

## **National Wild Turkey Federation's 2008 Wild Turkey Woodlands Award Winners**

### **National Award Winner**

#### **Paul P. Mechling, Pierpont, Ohio**

Dr. Mechling and his family own over 580 acres in both Ohio and New York. The Snowy Oak Tree Farm makes up a majority of that acreage in Pierpont, Ohio. Dr. Mechling has been an NWTF member since 1979, has served on the Ohio State Board, and founded the Grand River Chapter in 1984. In 1988 he became a Life Member and has served on the Ohio Division of Wildlife (ODW) Wild Turkey Advisory Committee. In 1994, he received the NWTF's Latham Award. He also recently hosted a Wildlife Habitat Field Day on his property. He is a local zoning board chairman, an Ashtabula County Soil and Water Conservation District Supervisor, and is a member of numerous conservation organizations. Dr. Mechling also exposes the public to wise conservation through his two veterinary clinics.

All of Dr. Mechling's properties are Certified Tree Farms and have professional management plans to guide him. Dr. Mechling has taken advantage of several Farm Bill Programs, FLEP and EQIP, to assist with implementation of various practices. Management practices include:

- Conducted over 225 acres of timber stand improvements favoring mast producing trees.
- Planted over 10,000 hardwoods, conifers and shrubs beneficial to wildlife.
- Maintains annual and perennial food plots.
- Installed a pond and a 10.5 acre wetland including duck boxes and islands for waterfowl nesting.
- Created and maintained forest openings and woodland roads. Included erosion control devices and wildlife plantings.
- Uses no-till planting technique and has installed grassed waterways to prevent erosion on cultivated lands.
- Provided a wild turkey release site in 1991 in Perry County, OH.
- Has controlled invasive plants on 25 acres.
- Practices Quality Deer Management.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Runner-up Award Winner**

#### **Chris Massie, Mt. Erie, Illinois**

Mr. Massie and his family own over 800 acres in Wayne County, Illinois. He is a third generation farmer and livestock owner. He has been an active NWTF member for 10 years, serving as a sponsor member, committee member, and on several JAKES/WITO events committees. Mr. Massie is active in the FFA and 4-H. He also serves on his local electric coop advisory board, his township board of trustees, and as a highway commissioner. He uses his influence in the local community to promote wise conservation by hosting youth hunts, demonstrating management practices and allowing others to use his equipment.

Mr. Massie uses NRCS programs, CRP and WHIP, to implement many of his management practices. He has management plans from both the NWTF and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to guide him. Management practices include:

- Planted over 33,000 hard and soft mast producing trees and shrubs.
- Installed field borders and native warm season grasses in over 75 acres and maintains using prescribed fire.
- Uses grasses filter strips and waterways to control erosion.
- Installed over 20 acres of permanent wildlife habitat in both annual and perennial plantings.
- Uses rotational grazing in his pastures to minimize cattle impacts on wildlife.
- Installed barn owl (listed as endangered in IL) nesting boxes that are being utilized, as well as over 50 bluebird and wood duck nesting boxes.
- Has created brush piles for rabbits and small mammals and maintains early successional habitat.
- Conducts invasive species control and timber stand improvements.
- Maintains riparian buffers and wetland areas for wildlife.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> Runner-up Award Winner**

### **Slade Lail, Duluth, Georgia**

Dr. Lail owns and manages over 350 acres, known as Plumbdent Farms, in Hancock County, Georgia. He is an active NWTF member and has hosted a Wild Turkey Woodlands Field Day, recently testified in front of Congress, at the NWTF's request, in support of EQIP and other Farm Bill Programs, and hosted the Georgia Governor, Sonny Perdue, to a successful turkey hunt last spring. Dr. Lail is also active with other conservation organizations and was recently awarded the Georgia Tree Farmer of the Year, the Certified Forest Steward of the Year and the Hancock County Conservationist of the Year. He is also a member of his local Rotary Club and on the Steering Committee of a local hospital foundation.

Plumbdent Farms has been the site of various outreach hunts and fishing days exposing youth from urban Duluth to the outdoors and used as a demonstration area for professional conservation training. Dr. Lail uses his Forest Stewardship Program management plan to help guide his long term conservation objectives and uses several NRCS programs, EQIP, FLEP and WHIP, and other state run programs to implement practices. These practices include:

- Established riparian buffers and created several low-water crossings to prevent soil erosion and maintain water quality.
- Installation of wood duck nest boxes.
- Planted over 1,500 longleaf pine (a high priority habitat in the southeast) and soft and hard mast trees.
- Uses prescribed fire and discing to maintain early successional habitat.
- Maintains year-round food plots with annual and perennial plantings.
- Performs timber stand improvements including invasive species control.

## **Outstanding Land Steward Winner**

### **Dr. Clifton Higgins, Lake City, Arkansas**

Dr. Higgins owns 200 acres and with an adjoining 150 acres owned by a friend they manage the property as the J&H Hunting Club in Sharp County, Arkansas. Dr. Higgins has been an NWTF member for over 10 years and is a competitive turkey caller. He's a sponsor member and was recently elected as his local chapter president. Dr. Higgins recently opened his property up for a JAKES event that was attended by over 90 youngsters. For the past two years, he's helped organize "Hunting for a Cure", a youth turkey hunt held in Tennessee to raise money for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Last spring's event raised over \$130,000. He's also organized an adult/youth archery shoot at his local church.

Dr. Higgins enlisted the aid of a wildlife biologist to develop a management plan to guide the vision for the property. Dr. Higgins has recently enrolled in the NRCS program, WHIP, for financial assistance to implement conservation practices. Those practices include:

- Fescue eradication.
- Timber stand improvement on over 70 acres.
- Using prescribed fire in over 140 acres.
- The installation of a 1 acre pond.
- Conversion of wildlife openings to native warm season grasses.
- Installation and maintenance of annual and perennial food plots.
- Maintenance of early successional habitat.