

# National Wetlands Awards

*Honoring Excellence in Wetlands Conservation*

May 21, 2015 • U.S. Botanic Garden • Washington, DC

# Celebrating 26 Years of Protecting and Restoring Our Nation's Wetlands

*“The marsh, to him who enters it in a receptive mood, holds, besides mosquitoes and stagnation—melody, the mystery of unknown waters, and the sweetness of Nature undisturbed by man.”*

—William Beebe

Having collectively restored, researched, protected, and educated the public on thousands of wetlands nationwide, the seven recipients of the 2015 National Wetlands Awards have truly made a difference in protecting and improving these vital natural resources that filter pollutants from our waterways, recharge our aquifers, provide essential habitat to wildlife, buffer coastal storms, reduce the threat of floods, and protect biodiversity. They are inspirations to us all.

Since 1989, the National Wetlands Awards program has honored individuals who have demonstrated extraordinary commitment to our nation's wetlands. The recipients provide wonderful examples of how individual citizens across the country can—and do—make a difference in wetlands conservation and restoration efforts.

The program is administered by the Environmental Law Institute and supported by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Forest Service, NOAA Fisheries, and the Federal Highway Administration. ELI coordinates the awards program, while our federal agency supporters provide financial support, serve on the selection committee, and/or participate in the ceremony.

# 2015 Award Recipients

## Conservation and Restoration

**THOMAS R. BIEBIGHAUSER**

Wetland Restoration & Training LLC  
Morehead, Kentucky

## Education and Outreach

**DR. JACQUELINE COMITO**

Iowa State University  
Ames, Iowa

## Science Research

**DR. STUART E.G. FINDLAY**

Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies  
Millbrook, New York

## State, Tribal, and Local Program Development

**DAVID L. DAVIS**

Virginia Department of Environmental Quality  
Richmond, Virginia

## Landowner Stewardship

**MARY & JAY HARDWICK**

Hardwick Planting Company & Somerset Plantation  
Newellton, Louisiana

## Wetland Community Leader

**BARBARA “MAKA’ALA” A. KA’AUMOANA**

Hanalei Watershed Hui  
Hanalei, Hawaii

# Biographies

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## *Conservation and Restoration*



**Thomas R. Biebighauser**  
*Wetland Restoration & Training LLC*  
Morehead, Kentucky

Thomas R. Biebighauser has been dedicated to wetland conservation, restoration, and establishment for over 33 years. He has restored over 300 wetlands since his retirement from the U.S. Forest Service in 2013. As a wildlife biologist, wetland ecologist, and founder of Wetland Restoration and Training LLC (home to the Center for Wetland and Stream Restoration), Biebighauser has taught thousands of individuals how to restore wetlands by instructing hands-on wetland restoration workshops in hundreds of communities. He designs and teaches numerous workshops, training sessions, and college-level courses on wetlands restorations—his restoration techniques have been replicated by over 10,000 students, biologists, land managers, engineers, and private land owners. He has worked to pioneer a multitude of techniques for restoring wetlands, including the use of groundwater dams and aquatic-safe liners. Biebighauser has successfully restored and established over 1,700 wetlands in 21 states, two Canadian Provinces, New Zealand, and Taiwan.

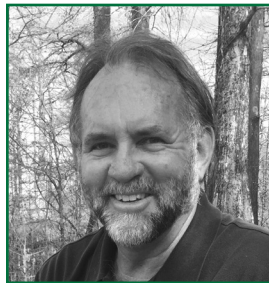
## *Education and Outreach*



**Dr. Jacqueline Comito**  
*Iowa State University*  
Ames, Iowa

Dr. Jacqueline Comito, an anthropologist, musician, and video producer, has been involved in wetlands education and outreach for just five years, but in that short time has produced an impressive body of high-caliber work. She is the director of two outreach and education programs at Iowa State University—Water Rocks! and Iowa Learning Farms. Her creativity and vision have propelled these programs to become highly successful and often requested across Iowa. Since 2005, she has partnered with numerous state organizations and federal agencies to help implement the Iowa Learning Farms, a statewide conservation demonstration and outreach program to promote water conservation. In 2013, she developed and launched Water Rocks!, an entertaining and engaging youth water education program, which utilizes art and science to teach over 15,000 youth about the importance of water and wetlands. She also oversaw the development of a fleet of three interactive, mobile learning centers called “Conservation Stations,” which have attended 389 events and engaged 51,000 people in natural resource education.

## *Landowner Stewardship*



**Mary & Jon “Jay” Hardwick**  
*Hardwick Planting Company & Somerset Plantation*  
Newellton, Louisiana

Mary and Jon “Jay” Hardwick are partners in Hardwick Planting Company, which operates on Somerset Plantation, a large family partnership in Newellton, LA. Somerset Plantation is dedicated to achieving and promoting balanced farm ecosystems that are both productive and sustainable. Somerset, led by the Hardwicks, has restored over 450 acres of wetlands on the large family farm, including taking sensitive land out of production along Bayou DuRosset. They have partnered with numerous state and federal agencies to promote sustainable agriculture and conservation methods. Somerset regularly hosts educational tours and workshops, utilizing the farm as a model to demonstrate wetland restoration, crop science, and conservation techniques to both the public and representatives from federal and state agencies.

# Biographies

## *State, Tribal, and Local Program Development*



**David L. Davis**

*Virginia Department of  
Environmental Quality*  
Richmond, Virginia

David L. Davis is the director of the Office of Wetlands and Stream protection at Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ). He has played an essential leadership role in the evolution of Virginia's wetland program. In 2000, he was nominated to serve on VDEQ's Technical Advisory Committee to draft regulations implementing new state wetland laws. A year later, he joined the staff as a wetlands ecologist, and then, in 2006, became the director. In 2012, he was appointed to the Certification Review Committee for the Society of Wetland Scientists-Professional Certification Program and he recently completed a second term as Chair of the Association of State Wetland Managers Board of Directors. He has worked to build bridges with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to ensure that Virginia has a seamless state-federal wetland regulatory program. His experience in both the field and as a consultant has enabled him to proactively address high-priority issues with concerned stakeholders. Today, Virginia's wetland program has become one of the most comprehensive in the country and is recognized as a model for other states.

## *Science Research*



**Dr. Stuart E.G. Findlay**

*Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies*  
Millbrook, New York

Dr. Stuart E.G. Findlay is a senior scientist at the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies. His research over the past 25 years on the Hudson River has benefitted the 10 million people who depend on the river for their drinking water and recreation. He has contributed to over 100 papers on freshwater ecology and restoration, focusing on the ecological functions of several near-shore habitats, with tidal freshwater wetlands a particular interest. He was instrumental in the creation of the Hudson River Environmental Conditions Observing System and designed an interpretive display at the Hudson State Historic Park that is visited by nearly 500,000 people annually. He is also dedicated to mentoring and training the next generation of scientists through his involvement with the Research Experience for Undergraduate program, a volunteer monitoring program for submerged aquatic vegetation, and by lecturing at numerous universities. He also serves on advisory committees for the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, NOAA's Research Reserve, and EPA.

## *Wetland Community Leader*



**Barbara "Maka'ala"  
A. Ka'aumoana**

*Hanalei Watershed Hui*  
Hanalei, Hawaii

Barbara "Maka'ala" A. Ka'aumoana is the executive director of the Hanalei Watershed Hui, a community-based, nonprofit focused on the stewardship of the natural, cultural, and economic resources of the Hanalei Bay Watershed. For over 20 years, her work has highlighted the connections between upland, wetland, and near-shore resources critical to the subsistence, recreational, cultural, and economic needs of the community. With the designation of the Hanalei as an American Heritage River, she facilitated the collaboration of the community, government, and the private sector in the development of the Hanalei Watershed Action Plan and advocated for a community-led process for research and planning. The iconic Hanalei River valley encompasses nearly 350 acres of wetland impoundments that produce over 80% of Hawaii's taro production and provide critical habitat for five species of Hawaii's endangered wetland birds. She has engaged the community in stewardship through the development of a Watershed Management Plan, a Makai (ocean) Watch program, a Community Disaster Resilience Plan, a mobile science/education van, and the annual publication of the *Hanalei Moon and Tide Calendar*.

# Thomas R. Biebighauser

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*Biebighauser demonstrating during a wetland restoration workshop.  
Photo credit: April Anderson*

“We have the technology to build wetlands that should last forever.”

—Thomas R. Biebighauser



*Biebighauser building a wetland at SLC Charter School in Ben Lomond, California.  
Photo credit: Robin Annschild*

“Wetlands are fascinating places for students to learn about their environment. Every school should have one or two!”

—Thomas R. Biebighauser

“Farmers have been draining and filling wetlands for hundreds of years. It’s great to see they’re now working to restore them.”

—Thomas R. Biebighauser



*Biebighauser instructing a wetland restoration workshop. Photo credit: April Anderson*

# Dr. Jacqueline Comito



*Dr. Comito videotaping at a wetland in Iowa.*

“I have entered into a love affair with wetlands. It would be great for us if everyone could experience wetlands, but that is not the best thing for wetlands. So, we have to create ways to convey the love and attachment to them, their importance to our survival, in a classroom or at a community event. I am speaking from the heart, and I truly do want to see if through music, stories, sounds, photographs, and fun if I can inspire that love in others.”

—Dr. Jacqueline Comito

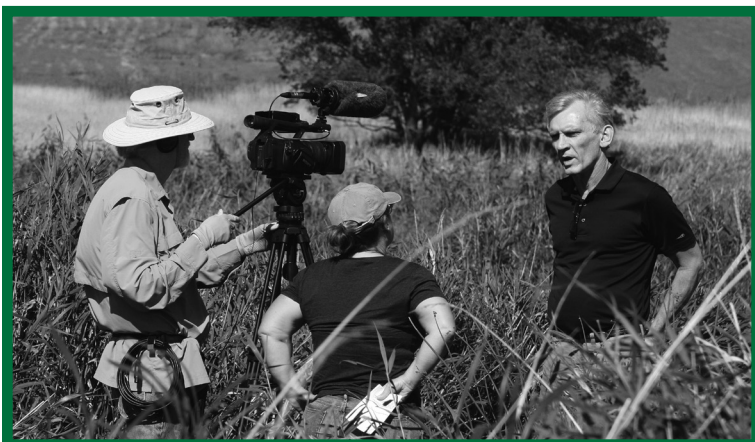
“The long-term health of our land, water, and especially wetlands rests in our youth, the future decisionmakers. We use music, science, math, art, and technology as the means of reminding students that water and wetlands are essential to life.”

—Dr. Jacqueline Comito



*Dr. Comito leading students in a game of Wetland Bingo as a part of their educational module The Wonderful World of Wetlands.*

*Dr. Comito, along with videographer Jon Anderson, interviewing wetlands ecologist Dr. Bill Crumpton for the award-winning documentary Incredible Wetlands.*



“Beyond the water quality and biodiversity value of wetlands, there is a spiritual connection that humans get from wetlands.”

—Dr. Jacqueline Comito

# Dr. Stuart E.G. Findlay

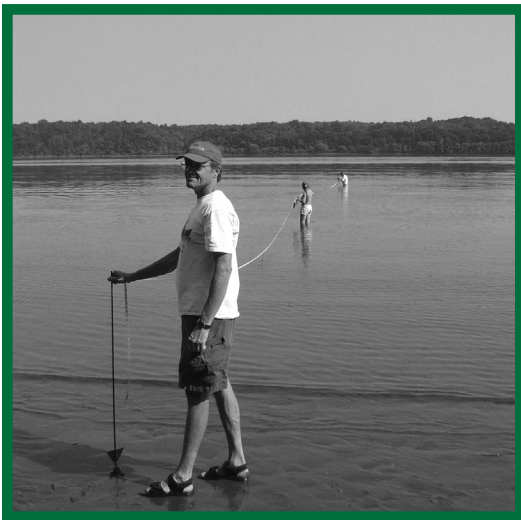
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“Predicting the future of our wetlands in the face of climate change presents a tremendous challenge for the scientific community. We need to challenge our baseline assumptions and train the next generation of scientists in the collaborative, data-driven research that will ultimately determine the fate of these essential and threatened ecosystems.”

—Dr. Stuart E.G. Findlay

*Findlay surveying a constructed shoreline on the Hudson River. Photo credit: Cary Institute*



“Effective environmental management relies on getting the science right. But that’s just the first step. Putting science into action requires taking multiple viewpoints on a set of facts into consideration. Achieving the best results is often a balancing act among competing needs.”

—Dr. Stuart E.G. Findlay

*Findlay setting a transect across the shallows. Photo credit: Cary Institute*

“When working on a natural resource, there are community stakeholders. Reaching these audiences requires investing time in science communication. As an ecologist, this translation takes effort and practice, but it is essential to ensuring that current science underpins stewardship.”

—Dr. Stuart E.G. Findlay



*Findlay helping a group of High School teachers prepare to sample water quality in Piermont Marsh on the Hudson. Photo credit: Nordica Holochuk*



# David L. Davis

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*Davis along the South River in Waynesboro, VA. Photo credit: Renee Bishop*

“One basic fact of biology is often forgotten—every living thing needs water. If we keep forgetting this, we’ll reach a point where it won’t matter if we remember it!”

—David L. Davis

“My professional time is often spent bridging the gap between wetland science and wetland policy; balancing different perspectives and expectations for managing wetland resources; and seeking practical, outcome-based solutions when conflicts arise. A strong economy and good environmental stewardship are not mutually exclusive goals. In fact, I believe they go hand-in-hand and that our society can simultaneously achieve both goals. But, to achieve these goals, we need to change our paradigm that it’s either this or that. We need to bring back more collaborative thinking and understanding to the conversation.”

—David L. Davis

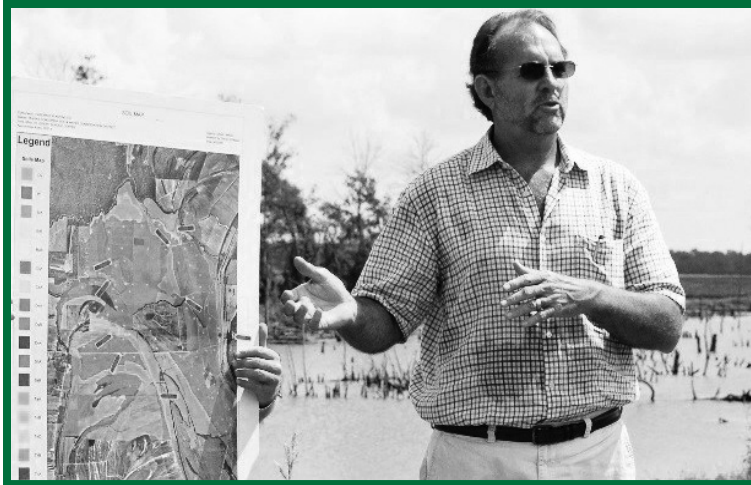
“One of the most important aspects of my job is education. Reminding people that we are intricately connected to our surrounding environment is the key to greater awareness and understanding.”

—David L. Davis



*Davis collecting field data with Michelle Henickeck in Augusta County, VA. Photo credit: Mike Dowd*

# Mary & Jon “Jay” Hardwick



*Jay Hardwick discussing farm soil types in front of newly constructed wetland with the Conservation Reserve Program restored boards.*

“As a farmer, I have come to recognize a broader view of what can be considered agricultural resources. Not only seed, fuel, fertilizer, labor, and machinery are resources; but, also the macro and micro animal kingdom along with archeology, history, culture, and the aesthetics of the farm as resources.”

—Jon “Jay” Hardwick

“We have come to view our stewardship of the family farm as caretaker of all the landscape resources. And, being a caretaker suggests caring in a manner that is right. It’s an ethical commitment of stewardship for all resources that becomes the foundation of a sustainable agriculture.”

—Mary Hardwick



*Mary Hardwick looking at Louisiana wild Copper Iris in a maintained forested wetlands.*

*Part of a Conservation Reserve Program contract to restore riparian buffer on former agricultural lands along a bayou.*



“The American family farm can be an exemplary model of stewardship and influence to help address some of today’s environmental and sustainable concerns and issues.”

—Mary Hardwick

# Barbara “Maka’ala” A. Ka’auomoana

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*Ka'auomoana working with Hawaii State officials and community members to establish the first subsistence fishery area in Hawaii.*

*“An island perspective highlights vulnerabilities and possibilities. The scale of our work is manageable, community by community, village by village, watershed by watershed, but in the larger view of an archipelago, our ability to manage our resources and bolster resilience is real. Individually, and together, these communities are restoring the traditions and future of their places.”*

*—Barbara “Maka’ala” A. Ka’auomoana*

*Ka'auomoana facilitating community/government planning process for the state program Makai (ocean) Watch, which provides place-based knowledge and enforcement support of resource management.*



*Working with Kua 'Aina Ulu 'Auamo, Ka'auomoana provides encouragement, experience, and support to community initiatives to manage their resources.*



*“The challenges facing communities and government are not different. They are the same. Working together, place-based solutions and real resilience are possible.”*

*—Barbara “Maka’ala” A. Ka’auomoana*

*All photos courtesy of the Hanelei Watershed Hui.*

*The Environmental Law Institute would like to thank the members of the 2015 Selection Committee for their generous service!*

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ELI has been advancing the dialogue on wetland law, science, and policy since 1978. In addition to the Awards, ELI publishes the *National Wetlands Newsletter*, conducts research, and administers conferences and seminars on wetland protection. For more information on the National Wetlands Awards program, visit our website at [www.nationalwetlandsawards.org](http://www.nationalwetlandsawards.org).