

Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame to Welcome Mike Conlin, Jim Smith and Bob Wilkins

August 20 2020 11:11 AM



SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The Illinois Conservation Foundation (ICF) Board of Directors today announced that Mike Conlin, Jim Smith, and Bob Wilkins have been selected for induction into the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame.

The formal inductions of Conlin, Smith, and Wilkins – along with the inductions of Diane and Doug Oberhelman, who were named to the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame last November – will occur during a ceremony at the Illinois Conservation Foundation’s 25th Anniversary Gala April 21, 2021 at the Union League Club in Chicago.

“The Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame recognizes individuals for their exemplary service in and commitments to improving conservation efforts and outdoor recreation opportunities in Illinois – and Mike Conlin, Jim Smith, and Bob Wilkins have helped set the pace on conservation leadership for years,” said Colleen Callahan, chair, Illinois Conservation Foundation Board of Directors and director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). “Those who enjoy fishing and hunting can thank Mike, Jim,

and Bob for working to ensure that Illinois is and will continue to be a great place to spend time outdoors.”

Michael W. Conlin, Auburn

Mike Conlin retired from a distinguished 38-year career with the Illinois Department of Conservation and IDNR in 2009 having served as a fisheries biologist, chief of the Division of Fisheries for 30 years, and director of the IDNR Office of Resource Conservation. Conlin served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Africa from 1964 to 1966 prior to studying at Eastern Illinois University where he graduated with degrees in zoology and aquatic biology.

While managing the Division of Fisheries, Conlin initiated expansion of the state fish hatcheries; enhanced monitoring and assessment of fish populations; began a fish contaminant monitoring program in cooperation with the IEPA; developed the state’s popular catchable trout fishing program and Illinois Urban Fishing Program; promoted agreements allowing management assistance and public access to non-state owned waters for fishing; and, worked to increase federal and state funding for fisheries programs.

Jim Smith, Morris

Bob Wilkins, Shorewood

Avid sportsmen and volunteer IDNR Safety Education instructors Jim “Smitty” Smith and Bob Wilkins, along with Amanda Ringness and Jim’s wife Kim Smith, founded TEACH Outdoors — Tradition, Education, Adventure, Conservation, and Habitat — in 2016 to provide outdoor recreation opportunities to youth and their families and veterans.

Their efforts have included sponsoring fishing derbies, hosting wood duck box and bat box building and placement events, and waterfowl education seminars. They partnered with the Grundy County Rod and Gun Club to install an archery range, promoted youth shooting sports activities, and organized a youth council to promote participation and leadership skills for kids interested in the outdoors. A new TEACH Outdoors headquarters and archery range being developed in 2020 on a five-acre Grundy County site will allow for expanded programming when COVID-19 protocols allow.

Since 2002, the ICF has recognized Illinoisans for their significant contributions and unparalleled dedication in preserving, promoting, enhancing or supporting natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities with induction into the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame.

The Illinois Conservation Foundation is an IRS 501 (c) (3) not-for-profit corporation established in 1995 to support the programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. For more information on the Illinois Outdoor Hall of Fame and the ICF Gala on April 21, 2021, check the ICF website at www.ilconservation.org.