

March 3, 2006 – **EMBARGO: 6:00 P.M.**

Outstanding wildlife conservationists receive Order of the Bighorn

Edmonton... Six of Alberta's fish and wildlife champions are being honoured today for their exceptional conservation efforts.

David Coutts, Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, announced the names of those chosen as inductees into the Order of the Bighorn, Alberta's highest wildlife conservation award.

Kim Allan (Sherwood Park), Jay Bartsch (Brooks), Tony Blake (Red Deer), Rod Dyck (Drumheller), Dr. Bob Fisher (Medicine Hat) and Jim Potter (Delburne) will become the newest Members of the Order of the Bighorn.

"All Albertans share responsibility for conserving our fish and wildlife resources and stewardship is more important today than ever," said Minister Coutts. "I am pleased that so many residents are actively involved in conservation in every part of Alberta and the Members of the Order of the Bighorn are outstanding role models."

The award recipients were honoured at a gala banquet in Edmonton on March 3. The reception was hosted and co-sponsored by Alberta Sustainable Resource Development, Alberta-Pacific Forest Industries Incorporated, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Devon Canada Corporation, Shell Canada Limited and TransCanada Pipelines Limited.

The Alberta government established the Order of the Bighorn in 1982 to recognize outstanding contributions to fish and wildlife conservation by individuals, organizations and corporations. Customarily, recipients have demonstrated a commitment to conservation over many years. Including the six awards presented today, 93 of the honours have been awarded since the Order was established. Alberta's official mammal, the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep, was the inspiration behind the name of the award.

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Backgrounders attached

Media inquiries may be directed to:

John Lear
Public Affairs Officer
Communications
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Edmonton
(780) 427-8636

Dave England
Co-ordinator, Order of the Bighorn Awards
Fish and Wildlife Division
Alberta Sustainable Resource Development
Edmonton
(780) 427-1139

To call toll-free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

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Biographies

Kim Allan (Sherwood Park)

Since 1989, Kim Allan has tirelessly cared for thousands of injured and orphaned wildlife through the society she created, the Alberta Bird Rescue Association, which has grown from a staff of one to become a diverse network known as the Wildlife Rehabilitation Society of Edmonton.

More recently, Kim founded a wildlife hotline to allow people to report concerns about injured and orphaned wildlife; today, the hotline receives well over 4,000 calls a year. With the Edmonton Institution for Women, she is also the architect of a unique program that involves female prison inmates in caring for baby birds.

Kim's many other efforts include developing several successful fundraising events for the society, and promoting understanding and respect for urban wildlife by delivering presentations at schools, post-secondary institutions and clubs. In 2005, she worked tirelessly for many weeks as a key leader among volunteers on the recovery of hundreds of waterfowl affected by the Wabamun Lake oil spill.

Jay Bartsch (Brooks)

In 22 years of service to date with Ducks Unlimited Canada, Jay Bartsch has been instrumental in the success of a large number of habitat conservation projects recognized both nationally and globally.

Through the Brooks chapter of Ducks Unlimited Canada, Jay has raised over one million dollars for habitat development projects, and the 190-plus projects he has been involved with have secured over 382,000 acres of crucial wildlife habitat for future generations of Albertans.

Jay's work includes several projects that transformed entire landscapes using irrigation water, providing multiple benefits to both agriculture and wildlife.

A former teacher, Jay continues to contribute to his community and conservation efforts in general through education, including his involvement in the hunter mentoring program and Ducks Unlimited Canada's youth education program.

Tony Blake (Red Deer)

A leader and participant in Alberta's fish and wildlife community for nearly two decades, Tony is a champion of conservation efforts who serves as an excellent role model for all Albertans.

Tony led the effort to designate the bull trout as Alberta's signature fish species in 1995 while serving as president of Trout Unlimited Canada's Central Alberta Chapter. Two years later, as president of Trout Unlimited Canada for all Alberta, he organized the first fish rescue program to save fish trapped in dewatered irrigation canals.

Since stepping down from the Trout Unlimited executive, Tony has continued to be involved in conservation issues through the Red Deer River Naturalists organization, and with the Alberta Conservation Association's Advisory Committee.

Rod Dyck (Drumheller)

A life-long conservationist, Rod Dyck joined the Alberta Fish and Game Association in the mid-1980s and has since served terms as Junior Vice-President and President of the organization.

Under his stewardship, the AFGA's Wildlife Trust Fund secured more habitat in one year than had been set aside in all previous years combined.

Rod has contributed to fish and wildlife management by raising public awareness of a wide range of topics on behalf of the AFGA, including grizzly bear hunting, outfitter allocations, public land sales and access for hunters, cervid harvest preserves and game ranching, among others.

Rod's active participation in fish and wildlife management has also involved serving on a number of committees over the years, including the Alberta Conservation Association's Regional Advisory Committee, Wildlife Enhancement Committee and the Outfitter Allocation Committee. He has also been a member of the Hunting Futures Committee of the Hunting for Tomorrow Foundation and is a certified hunter education instructor.

Dr. Bob Fisher (Medicine Hat)

Dr. Bob Fisher has made tremendous contributions to wildlife conservation in southwestern Alberta over the past 25 years, donating hundreds of hours of expertise and absorbing thousands of dollars of veterinary expense without requesting compensation or formal recognition.

Notably, Dr. Fisher and staff at Valley Pet Hospital in Medicine Hat have never turned away an animal brought in for attention. They have accepted injured wildlife from the public, city police, bylaw officers and Fish and Wildlife staff.

Dr. Fisher and staff at Valley Pet Hospital have provided invaluable expertise and advice to Fish and Wildlife staff regarding handling and treatment of injured and distressed animals. Dr. Fisher has also supplied X-ray and post-mortem examination services in support of Fish and Wildlife investigations of suspected poisoning and poaching cases.

Jim Potter (Delburne)

Jim Potter's life-long commitment to conserving wildlife and wildlife habitat started over 40 years ago when he began experimenting with developing artificial nest boxes for cavity-nesting waterfowl.

After erecting about 350 nesting boxes in the Pine Lake area on his own initiative and at his own expense, Jim worked with the North American Waterfowl Management Plan to install another 400 nesting boxes in the Buffalo Lake Moraine area and today maintains over 1,200 nest boxes in Central Alberta.

As well, Jim has educated more than 150 landowners about the benefits of maintaining wooded habitats for both wildlife and landowners, and in over 100 presentations to youth groups, he has imparted the importance of conserving suitable habitat for wildlife.

In addition, Jim has worked through the Hunting for Tomorrow Foundation to help introduce new hunters to the sport.

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For information about former Order of the Bighorn recipients, visit the website of Alberta Sustainable Resource Development -- <http://www3.gov.ab.ca/srd/fw/oba/>

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