by the members of the Nebraska Conservation Officers Association

(NCOA) and their agency in hosting this exceptional event. Alex Hasenauer and his committee delivered a first-class conference experience and kept attendees engaged throughout the week!

The host team organized a variety of exciting side tours in Omaha and the surrounding area, offering something for everyone. Highlights included visits to the Henry Doorly Zoo, the Hornady Manufacturing facility, and the Strategic Air Command Museum, among many other attractions.

The conference also featured strong participation in our traditional events. Twenty teams competed in the Warden Skills competition, and the 5K Torch Run enjoyed an excellent turnout. Attendees also had access to a wide range of certifiable training opportunities, allowing officers to earn valuable professional development hours throughout the week.

This year, we had the opportunity to hear from Josh Thibodeau of New Brunswick, who shared highlights

of his exchange trip to Wyoming. A sincere thank you to the Wyoming Game and Fish Department for hosting Josh and providing what he described as the experience of a lifetime. We also travelled virtually to Georgia as Ben Beetlestone of British Columbia, our 2024 Canadian Exchange Program winner, presented an overview of his memorable exchange experience. Our 2025 U.S. Exchange Program winner, Jeff Mock of Pennsylvania, was forced to postpone his trip to British Columbia due to flight cancellations and severe weather. Plans are underway for him to complete his exchange later this year. Congratulations to Sean Farrell of New Brunswick and Austin Jackson of Oklahoma, the 2026 Officer Exchange Program winners. We look forward to hearing about their experiences, as well as Jeff's, and seeing their presentations at the Ohio conference in 2027.

There were also several changes to the NAWEOA Executive Board this year. Chris Maier succeeded outgoing President Larry Hergenroeder following the completion of Larry's term. Congratulations to Chris on his new role, and a heartfelt thank you to Larry for his dedication, leadership, and commitment to the Association. I would also like to congratulate Jesse Gehrt on his election as Vice President. Jesse has served as a Director for many years and brings a wealth of experience and enthusiasm to the position.

Looking ahead to Ohio 2027, the host committee is already hard at work planning what promises to be another memorable conference. If their creativity and enthusiasm are any indication, attendees can expect a few surprises along the way. I encourage all members to save the date, book their accommodations early, and start making plans to join us in Ohio next July.

Region 4 Director Sean Spencer



Greetings from Region 4 to all our North American Wildlife Officers. We had a great summer conference this year in Nebraska and a big thanks to all the officers who stepped up to make that happen. Things have been interesting out here in the west over the summer and into the fall. Many of our states, like a lot across all North America, had a hot and dry start to the summer. This led to severe wildlife fire con-

ditions and many major fires. Here in Utah, we had the largest burning fires at a couple of different points this summer. We lost a record 285,000 acres of wooded areas and over 500,000 total acres burned. But we are hoping this isn't all bad and leads to lots of great wildlife habitat in a few years to come.

This summer we have also had a record number of bear issues across the state. This was mostly in the form of bears getting into towns and cabin areas. Many people said they have lived in the area for over 30 years and never even seen a bear. Many of these bears have had to be euthanized for various reasons and some of the public are unhappy about that. What many people don't realize is that because of the early warm up we had in March berries and acorns bloomed early and then a late frost killed everything off. This led to less food in the landscape and has led to this increase in bear problems. It was interesting to hear from our biologist that many other states across the west are also facing a significant increase in bear issues, so it isn't just Utah.

Utah has also been moving ahead with our divisional change. It's been a year and a half since we combined our 4 DNR law enforcement sections. That has come with its pros and cons but we are all working together to move in a positive direction for the future. Even though we have gotten new patches and uniforms our mission of protecting Utah's outdoor resources remains the same. We were hoping that our voices and recognition would become greater because of this combination and I think it has.

Updates from Colorado.

Due to an unprecedented and nearly complete mast production failure, Colorado Wildlife Officers worked around the clock handling conflict bear issues this summer.

Late frosts and prolonged summer drought conditions were contributing factors.

During a very active fire season, Colorado Wildlife Officers assisted with roadblocks and evacuations during several large wildfires across the state with the Aspen Acres Fire being the largest with over 100,000 acres burned.

Tip of the hat to longtime CPW employee Jenny Campbell who retired after 22 years of service to the agency. Campbell just finished a 4-year term on the Colorado Wildlife Employees Protective Association (CWEPA) board.

The 2026 class of trainees were recently assigned districts and are in the middle of their fall FTO schedules. The process for hiring a 2027 class started September 1st. A new hire for open district concept is being implemented for the 2027 class of new officers.



Region 5 Director Alex Hasenauer



Thank you, NAWEOA, for the opportunity to serve as the Region 5 Director. I am honored to step into this role and finish the term of newly elected Vice President Jesse Gehrt. My hope is to continue the hard work and dedication Jesse has brought to the region and to build upon the strong foundation he has established.

Many of you had the opportunity to get to know me during Nebraska's hosting of the NAWEOA Summer Conference. For those I have not yet met, I would like to take a moment to introduce myself.

I am married to my wife, Mareesa, and we have three children: Aubree, who is 9, Carlee, who is 5, and Ralph, who is 6 months old. I have served as a Nebraska Conservation Officer with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission for 13 years and was promoted to Sergeant in 2024.

Throughout my career, I have been committed to protecting Nebraska's natural resources, serving the public, and supporting the professional development of fellow conservation officers.

In addition to my regular duties as a Conservation Officer, I serve as a Lead Defensive Tactics Instructor, helping prepare officers with the skills, knowledge, and confidence necessary to safely handle challenging situations in the field. I also serve as a Field Training Officer, where I have the opportunity to mentor and develop new officers as they begin their careers in wildlife law enforcement.

I am also a member of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Honor Guard, representing our agency and profession with pride, dignity, and respect at important ceremonies and events.

Beyond my responsibilities with Nebraska Game and Parks, I am actively involved in the Nebraska Conservation Officers Association, where I currently serve as President. In this role, I have worked to promote the interests of Nebraska's Conservation Officers, strengthen professional relationships, and support the continued advancement of wildlife law enforcement in Nebraska.

I am excited about the opportunity to serve as the Region 5 Director and look forward to working with all of you. I believe NAWEOA is strongest when we work together, share our experiences, support one another, and continue to advance the profession of wildlife law enforcement.

Thank you again for this opportunity. I look forward to representing Region 5 and doing everything I can to support our members and the mission of NAWEOA.



Region 6 Director Shawn Elmore



Greetings to all my fellow Game Wardens throughout the US and our brothers and sisters north of the border in Canada!! It is a pleasure to serve as your Region 6 Director, and I hope y'all are safe and healthy. I know each of you has had a very busy and hopefully safe summer season! I know in the

South; our hunting seasons are right around the corner and folks are getting in the woods. We've had lots of hot weather but hoping for the cool spells to start and giving us the itch to get into the woods. I hope each of you have a safe and plentiful hunting season, at work and personally!!

I want to express sincere thanks to the Nebraska Conservation Officer's Association for hitting a home run on the 2026 NAWEOA Summer Conference!!!! From the keynote speaker to hospitality nights, to the great training sessions, and the closing ceremonies, if you missed it, you missed some great training, networking, and great friendships!! Over the next year, the Ohio Wildlife Officers Lodge will be putting together another great conference for all our current and retired Game Wardens throughout North America. I know Conference Chairman Brian Bury; Ohio Wildlife Officers Lodge President Chris Gilkey and the other members of their team have a conference planned that will knock your socks off!!! I highly encourage you to make plans to attend.

I want to send a big THANK YOU to Region 6 J-Reps for their continued support and let's bring some more southern hospitality to future conferences! Stay safe and be ready!!



Region 7 Director Kris MacCabe



As we head into another hunting season, I want to take a moment to thank all of our Region 7 members for their continued dedication, professionalism, and support of the NAWEOA. A special thank you goes to the State of Nebraska for serving as our 2026 confer-

ence host and for the time and effort put into making the conference a success. I also want to recognize and thank all of the Region 7 members who took the time to attend the conference. Your participation, fellowship, and willingness to share knowledge and experiences are what make our association strong. As the fall season gets underway, I wish everyone a safe and successful hunting season. Please continue to look out for one another, stay safe in the field, and remember the important role we play in protecting our natural resources and serving the public.

Torch Run/Walk and Breakfast

Reviewed by Sean Spencer

This year's 24th annual torch run was a great event as always. Nebraska is to be commended on the effort that it takes to put on an event like this. The main purpose of the torch run is to remember our fallen officers and to raise money for the Game Warden Museum. The fallen officers from this past year were Conservation Enforcement Officer Senior Shawn Nixon from Alabama, New Your State Environmental Conservation Police Officer Ron Bosela and Maine Game Warden Pilot Joshua Tibbetts.

The starting location of the event was at the Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Headquarters, which is run by the National Park Service. They had a beautiful facility that paid tribute to the early exploration of the country. They had some great exhibits with stuff that the kids really enjoyed looking at and getting hands on experience with. The building is situated right next to the Missouri River. The race route went over the Bob Kerrey Pedestrian Bridge and continued along the Iowa side of the river. This is the first time in all the conferences that I have been to where we were able to run the 5k in two separate states.

Everyone was bused from the hotel to the starting location. As we were waiting at the starting line there was a beautiful sunrise coming up over the river. All the runners took off first, then the Ruckers, and the walkers brought up the rear. I was in the walking group but because I carried my 3-year-old most of the way I should have started with the Ruckers. We stopped to get a picture at the middle of the bridge which is that state line. From that view we could see deer, lots of birds, and turkeys along the route. Overall, it was a great 5k.

At the finish line they provided breakfast. There were breakfast sandwiches, fruit and plenty of orange juice. Then they handed out the medals to all the winners.

Mens 18-49

1st Cody Dierking, NE 20:27
2nd Tylor McGaughey, AZ 22:36
3rd Shawn Stutts, PA 22:43

Mens 50+

1st Hank Jenks, OK 22:40
2nd Rick Finnegan, PA 23:80
3rd Ray Dierking, NE 25:58

Youth Boys >18

1st Jarrett Johnson (15), NE 22:59

2nd Deron Hopps (14), WY 26:22

3rd Collin Huntington (17), CO 28:20

Walkers Mens

1st James Hobbs, WY 39:09

2nd David Holman, MD 39:47

3rd Roger Selesse, NB 42:39

Women 18-49

1st Makayla Stutts, PA 20:22 (1st Place Overall)

2nd Elise Calhoun, WY 22:37

3rd Cheyenne Hudson, UT 22:57

Women 50+

1st Mandy Packett, NE

2nd Sandra Pink,

Youth Girls >18

1st Ally Johnson, NE 28:49

2nd Morgan Huntington, CO 29:45

3rd Cora Broniker, MO 30:25

Walkers Women

1st Kim Huntington, CO 39:20

2nd Emerson Reeder, PA 40:09

3rd Cassie Johnson, NE 42:08



NAWEOA Awards

by Larry Hergenroeder

It's agreed that recognition for officers performing at the highest level in this profession cannot be over emphasized. Being recognized on an international stage, nominated by your peers, has value unlike no other. The NAWEOA Awards program consistently fosters officer development and production while setting the standard for others to emulate in Wildlife Conservation Law Enforcement. It is my pleasure to share with you the names and department of those achieving excellence in our profession. Selected as the recipients of the following prestigious 2026 NAWEOA Award honors are:

NAWEOA 2026 "Officer of the Year"

Senior Conservation Police Officer Kevin Webb / Virginia Dept. of Wildlife Resources-Conservation Police

TORCH AWARD:

The Torch Award recognizes excellence by those officers in the first 5 years of their career as a Wildlife Law Enforcement Officer. With a demanding schedule, these self-motivated officers perform as veterans, paving the path for the next class of graduates in this prestigious profession, hence passing the "Torch".

Region 1: Conservation Officer Justin Clampitt / Saskatchewan Ministry of Community Safety

Region 2: Conservation Officer Nicolas Brancatella / Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

Region 3: Conservation Officer Riley Yeomans / New Brunswick Dept. of Justice and Public Safety

Region 4: Senior Conservation Officer Kolby White / Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Region 5: Game Warden Dartanion Tilley / Oklahoma Dept. of Wildlife Conservation

Region 6: Game Warden Thomas Ledford / Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources - Law Enforcement

Region 7: State Game Warden Sean Lauer / Pennsylvania Game Commission

LOYAL PARTNER AWARD: "K-9 & Handler of the Year"

K-9 Units are becoming a necessity amongst North American Wildlife Enforcement agencies. Agency Command staff and those officers that call for their assistance recognize the valuable asset K-9's and their handlers have become for investigating wildlife crimes. From locating evidence to literally tracking down violators, our four-legged partners and their

noses have earned their place in Wildlife Law Enforcement.



Conservation Officer / K-9 Handler Mike Fairbanks, K-9 Si & K-9 Fennec / Minnesota Dept. Natural Resources – Enforcement Division

MUDDY BOOTS AWARD: "Jurisdictional Representative of the Year"

The Muddy Boots Award recognizes the outstanding performance and dedication by Jurisdictional Representatives (JReps) that are the lifeline between the NAWEOA Executive Board and their Officers Associations. NAWEOA simply could not operate efficiently without the time and efforts of these dedicated officers.



Wildlife Investigator Brian Bury / Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources – Division of Wildlife

NAWEOA Awards

by Larry Hergenroeder

VALOR AWARD:

The recipients of this award, without hesitation, act to save the life of another without due regard for their own safety. The level of danger and threat of losing their own lives make the actions by the following officers nothing less than heroic.

Sergeant Justin Chambers / Virginia Dept. of Wildlife Resources – Conservation Police

Game Warden Mike Pierre / Maine Warden Service/ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Corporal Keith Page / Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources - Law Enforcement

Game Warden First Class Ryan Buice / Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources - Law Enforcement

Conservation Officer Brock Lockhart / Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Service

Conservation Officer Brad Johns / Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Service

Sergeant Casey Howey / Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Service

Conservation Officer Jarred Bonneau / Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Service

Conservation Officer Caitlin Lee / Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Service

Conservation Officer Brady Yablonski / Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Service

Conservation Officer Tiernan Elliott / Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Service

Conservation Officer Lucas Kleisinger / Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Service

Sergeant Casey Gehrt / Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Conservation Officer Brandon Wallace / Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Conservation Officer Travis Schultz / Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Conservation Officer Justin Gress / Nebraska Game and Parks Commission

Game Warden/K9 Officer Tanner Houck / Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Game Warden Blayne Cunningham / Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Game Warden Ryan Twellmann / Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Conservation Officer Mallory Barbera / New York DEC-Law Enforcement Division

Conservation Officer Tyler Ableson / New York DEC-Law Enforcement Division



LIFESAVING AWARD:

Every year, dozens of Game Wardens perform selfless acts to help others in distress. Not all arise to the level of those being formally recognized for their actions, however, those receiving the NAWEOA Lifesaving Award, undoubtedly, have gone above and beyond the call of duty in order to help others in their time of need.

Sergeant Cory Loitz / Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Service (Sgt. Loitz received two awards for separate incidents)

Game Warden Peter Herring / Maine Warden Service/ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Game Warden Cody York / Maine Warden Service/ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Captain Robert Johnston / Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission

NAWEOA Awards

by Larry Hergenroeder

Officer Michael Oldsen / Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission

Lieutenant Peter Knutson / Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission

Senior Officer Jeremy Deweese / Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission

Officer Specialist Ben Norbrothen / Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission

Wildlife Conservation Officer Don Allaway / South Dakota Game Fish and Parks

Wildlife Conservation Officer Taylor Kirchner / South Dakota Game Fish and Parks

Wildlife Conservation Officer Eric Brumbaugh / South Dakota Game Fish and Parks

Wildlife Conservation Officer Travis March / South Dakota Game Fish and Parks

Wildlife Conservation Officer Austin Norton / South Dakota Game Fish and Parks

Wildlife Conservation Officer Kenny Jimerson / South Dakota Game Fish and Parks

Wildlife Officer Dusten Moffitt / Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency Boating and Law Enforcement Division

Game Warden Jake Bersche / Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Game Warden Rylee Rolling / Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Game Warden Kody Moore / Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Game Warden Cody Morris / Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Ranger Wyatt Manis / Utah Natural Resource Law Enforcement

Ranger Hunter Minch / Utah Natural Resource Law Enforcement

Conservation Officer Brennen Rolofs / Ontario Conservation Officers Association / Ministry of Natural Resources

Conservation Officer Al Dimenna / Ontario Conservation Officers Association / Ministry of Natural Resources

Conservation Officer Chris Staples / Ontario Conservation Officers Association / Ministry of Natural Resources

Game Warden Mike Hopper / Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Game Warden Colbe Austin & K9 Kai / Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Game Warden / K9 Handler Tanner Houck / Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Lieutenant Matthew Cook / Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Game Warden Kalaeb Bratton / Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Game Warden Blayne Cunningham / Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD:

The recipients of this award are proven leaders in the profession of Wildlife Law Enforcement. Recently most of the NAWEOA Outstanding Service Award recipients were nominated for the prestigious NAWEOA "Officer of the Year Award" after receiving various officer of the year honors in their home State, Province or Territory. Other recipients received their nomination based on their unwavering and meritorious service to North America's wildlife resources making them among the professions elite.

* Game Warden Pilot Joshua Tibbetts / Maine Warden Service/Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Game Warden First Class Hunter Rush / Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources - Law Enforcement

Sergeant Bart Hendrix / Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources - Law Enforcement

Senior Conservation Officer Cody Osborne / Provincial Protective Services Branch, Ministry of Corrections, Policing and Public Safety

Wildlife Investigator Jason Sherwood / Wyoming Game and Fish Department



NAWEOA Awards

by Larry Hergenroeder

State Game Warden Jon “J.D.” Walker / Pennsylvania Game Commission

Senior Wildlife Officer Thomas Weaver / North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Game Warden Kalaeb Bratton / Kansas Department of Wildlife and Parks

Wildlife Officer Micah Collier / Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources – Division of Wildlife

Game Warden Justin Cornett / Oklahoma Department of Wildlife Conservation

Investigator Nate Foley / Arizona Game and Fish Department

Renewable Resource Officer III Tobias Halle / Environment and Climate Change Canada

District Wildlife Manager Evan Jones / Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Law Enforcement Supervisor Jonathan Kaiser / Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources

Sergeant Mike Kinghorn / Utah Natural Resources Law Enforcement

Area Wildlife Manager Tim Kroening / Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Wildlife Officer K9 Handler Ryan Lane / Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Wildlife Officer Austin Levering / Ohio Dept. of Natural Resources – Division of Wildlife

Officer Danz Matthew / Delaware Natural Resources Police

District Wildlife Manager Josh Melby / Colorado Parks and Wildlife

Wildlife Conservation Officer Shane Pedersen / South Dakota Game Fish and Parks

Wildlife Officer Chase Rich / Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency

Sergeant Chad Robertson / Maine Warden Service/ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Corporal Jonathan Segars / Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources - Law Enforcement

Corporal Levi Thompson / Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources - Law Enforcement

Corporal Jason Bennett / Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources - Law Enforcement

Game Warden Tyler Leach / Maine Warden Service/ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Game Warden Avery Boucher / Maine Warden Service/ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Sergeant Marc D’Elia / Maine Warden Service/ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Game Warden Tennie Coleman / Maine Warden Service/ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Game Warden Peter Herring / Maine Warden Service/ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Game Warden Ben Gormely / Maine Warden Service/ Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife

Conservation Officer Kyle Smith / Ontario Conservation Officers Association / Ministry of Natural Resources

* Game Warden Pilot Joshua Tibbetts perished in the line of duty on May 12, 2026. Warden Tibbetts exemplified the criteria for the Outstanding Service Award that he was nominated for prior to his passing.



J-Rep Breakfast

Reviewed by Jason Pink

J-Reps are an integral part of the NAWEOA network. They serve as key liaisons with the members within their agencies, sharing important information, including awards nomination opportunities, contributing content for newsletters, maintaining membership rosters, and assisting with dues administration, among many other responsibilities. As a J-Rep myself, I have a firsthand appreciation for the effort these volunteers bring to the role!

This year's breakfast was exceptionally well attended, bringing together J-Reps from across Canada and the

United States, including several new reps attending their first conference. The gathering provided an excellent opportunity to network, exchange ideas, and discuss both successes and challenges facing our members.

I look forward to seeing even more of our J-Reps at next year's conference in Ohio. These dedicated women and men are invaluable to the Association, and their contributions are deeply appreciated by the entire Board.

Fallen Officer Memorial

Reviewed by Larry Hergenroeder

A somber quiet filled the Grand Ballroom at the Double Tree by Hilton as the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission Honor Guard escorted the traditional Class A cover to a flag draped and candle lit memorial representing each jurisdiction of the recently fallen. The NAWEOA Fallen Officers Memorial commences at each summer conference where our brothers and sisters memory and service are honored as part of the opening ceremonies. Alabama Conservation Officer Senior Shawn Nixon E.O.W. 11/23/2025, New York State Conservation Officer Ronald Bosela E.O.W. 2/27/2026, and Maine Game Warden Pilot Joshua

Tibbetts E.O.W. 5/12/2026 (Tibbetts full honors scheduled for 2027) were honored by reading their biography and details surrounding the "end of watch" for each of these law enforcement heroes. A final command of present arms was called in their honor followed by bagpipes filling the ballroom with Amazing Grace as the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission Honor Guard ceremoniously marched away. The service and sacrifice of these brave men shall not be forgotten, and their memory will forever be memorialized on the NAWEOA Fallen Officers plaque displayed at all future conferences.

Information regarding **NAWEOA Jurisdictional Representatives,**

- ♦ Names
- ♦ Contact information
- ♦ The jurisdictions they serve
- ♦ Etc.

Can be found elsewhere on the NAWEOA website

naweo.org

Training Presentation: Decision-Making Considerations for Wildlife Enforcement Officers

Reviewed by Chris Maier

Each year at the conference, there are many presentations to choose from, and this year I chose wisely by attending the session delivered by Ray Dierking and Taylor Dixon. I had not met Taylor before, but I've known Ray for many years, and I've spent a fair bit of time with him in the middle of nowhere. When I told Ray I was sitting in on his presentation, he looked at me and asked, "Why are you sitting in on this?" My response was simple: "I'm too old to change my ways, Ray, but I'm sure there's going to be some information I can take back to some of my new staff."

After 22 years as an officer, I've trained quite a few new hires—often without an official FTO program. Sitting through Ray and Taylor's presentation reminded me that there are things I take for granted as an older officer, things I consider "common sense," that don't necessarily translate to newer staff. Their presentation laid out a clear, thoughtful process for officers to follow when making enforcement decisions. While the pathway isn't always the same for every situation, they highlighted several important factors that should be considered before laying a charge.

Key Components of the Decision-Making Process

Finding the violation and understanding the elements of the crime When you find one violation... there are usually more.

Determining the intent of the law
Protecting the resource (bag limits, closed seasons, AIS)
Providing revenue (licences, stamps, permits)
Safety (hunter orange, PFDs, safe operation)
Collecting information (check stations, surveys)
Ethics (minimum calibre, fair chase)
Law enforcement tools (species ID, tagging requirements)
Determining the intent of the violator
Was the violation committed:
Knowingly
Negligently
Accidentally
Making your enforcement decision The intent of the law and the intent of the violator both need to be understood to make an enforcement action that is appropriate—and defensible—to the public, prosecutors, judges, and fellow officers.

Ray and Taylor also discussed the different enforcement options available, emphasizing the importance of explaining your decision to the individual involved. Ensuring they understand why an action was taken can go a long way in maintaining professionalism, transparency, and trust.



Conference Vendors

Reviewed by Jason Sherwood

The Nebraska Conservation Officers Association is a great opportunity to light the spark for someone hosting crew did a great job in rounding up a variety who might build or improve the gear you really wish of game warden-relevant vendors for this year’s conference. was available to you.

Not only were the hallways leading into the convention space filled, but many also chose to donate directly in support of the conference. These business owners and representatives sought out or welcomed the opportunity to interact with game wardens directly for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the chance to talk with field conservation officers and learn what officers are currently looking for, and glean new ideas for future improvements to their products.

Please keep this in mind for future conferences—even if you don’t believe you’re in the market to buy, this

It also seemed many of them had too much swag inventory on hand and were compelled to hand out dozens of caps, decals, and patches while letting attendees paw over their equipment and otherwise check out their examples!

Aside from the usual booths for the North American Game Warden Museum, International Game Warden Magazine, and NAWEOA itself, below is a listing of the vendors who participated in this year’s event. When you have a chance, please give them your business and thank them for supporting us!

Vendor	Contact Info
Collision & Crime Forensic Solutions	https://www.collisionfs.com/ ; 402-339-1518
Custom Robotic Wildlife	https://www.roboticwildlife.com/ ; 715-432-8011
Evans Group (Surefire, Springfield Arms, etc)	kendouglas@theevansgroup.net
Golight	Jay.johnson@golight.com ; 308-278-3131
Hornady Manufacturing	Brian.thome@ludreps.com ; 308-224-4896
Nebraska Game & Parks	https://www.outdoornebraska.gov ; 402-471-0641
Saunders Archery	https://sausa.com
Tactacam	grussell@tactacam.com ; 419-217-1748
Warden's Watch Podcast	https://wardenswatch.com/ ; wayne@wardenswatch.com
Winnercomm LLC (Outdoor/Sportsman Channel)	brownviolet@gmail.com ; 406-300-5335
WiseEye Technology	https://wiseeyetech.com/ ; 225-478-4026
Zeiss Optics	eric.eshbach@zeiss.com

Henry Doorly Zoo

Reviewed by Sandra Cook

On Monday, July 20, 2026, a large group of conference attendees braved the heat for a full-day visit to Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo & Aquarium on what turned out to be the second-hottest day of the year, with temperatures reaching a scorching 39.4°C (103°F)!



The Cook/Pink family (Ontario) and Huntington family (Colorado) enjoying the zoo.

Widely regarded as one of the best zoos in the world, the facility features many impressive attractions, including the world's largest nocturnal exhibit and indoor swamp, as well as one of the world's largest indoor rainforests and indoor deserts. Highlights for our

group included chatting with the sea lion caretakers, touching stingrays, walking through the shark tunnel, and visiting any exhibit that got us out of the heat and into the air conditioning! The excursion included an enjoyable lunch and an entertaining meet-and-greet with Foster the cockatoo. A huge thank you to the Nebraska team for organizing such a memorable day!



Foster the cockatoo waving hello.



Warden Skills Games Reviewed by Mike Reeder

As always the games did not disappoint. Many of the games required game warden skill and knowledge to complete and others required just being able to walk in a pair of chest waders.



Nebraska provided a great venue at Eugene T. Mahoney State Park. There was plenty of space for the events and other activities for non participants to enjoy. The event ended with a traditional cookout with freshly shucked corn on the cob.

First Place—Ditch Chicken Detectives

Second Place Stormin' Mormons

Third Place—Rockin' the hills in America



Hospitality Night

By Steve Beltran

Another NAWEOA conference is in the books, and Omaha, Nebraska gave us a week we won't soon forget.

As always, the conference provided great training and events, but some of the best parts of the week were simply the opportunities to spend time together. The hospitality throughout the conference gave everyone a chance to catch up with old friends, meet new ones, share a few stories, and enjoy being together outside of the scheduled activities.

There was no shortage of things happening throughout the week. Between the conference events, competitions, entertainment, and evening activities, Omaha kept everyone busy. There were plenty of laughs, a lot of great conversations, and more than a few stories that will probably be told again at future conferences. One of my favorite parts of the week was the bobber collection and guessing contest. Seeing the container filled with fishing bobbers and watching everyone take their best guess at how many were inside was such a simple idea, but it became one of those fun little moments that people kept coming back to. It sparked plenty of conversation, friendly competition, and more than a few confident guesses. Those are the kinds of details that make hospitality memorable — not just the big events, but the small activities that get everyone talking and laughing together.



That is really what makes the hospitality side of NAWEOA so important. We may only see some of these people once a year, but when everyone gets back together it doesn't take long to pick up where we left off.

It is also a great opportunity to meet officers from other states and provinces. Conversations that start casually during hospitality can turn into discussions about cases, equipment, agency practices, or challenges we are all facing. You quickly realize that even though

we work in different places, there is a lot we can learn from one another.

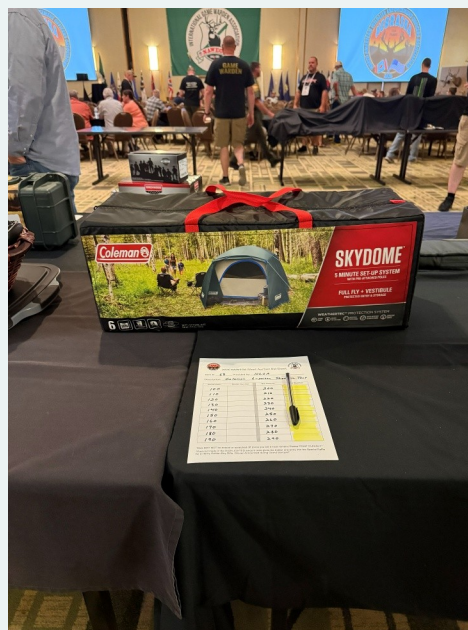
For newer members, those evenings are also one of the easiest ways to become part of the NAWEOA family. Sit down at a table, introduce yourself to someone you haven't met, and before long you are swapping stories with officers from halfway across the continent.

The entertainment and activities in Omaha gave everyone plenty to enjoy, but the people are what made the week memorable. Retired officers, active officers, spouses, families, and longtime friends of NAWEOA all came together again for another great conference.

A big thank-you goes to everyone in Nebraska who helped put the conference together and welcomed us to Omaha. Anyone who has been involved in hosting a NAWEOA conference knows how much work goes on behind the scenes. Your efforts gave all of us another opportunity to enjoy great events, great hospitality, and, most importantly, each other's company.

When the conference ends, we may take home new training, new ideas, and maybe a few souvenirs, but we also leave with new friendships and a lot of good memories.

That's what NAWEOA hospitality is all about. Until next year!



Game Warden Museum Field Notes

By Thomas Caifa

Greetings from the North American Game Warden Museum, where we celebrate the game warden profession and honor the officers who have given their lives in the line of duty. It has been a busy and exciting summer season. Here is a summary of what's been going on at your museum.

WHAT'S NEW AT THE MUSEUM?

The Museum is proud to welcome an impressive new exhibit highlighting the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Dive Team. The SCDNR Dive Team is a specialized unit of game wardens trained to conduct underwater search, rescue, recovery, and investigative operations. Team members routinely work in challenging environments ranging from lakes and rivers to coastal waters, assisting with boating incidents, missing-person searches, evidence recovery, and other law enforcement operations.



SCDNR invested a great deal of time, effort, and resources into creating this exhibit for the museum. Featuring a fully equipped diver, authentic dive equipment, video display, and a dramatic underwater backdrop, the display gives visitors an up-close look at a highly specialized side of the game warden profession that few members of the public ever see.

The museum sincerely thanks the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources and the members of its Dive Team for their generosity and commitment to preserving and sharing this important part of game warden history.

The museum is always looking for game warden "tools of the trade" as display items. Does your department have any old equipment that could be used for a display? Before you toss those things out or relegate them to the nearest musty quartermaster closet, please consider donating those items to the museum. We will consider any items in decent condition, no matter how old. Sometimes the historical stuff is the most interesting! Feel free to contact any museum board member if you would like to donate items or have questions about donating.

MUSEUM OPERATIONS

We're happy to report that the Fallen Officer Memorial Cairns have been repaired, including a complete replacement of all eight stone tops. The museum is committed to making additional improvements that will allow the memorial to withstand the weather for years to come.

This is the last year for our current museum manager, Stephanie Lee. We will miss her, and we wish her well as she moves on. Now, the hunt is on for a new museum manager.

We are still working with the Peace Garden to re-open our nature trail. The two bridges along the trail need major repairs before we can allow people back on the trail.

FALLEN OFFICER MEMORIAL CEREMONY

The museum's Fallen Officer Memorial Ceremony was held on Saturday, August 8th. The ceremony started at 1:00pm and was live streamed on our Facebook page. It was an honor to have the family of Maine Warden Service Pilot Joshua Tibbetts attend the ceremony this year. Joshua's father and daughter



Game Warden Museum Field Notes

By Thomas Caifa

made the trip to North Dakota and were presented with a U.S. flag during the ceremony in his honor.

The museum would like to thank the honor guards from the Pennsylvania Game Commission, Manitoba Conservation Officer Service, Saskatchewan Conservation Officer Service and Ohio Division of Wildlife for travelling to the museum to perform the ceremony. Thank you to all the agencies and officers who sent representatives and helped make this a very special and meaningful ceremony. It was an impressive showing of support from the game warden community and a fitting tribute to Joshua and all the officers whose names are memorialized at the museum.

The following names were added to the museum's Fallen Officer Memorial this year.

Joshua Tibbetts, Maine, EOW 5/12/26

Ronald Bosela, New York, EOW 2/27/26

Shawn Nixon, Alabama, EOW 11/23/25

John Shank, Virginia, EOW 3/21/32 (historical addition)

John Cox, Virginia, EOW 6/28/31 (historical addition)

Charles Headley, Virginia, EOW, 2/8/24 (historical addition)

Are all your fallen officers listed on our memorial? Go to our website and check your jurisdiction's memorial stone. gamewardenmuseum.org/wp/fallen-officer-memorial/fallen-officer-cairns/

PAVING STONES

The paving stone area at the front of the museum has been improved with an expanded concrete walkway and several new paving stone frames. Are you interested in ordering a paving stone? It's easy. Just visit our website and fill out the online form.

VISITING OFFICER PROGRAM

Every year, one game warden is selected to be our guest at the museum for a long weekend with all expenses paid. This year's visiting officer was New Brunswick Conservation Officer David Nash. David selected the dates of August 1st and 2nd as the weekend for his visit. He spent his time as an ambassador of the game warden profession, speaking with visitors at the museum and answering all their questions about who we are and what we do.

Are you interested in coming to the museum as a visiting warden? We will be accepting applications for the 2026 season in February. Watch for the announcement on Facebook.

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

To be eligible for the scholarship program, applicants must have plans to major in some type of natural resource management and/or conservation law enforcement degree program. Applications are reviewed based on the students' overall academic achievements, volunteer activities and community spirit. Congratulations to this year's winners Jacob Bridgefarmer of Texas and Dacia Gingerella of Rhode Island, both of whom are children of active game wardens. These hard-working students received \$500 for their upcoming educational expenses.

Do you know a student that might be interested in a scholarship? Applications for 2026 will be accepted in January. Watch for the announcement on Facebook and check our website for the application link.

FUNDRAISING & DONATIONS

The North Dakota Moose Raffle, which provides a moose tag for the first-place winner, was announced on June 15th. This tag can be used by a non-resident of North Dakota, making it a much sought after prize. Second prize is \$2000. Third, fourth and fifth prizes are all long guns. The raffle brought in about \$40,000 this year.

The 24th Annual NAWEOA Torch Run/Walk was held at the NAWEOA conference in Nebraska on July 23rd. Thank you to the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission and NAWEOA for their support. A special thank you goes out to all the officer associations who graciously made donations to the torch run. This event raised a little over \$5,200.

The 23rd Annual Manitoba Golf Tournament was held in LaSalle, Manitoba on August 5th. This event is a "scramble" type tournament that golfers of all skill levels can enjoy. Once again, the weather was perfect and a great time was had by all. Thank you to all the sponsors who made the tournament a big success again this year. The tournament raised about \$9,200.

Game Warden Museum Field Notes

By Thomas Caifa

Once again, we would like to thank Randy Nelson, Todd Vandivert and Bud Holste for donating a portion of the proceeds from their book sales to the museum. We really appreciate their support!

Jon Tofteland (ND) US Treasurer
Contact for ND Moose Raffle
(701) 201-0703
us-treasurer@gamewardenmuseum.org

Would you like to donate to the museum? We make it easy. Just go to our website, where you will find several different ways to donate.

Blake Patterson (MB) Past President
Contact for Fallen Officer Cairns
Contact for Paving Stones
(204) 281-5300
pastpresident@gamewardenmuseum.org

WEBSITE

Would you like your agency's wardens to be featured on our website? Feel free to send us some photos. You can email them to gamewardenmuseum@gmail.com

Chris Kuntz (SD) Director
(970) 593-8503
kuntzca@gmail.com

ANNUAL BOARD MEETING

The Museum Board of Directors held their annual meeting on August 6th and 7th at the museum. We had the pleasure of welcoming our newest board member, Tom Frank, who joins us from the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

Gord Cox, (ECCC) Director
(403) 999-7848
gordon.cox@lethbridgecollege.ca

MUSEUM BOARD OF DIRECTORS VACANCIES

Do you know someone who might be interested in joining the Museum Board of Directors? We currently have two Canadian vacancies and one USA vacancy. Feel free to contact any board member if you are interested.

Jessica Avery (MB) Vice President
& Canadian Treasurer
Contact for Manitoba Golf Tournament
(204) 641-1455
vicepresident@gamewardenmuseum.org

CONTACT US

Website: gamewardenmuseum.org
Email us at: gamewardenmuseum@gmail.com

Sheila Paquette (RI) Secretary
Contact for Scholarship Program
401-222-3070
secretary@gamewardenmuseum.org

Tom Caifa (NY) President
Contact for NAWEOA Torch Run
Contact for Visiting Officer Program
(518) 424-0408
president@gamewardenmuseum.org

Shawn Hanna, (SC) Director
(864) 353-0104
shawnhanna153@icloud.com

Chad Moir (MB) Director
(204) 868-6000
crmoir@hotmail.com

Tom Frank (OH) Director
(937) 243-2983
Frankfarm2017@gmail.com

New Brunswick, Canada to Wyoming, USA Officer Exchange

By Sgt. Josh Thibodeau

In May 2026, I had the opportunity to participate in an officer exchange trip supported by NAWEOA (North American Wildlife Enforcement Officers Association) that took me from New Brunswick, Canada to Wyoming, USA for 10 days. The experience provided a valuable look at how conservation law enforcement is carried out in a very different landscape, and it reinforced the shared goals we all work toward—protecting natural resources, ensuring public safety, and maintaining strong relationships with the public. If there is one thing I learned, although in very different parts of North America, officers that work in Conservation law enforcement share a very true passion for their work and a desire to protect things that can't protect themselves.

It was very difficult to pick and choose what I showcased in this article as there was so much of this experience that is hard to put into words. A big thank you to the Wyoming Fish and Game department, Wyoming Game Wardens Association and NAWEOA for this once in a lifetime opportunity. A special thank you to investigator Jason Sherwood for organizing and making this trip possible.

After 18 hours, 3 planes and 4400 kms/2734 miles I arrived in beautiful Jackson, Wyoming and my welcoming committee at the airport did not disappoint.



South Jackson Game Warden Colton Galambas and North Jackson Game Warden Jon Stephens

Day 1

Boy Scouts of America Antler Auction- This was one of the craziest experiences for me. I could not believe the antler shed industry and how popular this was. We don't have any market in New Brunswick for stuff like this and it would be considered illegal. Every Spring, thousands of Elk wintering on the national Elk refuge lose their antlers before they migrate to their summer range. The boy scouts harvest the shed antlers and auction them to bidders from around the world to make furniture, wall decorations, Jewelry, and food products from them. This took place in Jackson town Square. Scouts auction thousands of pounds of naturally shed Elk Antlers collected from the National Elk Refuge, with 75 % of the proceeds returning to the refuge for habitat conservation.



Elk antler arch in George Washington Memorial Park (town square) Jackson Hole made with thousands of naturally shed elk antlers from the nearby national Elk refuge. US F&W service refuge officer Hayden Benson, South Jackson Warden Colton Galambas, Josh Thibodeau North Jackson Warden Jon Stephens

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Antler sale and Auction, Jackson Hole Town Square

In the afternoon, Warden Galambas and I headed to the Grand Teton national park where we hiked into a couple of lakes to check some fishermen and take in some of the beautiful scenery.



String Lake, Grand Teton National Park

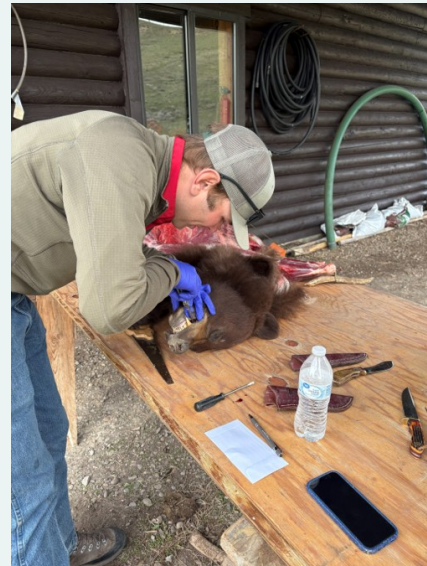
After a great day in the field, I got to experience the world-famous cowboy bar.



World Famous Cowboy Bar Jackson Hole, Wy

Day 2

We started the day patrolling and sightseeing in addition to being at the location of the Continental Divide. We worked our way to the neighboring district warden I was going to stay with but before that I had the opportunity to watch a black bear harvest getting checked in. In Wyoming, Wardens extract a tooth sample and document bear harvests for management purposes. Similar to New Brunswick, Spring bear hunting is a popular activity in Wyoming.



Warden Galambas extracting a tooth from a black bear harvest

Later in the afternoon, I met up with North Parkdale Warden Jake Miller. Warden Miller exposed me to some of his patrol area and showed me one of the Elk feeding areas that is used to provide feed for Elk during the winter season.



Elk Feeding area

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Day 3

Warden Miller took me on a side by side patrol into the Upper Green Bridger Forest. I got to see Mule Deer, Antelope, Elk and a Grizzly bear eating an Elk Carcass. This was all a new experience for me as we have none of these species in New Brunswick. I also got to see some of the Warden services remote patrol cabins and rugged terrain.



Remote Patrol Cabin



Grizzly Bear

Day 4

Prior to a long drive across the state to go to my next location I had the opportunity to go to a pistol and long gun requalification training session near Jackson with numerous Wardens. I was even given the opportunity to shoot their 9mm pistol that had red dot sights. This was my first experience with red dot, and it took a little getting used to but once I got used to it, I loved using the red dot sight.



Range day

After the range I met up with Buffalo Access Coordinator Troy Tobiasson who showed me some more beautiful countryside before putting me up for the night at his home where I got to meet his family.

Day 5

Troy and I started the day looking at some of the areas that he is responsible for and got to register a couple more black bear harvests at one of warden stations.

Later in the day I was handed over to Dayton Game Warden Gavin Dougherty where we started the day having lunch at one of their remote patrol cabins. After lunch we went to the tongue river big basin area. The unique part about this location is there were still road closures from the winter snow load, and we had numerous Moose and Elk sightings as they were feeding in the open fields.

Day 6

Warden Dougherty and I spent the morning hiking along the little big horn river looking for a bear bait on public land. In Wyoming, bear hunters with bear baits on public land are required to share the location with the warden service.



Warden Dougherty

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After a morning hike, I got to see the Sheraton Regional office followed by a long drive over to my next assignment where I met Sundance Game Warden Nate Holst. Nate and his family treated me to a lovely supper at a local restaurant, and I got to stay overnight in one of the remote patrol cabins which was a great experience and beautiful property.

Day 7

Warden Holst and I patrolled for turkey hunters, and I also got to experience the world-renowned site seeing attraction. "Devils Tower"



Devils Tower-igneous rock formation

In the afternoon I shuffled around to wardens Mark Dexter and Daniel Tisi where I really got to see how different the landscape can be as I travelled to the southeast part of the state. I ended the day at Investigator Sherwood's house where I was treated to supper and some social time with some local wardens.

Day 8

I started my day getting picked up by South Laramie Game Warden Elise Calhoun where we stopped by the Laramie regional office and travelled up through the Medicine Bow National Forest where I met Saratoga Game Warden Connor Worthen.

Later that day Warden Worthen took me on horseback in the Bennett Peak and Corral Creek area. For Context, Horse patrol has been a bucket list item for me since I became a Conservation Officer, so this was an exciting day for me. I have no horse riding experience and Warden Worthen did a great job getting me prepared and educated on what I needed to know and do for a successful day.



Saratoga Game Warden Connor Worthen and South Laramie Game Warden Elise Calhoun



In typical game warden style, after we arrived back home at the end of the day, we ended up going back out to register a black bear harvest for a neighboring district.

Day 9

I started the day by getting picked up again by Warden Calhoun where we patrolled and ended up at the Colorado border. Later in the day we were joined by Warden Worthen where we floated a local river and conducted a fishing patrol. The weather was perfect for a day on the water. This being my last working day in Wyoming I ended up back at Investigator Sherwoods house to get ready for my next day early morning flight back home.

New Brunswick to Wyoming was an eye-opening shift. While both regions share a deep connection to the outdoors, Wyoming's vast open spaces, rugged

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terrain, and expansive wildlife populations create unique challenges for Game Wardens. By using horses and patrol cabins, officers can efficiently access remote terrain, allowing them to focus enforcement efforts in areas that are otherwise difficult to patrol. In contrast to our more densely forested and coastal areas in New Brunswick, Wyoming's terrain includes mountains, plains, deserts and large tracts of ranch/farm lands. Patrol areas are often significantly larger, which requires officers to be highly self-sufficient and prepared for long distances between calls.



I explored much of Wyoming and extended my travels into Montana, South Dakota, and Colorado. It was truly the experience of a lifetime. One of the most interesting aspects of the exchange was seeing the differences in wildlife species and enforcement priorities. Wyoming game wardens regularly deal with species such as elk, mule deer, pronghorn, bison, and large predators like grizzly bears and wolves. Beyond the operational experience, one of the most rewarding aspects of the exchange was building relationships with fellow officers. Sharing knowledge, discussing challenges, and learning from each other strengthens our collective ability to manage and protect natural resources.

The exchange program reinforced the importance of adaptability, communication, and continuous learning in conservation enforcement.

Overall, the experience was both professionally rewarding and personally memorable. I'm grateful for the opportunity to represent New Brunswick and to learn from our counterparts in Wyoming.

I would like to thank NAWEOA for this opportunity and the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the Wyoming Game Warden Association for their hospitality and providing with memories and friendships I will carry with me forever. Hats off to Wyoming!



NAWEOA Awards

N.A.W.E.O.A. believes deeply in recognizing the commitment of the wildlife law enforcement professional. The awards recognize people and agencies that have performed outstanding work, exemplary service to the public, or have contributed to wildlife law enforcement in other ways. Look at the award categories below and consider nominating your fellow officers for accomplishments. Submitting an award is easy. Go to NAWEOA.org and in the main menu under “Awards”, is “Award Application”. Click that link and you will be taken to the online Award Applications.

N.A.W.E.O.A. OFFICER OF THE YEAR AWARD

1. Must be a fully certified conservation officer in the state, province, territory, or country in which employed.
2. Must be a full time field officer, up to and including first line supervisors from the field in the last calendar year.
3. Both nominee and person submitting nomination must be a member of NAWEOA.
4. An officer whose character is beyond reproach.
5. An officer who is competent, knowledgeable and capable.
6. An officer who promotes wildlife law enforcement.
7. An officer who demonstrates professionalism in every facet of life.
8. The person submitting the nomination shall provide background material when submitting the nomination. Background material shall be in written narrative format, not exceeding 5 pages. Other supportive articles, certificates, awards, media coverage, etc. may be included with the nomination.
9. All nominations must be received by the Vice President of NAWEOA not later than April 1st each year. The successful officer will be notified by April 15th..

NAWEOA TORCH AWARD

Presented annually to an officer from each region, to encourage the professional development of recently appointed officers. The selection criteria are as follows:

Both nominating and nominated officers must be regular NAWEOA members.

Nominated officer must not have worked as a wildlife enforcement officer more than five years.

Must have demonstrated a genuine desire to protect the resource and develop professionally.

Must demonstrate exceptional ability and initiative in the performance of his or her duties, including public education.

Must be respected by his/her peers and the general public.

Nominations must be received by April 1st each year. Winners will be notified by April 15th.

Awards will be presented at annual conference; attendance encouraged but not mandatory.

OUTSTANDING SERVICE AWARD

Anyone who is eligible for regular or deputy membership may be nominated for this award. It is given for outstanding achievement or service in the field of Wildlife Law Enforcement, to NAWEOA executive or outgoing NAWEOA Directors. (Amended Winter 2003, West Palm Beach)

CERTIFICATE OF RETIREMENT

Anyone who is eligible for regular or deputy membership may be nominated for this award. It is given to honor years of service to the profession. This award is distributed on behalf of NAWEOA by regional reps and is not subject to executive review.

AWARD OF VALOUR

Anyone who is eligible for regular or deputy membership may be nominated for this award. It is given to the officer who performs a heroic act, or risks or receives serious injury, in the line of duty in an attempt to pro-

NAWEOA Awards

tect him\herself or a member of the public from a dangerous situation or circumstance. It infers bravery in the face of adversity.

LIFESAVING AWARD

Anyone who is eligible to be a regular or deputy member of the association or anyone who is a member of the association may be nominated for this award. It is given for any act at any time which saves the life of another person. (Amended Winter 2003, West Palm Beach)

CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

Anyone who in any way is helpful to the association and/or it's members may be nominated for this award. This includes, but is not limited to speakers, conference or workshop hosts, fundraisers, committee or special project members, citizens or politicians.

HONOURARY LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP

Anyone who has performed an extraordinary service to the association over a number of years may be nominated for this award. It is one of our most prestigious awards and may only be given in rare circumstances. Anyone who is eligible for regular membership in the association who receives this award shall maintain their voting privileges within the association.

K-9 AND HANDLER "LOYAL PARTNER AWARD"

Must be a fully certified conservation officer in the state, province, territory, or country in which employed. Must be a full-time field officer, up to and including first line supervisors from the field in the last calendar year.

Both nominee and person submitting nomination must be a regular member of NAWEOA.

Three years minimum experience and active as a K-9 handler at time of nomination.

All nominations must be received by the Vice President of NAWEOA not later than April 1st each year. The successful officer will be notified by April 15th.

Both K-9 and handler must demonstrate exceptional ability and initiative in the performance of his or her duties.

Award will be presented at annual conference; attendance encouraged but not mandatory.

