

DNREC Honors Longtime Wetland Educator as Delaware's 2013 Wetland Warrior

HARRINGTON (July 25, 2013) – Today at the Delaware State Fair, Governor Jack Markell, DNREC Secretary Collin O'Mara and U.S. EPA Region III Administrator Shawn M. Garvin honored Terry Higgins of Marydel with the 2013 Delaware Wetland Warrior Award for his lifelong efforts to conserve, restore and educate Delaware residents on the need for and importance of wetlands.

“Wetlands contribute to the quality of life in Delaware by providing storage for floodwaters and protecting us from coastal storms, providing habitat for wildlife species, and purifying water by removing pollutants and nutrients from runoff. Efforts to protect, restore, and better understand processes affecting wetlands are critical to enable the continuation of the economically valuable services provided by wetlands,” said Secretary O'Mara. “We are proud to recognize Terry Higgins for his important contributions to protecting and understanding this vital natural resource.”

The Wetland Warrior Award, now in its sixth year, is presented annually to a citizen, organization, or business that has demonstrated exemplary efforts to benefit Delaware wetlands in the areas of outreach and education, monitoring and assessment, or restoration and protection.

“Often when we hear about wetlands, it's about their decline, but this award focuses on recognizing individuals who are working to make a positive change in wetland health in Delaware,” said Maggie Pletta, DNREC Wetland Monitoring and Assessment Program. “Terry Higgins has set a great example of encouraging stewardship of our resources and educating young

people on the value of wetlands.”

Higgins is a professor emeritus from Wesley College in Dover, where he served in the science department for 40 years, mentoring and educating more than 8,000 students. While at Wesley, he also became involved in the school’s environmental advocacy club, Team Cannon, monitoring the wetlands at Camden’s Brecknock Park.

After his retirement from Wesley in 2000, Higgins continued his commitment to wetlands as the Kent County volunteer coordinator for Delaware’s Adopt-A-Wetland Program. Through his initiative and mentoring, numerous volunteer groups have become informed and engaged wetland caretakers.

Not only did Higgins encourage others to restore and protect wetlands, he and his family recently preserved a 10-acre forested wetland site in the Choptank River Watershed.

During today’s annual DNREC Awards ceremony at the State Fair, Higgins also received DNREC’s Outstanding Volunteer Award for Conservation and Restoration for his work in environmental education and wetlands conservation in Delaware.

“For more than five decades of his life and career, Terry Higgins has passed on his knowledge, passion, wisdom and commitment to Delaware’s wetlands in countless ways,” said Delaware Adopt-a-Wetland Program Administrator Gary Kreamer. “On the occasion of his well-earned retirement from volunteer service, this award honors his lifelong legacy to Delaware’s natural resources.”

After decades of teaching and practicing environmental science, Higgins continues to find wetlands a fascinating area of study, from the biodiversity they support to the vital role they play in our daily lives. “There are so many important facets of wetlands that affect more than just the organisms that live there: protection from storm surges, absorbing excess nutrients and – though I feel this is not yet

completely studied or understood – the unique ability of wetlands to filter out various pollutants,” he said.

Higgins’ widely-known passion for conserving and protecting wetlands and for urging others along the same path also continues unabated. “Wetlands have an amazing ability to restore and right themselves if we just stop impacting them. They are pretty amazing, and we need to do whatever we have to do to let them do what they were created to do,” he said.

Next year’s call for nominations will be posted in the spring on the Delaware Wetlands website, www.dnrec.delaware.gov/Admin/DelawareWetlands.

For details about past Delaware Wetland Warriors please visit:

<http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/Admin/DelawareWetlands/Pages/WetlandWarriors.aspx>