

Dear Team Interior,

Each month, I will highlight individuals or teams from our Department of the Interior family who have received the Secretary's Commendation Award for going above and beyond to serve their communities and for exemplifying one of my 10 priorities:

1. Create a conservation stewardship legacy second only to Teddy Roosevelt.
2. Sustainably develop our energy and natural resources.
3. Restore trust and be a good neighbor.
4. Ensure tribal sovereignty means something.
5. Increase revenues to support the Department and national interests.
6. Protect our people and the border.
7. Strike a regulatory balance.
8. Modernize our infrastructure.
9. Reorganize the Department for the next 100 years.
10. Achieve our goals and lead our team forward.

Today, I would like to shine the spotlight on a team from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that helped save the economy of North Carolina's Outer Banks. That probably seems like an overstatement, but it is true.

In late July of this year, power to Hatteras and Ocracoke Islands was accidentally cut during a construction mishap. Cables that connect mainland power to island customers were severed in such a way that it would likely take weeks—possibly months—to repair.

For Outer Banks islands just hitting the peak of the tourism season, this accident was crippling.

Just 2 weeks without power could put some out of business. After a mandatory evacuation order, 50,000 visitors were resigned to take their business elsewhere. Our own Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge, just below Oregon Inlet, was only open to local bird watchers and outdoor enthusiasts.

Fortunately, employees of the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Complex (the administrative grouping for Pea Island NWR) took quick action to work with the North Carolina Department of Transportation and Cape Hatteras Electric Cooperative, returning power to the Outer Banks in just a few days. They figured out what needed to be done quickly and cleared the way for construction and repairs to get started immediately.

On August 3, power was restored, prompting visitors to return and area tourist attractions, including the Pea Island NWR, to reopen.

This is an excellent example of how we can be good neighbors to the communities that surround public lands. When the Alligator River staff stepped up to help the people of North Carolina, they did more than restore electricity. They restored hope to a community that would surely have suffered without their aid.

In light of these actions, I have presented the Secretary's Commendation Award to the following Department employees: Art Beyer, Assistant Refuge Manager, Pea Island NWR; Rebekah Martin, Project Leader, Alligator River NWR Complex; Rebecca Harrison, Supervisory Wildlife Biologist, Alligator River NWR Complex; and Scott Lanier, Deputy Complex Manager, Alligator River NWR.

In addition, you may recall last month's recognition of the inspirational team at the Charles M. Russell NWR in northeast Montana. I have also presented Secretary's Commendation Awards to: Paul Santavy, Project Leader; Matt DeRosier, Deputy Project Leader; Paula Gouse, Wildlife Refuge Specialist, Fort Peck; Aaron Johnson, Station Manager, Fort Peck; Mike Assenmacher, Station Manager, Sand Creek; Dan Harrell, Wildlife Refuge Specialist, Sand Creek; Jody Jones, Wildlife Refuge Specialist, Sand Creek; and Shaylene Piedalue, Wildlife Refuge Specialist, Fort Peck.

Thank you for all you do. Keep making us proud.

Ryan Zinke