



FLORIDA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

Affiliated With National Wildlife Federation

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FLORIDA WILDLIFE FEDERATION NAMES MATT ARESKO WILDLIFE CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR FOR 2004

Matt Aresco has been named as the Florida Wildlife Federation's Wildlife Conservationist of the Year. The award will be presented at the Federation's 67th Annual Conservation Awards Banquet to be held in the Jacksonville area. As part of one of the oldest conservation awards programs in Florida, individuals and groups have been chosen from nominations made to the Federation's board of directors. Award honorees are selected for their dedicated efforts on behalf of Florida's fish and wildlife resources.

The Florida Wildlife Federation had to postpone its Annual Conservation Awards Banquet scheduled for September 11 in Jacksonville, due to Hurricane Frances. The event will be rescheduled in the near future.

While earning his Ph.D. in biology from Florida State University, Matt Aresco has led the way in saving more than 8,000 freshwater turtles in the Tallahassee area. Early in 2000, a pre-existing sinkhole within Lake Jackson opened up and drained the lake, causing a mass exodus of turtles and other creatures toward nearby Little Lake Jackson. However, US Hwy 27 was in the way, with an average of 21,500 vehicles on the road each day, creating an impassible barrier to turtles and other wildlife. Hundreds of turtles were killed trying to cross the highway.

In order to prevent further mortality, Matt and his volunteer group constructed a temporary fence that directed turtles into a small culvert under the road. Matt and the group, called Eccopassage, monitored the area at least twice a day to identify and measure the turtles, transport them across the highway and release them back into the water.

Matt and other wildlife advocates proceeded to encourage the Florida Department of Transportation (DOT) to come up with a design for construction of an eccopassage or wildlife crossing to prevent further mortality of turtles and other wildlife. The DOT study will be concluded in December 2004 and an application will be made to federal transportation officials asking for assistance with design and construction of the turtle crossing in 2005. In the meantime, Matt continues daily monitoring and maintenance of the temporary fences along 7,500 feet of US Hwy 27, as well as moving turtles back and forth across the highway. The Florida Wildlife Federation is very grateful to Matt Aresco for his extraordinary efforts to save turtles and other wildlife in the Big Bend region of Florida.

Further information is available upon request from the Florida Wildlife Federation. Please contact Diane Hines at: (850) 656-7113 or info@fwfonline.org.