

## Who is Protecting Water Quality in Your Watershed?

IRWP honors outstanding work in the watershed with the annual Golden Paddle Awards.

*For immediate release*

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*Cave Springs, Arkansas* - Cave Springs, home of the Illinois River Watershed Partnership's Learning Center and Watershed Sanctuary, is named for a natural spring that flows from the cave year-round. Within that cave— and across the watershed and region— live hundreds of species that depend on clean water to survive. As Northwest Arkansas grows, that becomes more of a challenge that requires engaged stakeholder groups that help achieve IRWP's mission.

Every year, an outstanding organization or individual from seven different stakeholder categories is honored with the Golden Paddle Award for their work in and service to the watershed. The stakeholder categories are agriculture, business, conservation, construction, government, technical (research and education), and volunteer.

Winners are chosen based on the engagement, support, and stewardship they contribute towards IRWP's mission over the calendar year. These Golden Paddle recipients help us implement our mission by supporting water quality monitoring studies, like the Streambank Erosion Report that was recently released.

*2021 Winners*

### **Agriculture: The Ollers**

Stan Oller and his family received this award for their commitment to conservation practices including improving livestock grazing and watering systems on their farm. Family farms such as the Oller's have a key role in the future of land management and water quality throughout the region.

### **Conservation: Grand River Dam Authority (GRDA) Scenic River Operations**

GRDA Scenic Rivers Operations received this award due their dedicated work in watershed management in Oklahoma including making the Illinois River a sustainably managed recreation destination. (not

pictured!)

**Business: Arvest Bank**

Arvest was nominated for this award due to the company's leadership across the region supporting community investment that improves environmental education and water quality in the Illinois River Watershed. The work IRWP does in public education, outreach and implementation of conservation and restoration practices could not be accomplished without the active involvement of partners like Arvest.



**Construction: Wes Craiglow, NWA Urban Land Institute (ULI)**

ULI is advancing responsible land use and development in Northwest Arkansas. Wes and the ULI team are receiving this award for their work on responsible growth in partnership with a broad array of stakeholders in the real estate industry.

**Elizabeth Bowen, Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission (NWARPC)**

Elizabeth was nominated for this award due to her leadership and commitment in addressing stormwater and water quality in the Illinois River Watershed in 2021. IRWP is so appreciative of Elizabeth and NWARPC's leadership on these regionally important issues and look forward to continued collaboration.



**Technical/Research & Education: Candice Miller, Oklahoma Blue Thumb**

Candice received this award for her work with Oklahoma Blue Thumb on water quality monitoring and education in the Illinois River Watershed. Candice has been involved in IRWP's ongoing ecological assessments in Oklahoma (See Water Quality Monitoring for more on the EcoAssessment) which helps us better understand watershed management priorities in both Oklahoma and Arkansas.

**Volunteer: Curtis Lester**

Curtis received this award due to his dedication and enthusiasm for improving the Illinois River Watershed and volunteering his time with IRWP at a number of events throughout 2021.



*Stakeholders*

Each of these groups and the public at home is critical to IRWP's work to preserve, protect, and restore natural areas that affect the water quality

of the Illinois River.

The growing population of the region will need smart growth and sustainably managed water resources to handle the changing precipitation patterns and land use changes across the watershed. Lawn fertilizer application, leaky vehicles, pet or agricultural waste, industrial and chemical waste, failing septic systems, and nutrients and sediment from streambank erosion are all currently affecting the Illinois River.

One recipient, Wes Craiglow, said “It is an honor to accept the IRWP Golden Paddle for Construction, and I do so on behalf of the entire ULI NWA professional network.” ULI or the Urban Land Institute is a group of regional real estate development and land use practitioners. “Each [member] is dedicated to advancing those industry best practices and policies that shape our landscapes for the better. This award is a testament to the work they do and the enduring mission of the Urban Land Institute.”

IRWP Executive Director, Leif Kindberg, says “The buy-in of our stakeholders to IRWP’s mission of preserving the river and growing sustainably is key to protecting the habitats, homes, and economic potential of the watershed. We want to honor the people and organizations that address these challenges and improve water quality in the Illinois River Watershed.”

To view more about the Golden Paddle winners, visit [www.irwp.org/golden-paddle-awards](http://www.irwp.org/golden-paddle-awards).

*Illinois River Watershed Partnership*

[Visit the Golden Paddle Awards Web Page](http://www.irwp.org/golden-paddle-awards)



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