

Illinois Conservation Police name Godfrey's CPO Zachary French as Officer of the Year

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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Natural Resources and IDNR Conservation Police today recognized officers for outstanding efforts protecting the public during the past year, including the presentation of Conservation Police officer (CPO) Zachary French as Illinois Conservation Police Officer of the Year.

CPO French, a resident of Godfrey, is based in Madison County in southwest Illinois.

“Conservation Police officers are the best-trained, hardest working law enforcement officers in Illinois,” said IDNR Director Wayne Rosenthal. “Congratulations to CPO French and all of the award recipients for their exemplary efforts in enhancing the safety of all Illinoisans.”

“Our officers help ensure public safety in our parks and on our waterways, enforce wildlife and fish laws and regulations, as well as traffic, drug and environmental laws, while also being first responders for disaster relief and rescue efforts throughout the state,” said IDNR Conservation Police Chief Rafael Gutierrez. “We are proud this year to present the Officer of the Year honor to CPO Zachary French, whose work ethic and personal drive inspire and help motivate all of us.”

CPO French has served as a Conservation Police officer since 2012, working a large district that includes counties throughout the Metro East region. CPO French is a Homeland Security boat operator for the IDNR, assisting with maintenance and operation of patrol watercraft on the Mississippi River and Carlyle Lake. He assisted with flood emergency rescue and response last winter in the Metro East region that included evacuation of residents and rescues of livestock. CPO French serves as an IDNR firearms instructor, and is an active member of the Illinois Air National Guard at Scott Air Force Base. IDNR enforcement activity by CPO French last year included more than 560 arrests, citations, field reports, and written warnings to violators.

Illinois Conservation Police Officer of the Year award winners are selected based on a variety of factors, including job knowledge, skills and judgment; dedication and professionalism in investigation and follow-through on cases; and, cooperation with other officers, agencies and constituency groups.

Other Officer of the Year nominees were CPO Steve Beltran (Ogle Co.), CPO Holly Vadbunker (Kankakee Co.), CPO Ben Schultz (Vermilion Co.), and CPO Steve Vasicek (Union Co.).

IDNR Conservation Police also presented a number of other awards to officers for outstanding performance in 2015.

Medal of Valor: CPO Jason Moody (Moultrie Co.); CPO Brandon Barnes (Shelby Co.); CPO Kevin Bettis (Menard Co.)

Awards of Merit: CPO Troy Williams (Franklin Co.); CPO Audrey Jones (Carroll Co.); CPO Phil Wire (LaSalle Co.)

Certificates of Merit: CPO Dave Holland (Marion Co.); CPO Brandon Barnes (Shelby Co.); CPO Eric Schreiber (McHenry Co.); CPO Tom Davis (McHenry Co.); Capt. Laura Petreikis (Rock Island Co.); CPO Joe Cochran (Christian Co.); CPOT Brian Tanke (Sangamon Co.); CPO Jarrod Elliott (Mason Co.); CPOT Seth Thornley (Cass Co.); CPO Charles Diggins (Saline Co.); CPO Aaron Jansen (LaSalle Co.)