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Secretary Salazar Announces Presentation of Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award to U.S. Office of Surface Mining

WASHINGTON, D.C.--Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced that Interior's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement is the recipient of the first Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award in recognition of OSM's Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative.

The Secretary's announcement came in follow-up to yesterday's national celebration in Washington, D.C., by Environment for the Americas, home to International Migratory Bird Day.

"I commend the Office of Surface Mining for its leadership in establishing and implementing the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative," Secretary Salazar said. "This project is helping restore forest habitat that is vital for countless neo-tropical migratory birds and other wildlife while improving the quality of life for many communities in Appalachia. Moreover, this OSM initiative has fostered partnerships that will further the conservation of migratory birds for generations to come."

The Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds, which is led by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and composed of other federal agencies with migratory bird responsibilities, chose the winner of the award. The award was presented to OSM by FWS Deputy Director Dan Ashe at an event yesterday evening at the Dumbarton House in Washington.

"The presentation of the 2011 Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award at the International Migratory Bird Day celebration and recognition event in the nation's capital reflects the importance of OSM and their partners' work to educate the public and conserve

migratory birds – public awareness and concern are crucial components of migratory bird conservation,” said Susan Bonfield, executive director of Environment for the Americas.

Created by OSM in 2004, the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative focuses on restoring forests where deforestation by surface coal mining has occurred. These areas include the Appalachian breeding range of neo-tropical migratory song birds, notably the Cerulean Warbler, which depends on intact interior forests.

Under the leadership of OSM and the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative, the surface mining industry has planted about 70 million trees on about 103,000 acres of mined land that might have otherwise been reclaimed to grasslands with dense ground cover.

“I am honored to accept this first-ever Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award on behalf of OSM, the Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative, and our partners,” said OSM Director Joseph Pizarchik. “ARRI’s work clearly demonstrates how government agencies working cooperatively can create effective environmental protection programs that benefit everyone. More importantly, programs like ARRI also develop the talents of hard-working volunteers, many of whom have chosen careers in the environmental field.”

The Appalachian Regional Reforestation Initiative has attracted significant international attention. It is serving as an organizational model for other groups across the world seeking to restore disturbed landscapes with reforestation on a regional scale.

In addition to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Council for the Conservation of Migratory Birds includes representation from the Departments of the Interior, State, Commerce, Agriculture, Transportation, Energy, Defense, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. It is open to all federal agencies whose activities may directly or indirectly affect migratory bird populations.

International Migratory Bird Day, the signature program of Environment for the Americas, is held each year in partnership with the Fish and Wildlife Service and many other federal agencies and conservation organizations. This “day” is recognized throughout May in North America and in the fall in Latin America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. IMBD is the only international education program that highlights and celebrates the migration of nearly 350 species of migratory birds between nesting habitats in North America and non-breeding grounds in Latin America, Mexico, and the Caribbean. Each year, IMBD explores a different aspect of migratory birds and their conservation. To learn more about IMBD celebrations across the Americas, visit <http://www.birdday.org/> as well as the Fish and Wildlife Service’s IMBD page at <http://www.fws.gov/birds.imbd/>.

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