



NFWF



THE GUY BRADLEY AWARD

2024 REQUEST FOR NOMINATIONS for State Agency and Federal Agency Wildlife Enforcement Officers to Recognize Outstanding Lifetime Service

NOMINATIONS DUE BY *Friday, January 19, 2024, by 11:59pm Eastern Time*

OVERVIEW

In 1905, a Florida game warden named Guy Bradley became the first wildlife law enforcement agent killed while performing his duties to protect the nation's wildlife. Law enforcement agents like Bradley are essential to virtually every aspect of wildlife conservation, from recovering endangered species to managing waterfowl and big game resources. In honor of Guy Bradley, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation established this lifetime achievement award to recognize individuals for their commitment and performance in the field of wildlife law enforcement.

The Guy Bradley Award will be presented to one state agency and one federal agency officer whose dedication and public service to protecting the nation's natural resources demonstrates outstanding leadership, excellence in implementation, knowledge, and actions that have advanced the cause of wildlife conservation.

AWARD

One state and one federal recipient will receive a check for \$2,500 and a commemorative plaque in recognition of their efforts. Recently retired officers and previously nominated officers are eligible to receive this award. In the event that a recipient cannot accept a cash award, as is the case for federal employees, a donation of \$2,500 will be made in the recipient's name to the organization/project of his or her choice.

SPONSORING AGENCY

Agency Name:

Agency Address:

Contact Person Name:

Contact Person Email:

Contact Person Phone:

NOMINEE'S CONTACT INFORMATION

Full Name:

Job Title:

Office Address:

Email:

Phone:

NOMINEE'S YEARS OF SERVICE

List relevant job positions the Nominee has held and years in each position. (400 word limit)

Colonel Michael M. Weathers began his career in wildlife enforcement with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in 1999 as a Conservation Enforcement Officer. His first assignment was in Chambers County, Alabama, where he served six years. He was promoted to Sergeant in 2005 and served ten years at that rank. As a Sergeant, Colonel Weathers became well known throughout the state among his peers as a superb instructor. His outstanding performance as an Officer and Sergeant earned him recognition by his superiors that allowed him to promote to the rank of Lieutenant in March of 2015 and then to the rank of Captain in October of 2015. In 2016, Colonel Weathers was promoted to the rank of Assistant Chief. While serving as Assistant Chief, his innovative thinking and leadership abilities made him the obvious choice as the next Law Enforcement Section Chief. In 2017, Colonel Weathers was promoted to the rank of Law Enforcement Section Chief where he has continued to excel in his leadership role for the past seven years. In total, Colonel Weathers has almost 25 years of service dedicated to wildlife enforcement and conservation of Alabama's natural resources.

NOMINEE'S CAREER ACHIEVEMENTS

Describe in detail the Nominee's notable performance and accomplishments; especially those related to field work. Please provide specific examples, rather than generalities. (500 word limit)

As a Conservation Enforcement Officer in the field, Colonel Weathers worked tirelessly to serve the public, assist landowners, and serve as an instructor in multiple disciplines.

When performing field work, Colonel Weathers always focused on the most egregious wildlife violations which most often required working at night. From 2004-2014, Colonel Weathers was assigned to Calhoun County where he inherited an out of control night and road-hunting problem at Fort McClellan. During that time, he made over 300 arrests for those type violations alone.

One of the most egregious cases Colonel Weathers made as a field officer was during an undercover operation targeting the interstate transportation of game fish from the areas below Neely Henry and Logan Martin Dams. This operation netted over 5000 pounds of illegally taken saltwater and hybrid striped bass. The violators paid fines and restitution exceeding \$40,000, a portion of which was used to purchase cameras and GPS units for Agency officers. These game fish were being commercially harvested from public waters and sold in restaurants in the Birmingham and Atlanta markets.

In January of 2013, while on patrol, Colonel Weathers located an area in Calhoun County being hunted without landowner permission. Someone had installed a cable to aid in crossing a stream which allowed them to gain easy access to the property. While patrolling this area, Colonel Weathers encountered three subjects who attempted to elude arrest by fleeing on foot. A pursuit ensued which ended with the arrest of the three subjects, the discovery of a clandestine meth lab, a felony arrest for manufacturing, and numerous other drug-related charges.

Where Colonel Weathers truly shines is his devotion to the training of Division officers. Colonel Weathers' desire to keep our officers safe and well-trained has resulted in his repeated use of annual leave to attend advanced training on his personal time. Although these schools were not funded by the Department, the Agency benefited from them as Colonel Weathers modified the skills learned to meet the specific demands of the Agency and incorporate them into the training curriculum.

Colonel Weathers love for instructing and inspiring students has led to numerous instructor certifications throughout his career. An abbreviated list of those certifications he has obtained on behalf of the Agency

includes Advanced Law Enforcement Rapid Response Training (ALERRT), Pressure Point Control Tactics (PPCT), Strategic Self-Defense and Gunfighting Tactics (SSGT), and AERKO, as well as Glock, Colt, Remington, and Beretta armorer schools. He is currently the only certified firearms instructor employed by the Agency to have successfully completed firearms training schools from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the National Rifle Association (NRA), and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers (FLETC). In addition, he has attended and taught numerous courses at Thunder Ranch and the Shootrite Firearms Academy. Colonel Weathers also received a letter of commendation for teaching at the Northeast Alabama Law Enforcement Academy during his off time.

NOMINEE'S DEMONSTRATION OF OUTSTANDING LEADERSHIP

Describe the Nominee's leadership qualities and instances that best represent them. (400 word limit)

While it is difficult to list all leadership qualities displayed by Colonel Weathers, those that stand out the most are Empathy, Integrity, and Vision. Colonel Weathers recognizes employees are real people with real problems in their lives, including work.

Colonel Weathers empathy was on display in 2005 during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina when he volunteered to assist the Agency in Biloxi, Mississippi with security of a 6-10 mile stretch of gulf front property. A former field supervisor stated that Colonel Weathers told him that our Agency should not make this any harder for those affected by the storm, but rather our Agency should be their salvation. Another example of Colonel Weathers empathy occurs at every swearing-in ceremony, where he encourages all family members in attendance to write down his personal phone number. He asks them to contact him directly if any officer is neglecting duties at home by working too much and asks that they contact him to resolve the issue. Colonel Weathers emphasizes that while an officer's duty is to serve the public, family should come first.

Colonel Weathers' integrity has built a level of trust among Agency leaders as well as subordinates. He is a natural leader who inspires others by working hard and serving others without regard for himself. With each promotion, he has handled the responsibility of leadership with respect for the position and those he serves.

Colonel Weathers has always had a vision for the future of conservation resources and has committed much of his time and effort into making the Agency viable for many generations to come. He has the ability to see where the Section is going, where it needs to be, and how to get there, by getting others onboard. An example of this happened in 2020 when Colonel Weathers phased the Hunter Education Unit into the Law Enforcement Section. Colonel Weathers recognized the upward trend of firearm purchases, while hunting license sales were on a steady decline. The acquisition of Hunter Education allowed our Section access to federal funds that can be utilized for the building of archery and shooting ranges throughout the state. To date, these additional monies have allowed the Section access to increased funding for range construction, maintenance and manning of ranges.

NOMINEE'S UNIQUE PROFESSIONAL CONTRIBUTIONS (GOING ABOVE THE CALL OF DUTY)

Describe how the Nominee has demonstrated exceptional performance beyond the duties required by his/her job. Please provide specific examples, rather than generalities. (400 word limit)

The normal span of duties and responsibilities for the Law Enforcement Section Chief are far and wide and require around the clock availability, including all holidays and weekends. Due to the high demands of the job, there is little time available to go above and beyond the normal scope of duty. Colonel Weathers, however, with his high level of dedication and commitment to the Agency, has always found a way to go

above the call of duty to improve Agency operations. Below are some examples where Colonel Weathers has demonstrated his exceptional performance of going above the call of duty.

Over the last two years, Colonel Weathers has selected Agency instructors to attend training schools for De-escalation Techniques and Use-of-Force. This was done in order to better prepare all officers for the ever-changing environment and society that law enforcement officers must operate in. Although training is not required by APOSTC in these areas, Colonel Weathers recognized the long-term positive impact that this additional training would have. In 2024, all officers will be required to complete training in these two areas.

In 2022, Colonel Weathers decided that the Law Enforcement Section would pursue status as an accredited state agency. Soon after the decision, work began on amending and updating current policies in order to meet the standards required by the newly formed North American Wildlife Law Enforcement Accreditation program. Although this is not required of the Agency, Colonel Weathers recognized the need to establish policies that reduce liability for the Section and its officers, increase the effectiveness in the delivery of law enforcement services, and establish policy that make the Section and its officers accountable to the constituency it serves.

Colonel Weathers was instrumental in the transition of Division-issued firearms to more up-to-date systems. In 2023, all Section officers transitioned to the Glock 45 model handgun with red dot sights and weapon-mounted lights. Over the past several years, the Section has also purchased AR-15 rifles equipped with red dot sights and weapon-mounted lights for all officers. The addition of the red-dot sights on the handgun and the rifle immediately had a positive impact as qualification scores improved across the state.

NOMINEE'S INNOVATION (PROGRAM STARTER)

Describe any programs or projects that the Nominee has initiated or improved. (400 word limit)

Colonel Weathers is the innovative source behind the 'Rural Operations for Law Enforcement' program, which was developed and taught to all Alabama DCNR enforcement officers. It was organized for the purpose of teaching outdoor skills to new officers that may not have experience with hunting, fishing, or woodsmanship. The program has since evolved to encompass training for outside law enforcement agencies such as local police departments, Sheriff's departments, local rescue squads, and other state Conservation Law Enforcement agencies. This program focuses on officers' knowledge of tracking skills, tactics for working in impromptu search and rescue teams, and wilderness medical skills.

Colonel Weathers is responsible for the development of firearms classes designed for the ever-growing number of first-time gun purchasers. These classes offer the public an opportunity to learn about firearm safety and marksmanship. The 4-hour training sessions are held at Divisional shooting ranges and are available to anyone who purchases the appropriate license. In the two years since its inception, the majority of the attendees are first time license purchasers.

Colonel Weathers is responsible for the recognition of fallen officers from the Department's 117-year history with the creation of the "Fallen Officer Memorial". On February 20, 2018, the dedication of the memorial wall was attended by family members of fallen officers, all living retired Section Chiefs, dignitaries, and Governor Kay Ivey who spoke at the ceremony.

Colonel Weathers initiated the restructuring of the Departmental Honor Guard into one 24-member statewide unit. This unit includes members from all Divisions within the Department. The restructuring of this unit ensures consistency of all operations at functions that include law enforcement funeral services, color guard, and any other requests for service. Colonel Weathers was instrumental in the purchase of the formal military style uniform and equipment currently utilized by the unit. The DCNR Honor Guard is considered the best in the State and has had a prominent position in the last two Governor's Inaugurations as well as at Alabama's Bicentennial Parade.

Colonel Weathers implemented the restructuring of the Law Enforcement Section's Field Training Officer program. The program is now a comprehensive, yearlong training that ensures officers are ready to adequately protect Alabama's natural resources and serve the public.

NOMINEE'S IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Describe how the Nominee is/has been instrumental in initiating or leading efforts to benefit the local community (e.g. public outreach, community engagement, etc). (400 word limit)

Colonel Weathers has always been passionate about protecting the natural resources of Alabama for future generations and has volunteered his time on numerous occasions to bring the joy of the outdoors and all the resources it has to offer to Alabama's citizens. During his tenure as a field officer and sergeant, Colonel Weathers taught or assisted with over 50 Hunter Education classes, 22 of which he was the lead instructor. The average student ratio for these classes was 41 students. While there is no exact way to know how many students received his tutelage, records indicate over 2000.

Becoming an Outdoors Woman (B.O.W.) is another program that Colonel Weathers has supported and volunteered his time to. He participated in every session of B.O.W. from 1999 up until his promotion to Chief of Enforcement in 2017. Colonel Weathers took a special interest in the firearms instruction at these sessions. The B.O.W. firearm sessions allowed woman to familiarize themselves and become comfortable handling firearms in a safe environment. The interest in his firearms classes became the most requested class of each session and would fill up quicker than others. Many attendants would come again each session, just to gain additional knowledge. However, these sessions were limited to two times annually and had a limit on number of participants. Colonel Weathers got the idea to create a program that husbands and wives could attend together and offer smaller more intimate 4-hour sessions. He was instrumental in developing and implementing programs targeted at helping new and current firearms owners learn to safely use their firearms. These programs are called "Firearms 101" and are offered at Division shooting ranges across the state for free to citizens who possess any Division license.

There aren't enough words to list the many ways that Colonel Weathers has given of himself. However, here are just a few more. During his time in the field of conservation, he has assisted with innumerable Youth Dove Hunts, Disabled Fishing Events, and Youth Fishing Events. He supported "Shop with a Cop" events in which Agency officers partner with Academy Sports in taking Sheriff's Boys and Girls Ranch children shopping for Christmas and to dinner. He directs officers to be part of their communities by participating in as many public events as possible, utilizing these events as opportunities to educate the public on conservation issues and becoming familiar in communities they serve.

NOMINEE'S MENTORING ACTIVITIES

Describe the contributions made by the Nominee to peers and junior officers. (400 word limit)

Colonel Weathers has always been intrinsically motivated in the mentoring of colleagues, and nowhere has that been more evident than when it comes to officer safety. From the beginning of his career, Colonel Weathers has taken special interest in officer training and firearms and has worked diligently at becoming

an expert in these fields. While conducting various training courses throughout the state, it became obvious early in his career that Colonel Weathers was a naturally gifted teacher and mentor. Regardless of whether he is instructing a class in defensive tactics, clearing buildings, firearms, active shooter situations, or in rural operations, he has the ability to connect to all of his students. His patience and demeanor allow students to effectively absorb the material being taught.

Due to the time that he has spent teaching recruits at the Northeast Alabama Law Enforcement Academy, he has played an instrumental part in helping develop numerous law enforcement officers. He has devoted countless hours to mentoring less experienced officers to help them become more effective which in turn allows them to better serve their communities and the State of Alabama.

Because of his commitment to fellow officers, Colonel Weathers combined his love of firearms and passion for officer safety into developing and implementing several training programs for our state's officers. These programs are still being utilized today in molding Agency officers to be an elite group amongst the most well-trained law enforcement officers in the country.

Colonel Weathers consistently makes himself available to all his subordinate supervisors at all hours of the day and night. He advises on everything from how best to deal with personnel issues and field investigations, to how to work with the media and other agencies regarding public relations. He is very intentional with developing his command staff to their fullest potential. Due to his experience as a law enforcement officer and longtime supervisor, his input regarding the practical effects of law and regulation changes is sought out by Departmental and Division leaders, as well as our Legal Section.

ANY OTHER INFORMATION YOU WOULD LIKE TO INCLUDE ABOUT YOUR NOMINEE

Please submit any additional documentation you think would strengthen this nomination form in support of the Nominee.

In the mid-1990's, Colonel Weathers received his education from Jacksonville State University. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in criminal justice, and he minored in English. While attending JSU, Colonel Weathers began his law enforcement career as a dispatcher and was later hired as a patrol officer. Colonel Weathers attended the Northeast Alabama Law Enforcement Academy in Jacksonville during the 109th Session. At the graduation ceremony, he was bestowed the highly prestigious "Top Gun" award which is presented to the officer having the overall highest firearms scores during the session.

In 2013, Colonel Weathers received the Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers' Association, "Officer of the Year" award. This highly coveted and revered award is unique in that the winner is selected by his fellow colleagues.

Colonel Weathers has a passion for preserving the history of Alabama's Conservation Department and the officers who have served. His promotion in 2015 to the rank of Lieutenant required that he work from Division headquarters in Montgomery. Colonel Weathers was surprised to find that much of the Agency's history had never been documented or had been lost. At that time, he made it a priority to begin finding and preserving lost and forgotten memorabilia. Upon his promotion to Chief of Enforcement in 2017, he created a special task force to begin an extensive research campaign that resulted in the documentation of numerous events and donation of historically significant items. After the compilation of a wealth of information, Colonel Weathers began to think of creative ways to preserve and share this information. He partnered with Alabama Conservation Enforcement Officers' Association to provide funding for museum quality display cases, hand crafted shadow boxes, and professionally painted oil portraits. Under his direction, a mini museum was created and contains items such as historic badges, uniforms, newspaper clippings, and many other items of historical significance.

The efforts of Colonel Weathers led to the creation of the “Fallen Officer Memorial” wall which is proudly displayed at the Montgomery office headquarters. The memorial wall displays the portrait, the name, and end of watch, for the 12 officers who lost their lives in the protection of Alabama’s natural resources. A dedication ceremony honoring those 12 brave souls was held on February 20, 2018. Family members of all but two fallen officers were in attendance that day. Despite extensive efforts, no family member was ever located for deputy game warden, Bart Cauley, who was killed on March 19, 1923. The last living relative of game warden, George S. Wilson, who lost his life October 1, 1922, was Ms. Georgette Perry. Ms. Perry was 86 at the time and in frail health. Colonel Weathers arranged to have officers transport Ms. Perry to and from the ceremony, however due to health, she was unable to make the 4-hour trip. Colonel Weathers partnered with the Agency’s Communication and Marketing staff to record the day’s events, and an archival quality DVD of the ceremony was created and sent to each family member of a fallen officer. Colonel Weathers had two officers deliver the DVD to Ms. Perry at her home and share with her the event that she was unable to attend.



SUBMISSION & SUBMISSION ASSISTANCE

Please fill out this form and email it to AFWA Communications Director, Patricia Allen

(palLEN@fishwildlife.org)

For more information or questions about this request for nominations, please contact Patricia Allen.