

Chuck Martin Named 2023 IRAP Landowner Of the Year, Three Others in Area Recognized

February 25 2024 7:36 AM



SPRINGFIELD – Chuck Martin, a lifelong upland bird hunter, conservation advocate and local author, is the Illinois Recreational Access Program's (IRAP) 2023 Landowner of the Year, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources announced today.

Three area land owners were also recognized: Jonna Krueger, Macoupin County, Gary Kronable, Jersey County and Steve Zaubi, Macoupin, Christian and Menard Counties.

Others recognized were:

Craig Walter, Lee County

Brad Petersburg, Jo Davies County

The Landowner of the Year award is presented to a landowner enrolled in IRAP who has demonstrated outstanding habitat improvement and conservation practices while allowing public access on their private property through the IRAP initiative.

Martin first enrolled in the program in 2016 and now allows youth hunting, third- and fourth-season turkey hunting, archery deer hunting, and pond fishing on his IRAP-leased property in Christian County.

He said his decision to become a land steward was heavily influenced by the time he spent quail and pheasant hunting with his father. At the time they hunted together, neither of them owned land that provided access to hunting. This meant they relied upon the generosity of other landowners who granted them permission to hunt their property.

“I told my dad I’m going to buy existing farmland and turn it back into habitat for wildlife,” Martin said. “My dad didn’t think that was the brightest idea because of the high price of farmland at the time, but thanks to the encouragement and support of my wife, Mary Jo, we now own 70 acres that we can manage for wildlife and make accessible to other hunters just like my dad and me.”

Since he has been enrolled in IRAP, Martin has conducted prairie restoration and native forb plantings, prescribed burns, and vegetation management and stocking of his pond through the guidance of his IRAP coordinator.

“Every single (IRAP) staff member I have worked with has done what they said they would do and more. They are quick to answer questions and provide technical expertise,” he said.

Martin was also happy to report that all of the IRAP-assigned hunters who’ve accessed his property have been respectful and courteous, noting that “No one has ever destroyed anything, left any trash, or caused any issues with parking.”

Martin's favorite part of being enrolled in IRAP is being able to provide the same kind of experiences he and his dad enjoyed to other families. He's said he's happiest when he sees a young IRAP hunter heading out into the timber with a parent or mentor for a hunt in a controlled setting where they can practice skills and techniques they have learned.

Martin was one of seven nominees recognized by IRAP staff for their conservation efforts and stewardship of Illinois' natural resources, as well as their willingness to allow public access to their land for recreational opportunities. Other 2023 nominees were:

[Go online](#) for more information about the benefits of IRAP and how to enroll.