

NWTF Wildlife Manager of the Year

Nominee: **Larry Etheridge**

Submitted by: **Mitch Yeargin**

Larry Etheridge is a veteran officer with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources by serving the Department since 1999. He is a senior member of my work unit and is affectionately known to all as “Pops.” The term “Pops” is appropriate, as others routinely look to him for his experience and skills. Despite what is becoming routine budget and personnel reductions, Larry continues forward with his regular duties as well as takes on additional duties without additional compensation. Larry is currently the Area Manager of three Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)—Cohutta West, Coosawattee and Carter’s Lake. As such, he is



responsible for over 60,000 acres of wildlife habitat management as well as all of the other duties associated with such responsibility including WMA operations and maintenance, law enforcement responsibilities, as well as being looked to as the “region carpenter.” Through his resourcefulness and dedication, Larry continues to go above and beyond to serve both wildlife and the people that benefit from such wildlife conservation efforts (particularly hunters) as well as other residents and visitors that recreate and enjoy such well managed natural resources.



In the area of habitat improvement, Larry is a leader in our region, if not the state in terms of promotion and application of valuable wildlife management practices.

Even from the beginning of

Larry’s career, he relies on close working relations with the National Wild Turkey Federation, Ruffed Grouse Society, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Forest Service, and local sportsman’s clubs.

From these partnerships, he is able



to annually acquire seed and fertilizer to be used in our region

during tight budget times. In conjunction with identified management objectives, Larry recently enhanced the wildlife opening program on Cohutta WMA by expanding and/or reclaiming 12 wildlife openings. Considering the logistics and coordination involved, such work reaped generous rewards for turkeys and other wildlife resulting in 22 acres of improved wildlife conditions. The benefit is evident by the number of turkeys sighted already utilizing these wildlife plots.

Larry is one of only two in our region that is red card certified through the U.S. Forest Service. This certification requires additional training and physical fitness requirements allowing him to participate/assist with prescribed burning activities on all state and federal lands he works throughout the region. He even assists with wildland fire-fighting efforts on a national perspective. Because of this certification and his willingness to help others, Larry has participated in more burned acres than any other member of our region during the past year. Over the last two years, he has either managed or assisted in burning 2300 acres. Such areas are now greatly improved for turkeys and other wildlife at a fraction of the cost when compared to alternative habitat practices. No one recognizes the value of burning and timber management more than Larry.

Another way I feel Larry has helped with the wild turkey population in Murray County is through community service. When you introduce a child to the outdoors for the first time, you help insure our resources are protected by the next generation. Larry has been helping introduce children to the outdoors through his annual kids fishing event. Through this officer's effort, this event has been held in Murray County for the past 12 years. This past year, the event had over 125 participants. Of these, 23 were first time anglers. Additionally, Larry introduces kids to the outdoors through an annual adult/child deer, bear and hog hunt on Coosawattee WMA. This hunt evolved into one of the most successful hunting opportunities for children in our region, mostly through this officer's effort. Larry understands that conservation and education go hand in hand.



Larry is the real deal. He is committed to the outdoors and to the public we serve. He is willing to go the extra mile to insure everyone has an enjoyable outdoor experience. A good example demonstrating this officer's above-and-beyond effort recently occurred on Cohutta during the first weekend of archery deer and bear season. A husband and wife team from South Georgia met Larry on the road and asked if he knew a good place they could hunt bear. Larry took them to an area that he had personally hunted for years. He also gave the pair his personal cell phone number in case they needed any additional assistance. The next time Larry heard from these hunters was at midnight the next Sunday. That's when they called and advised that the wife had harvested a bear and they had just gotten it out of the woods. They wanted to take the bear back to South Georgia because of the warm weather and needed to get it tagged ASAP. Larry met the couple in Chatsworth at 1:00 AM. This is but one example of the dedication that this officer brings to the table. This is the reason I'm proud to nominate Larry Etheridge as NWTF Wildlife Manager of the Year.



Photo of a wildlife opening on Cohutta WMA planted in the Fall of 2010.



Photo of a wildlife opening on Cohutta WMA planted and renovated during the Spring of 2011.



Kid's Fishing Event



Larry is assisting an elderly person at local fishing event.

