

Raymond Murray Award

Raymond Murray Award is presented to sworn members who, by a conspicuous act of valor, courage, integrity, resourcefulness and bravery in the protection of our natural resources and /or the safety of the public, clearly set them apart from other persons. This award should be recognized by all members of the Division as the highest fulfillment of the position of New York State Forest Ranger.

On the afternoon of April 18, 2016, **Lt. Scott Murphy**, while on patrol near Hogsback State Forest in the Town of Boonville, heard a radio call for a brush fire on Woodgate Road. Lt. Murphy responded to the fire and was the first to arrive upon the scene. As he sized the fire up he found smoke and flames burning in grass, spruce regeneration, slash and old junk including, old mowers, lumber sheds, boats and cars. Many cans of gas and oil were also strewn about the ½ acre area. Upon further inspection, Lt. Murphy saw an elderly gentleman crawling amongst the smoke and flames.

Instinctively, Lt. Murphy ran to the aid of the man who had went outside to burn papers and inadvertently started the wildland urban interface fire. Lt. Murphy picked up the man and carried him to safety away from the flames, smoke and potentially explosive cans of gas and oil.

Lt. Murphy's quick response, thorough scene size-up, and decisive actions likely saved this man's life. His bravery to charge into the flame front with 4 foot plus flame lengths, heavy smoke and potential danger posed by several cans of gas, old vehicles with gas and oil, old propane tanks and other possibly explosive materials amongst the mini junk yard is commendable.

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On the morning of June 15, 2016, at approximately 11:55 a.m., **Ranger Dave Cornell** responded to a 911 radio dispatch for a personal injury motorcycle crash at the intersection of Teelin Road and Oswego Road in the Town of Vienna in Oneida County. Ranger Cornell was the first on the scene and found the motorcycle operator had a severe leg injury with a deep laceration and major

arterial bleeding. The patient was rapidly bleeding out. Ranger Cornell removed his issued tourniquet and applied it to the patient's injured leg to control the bleeding. Ranger Cornell then assisted arriving EMTs with further patient care and eventual transport to a helicopter airlift that arrived on scene. According to medical personnel, Ranger Cornell's quick medical response likely saved the patient's life and his cool, calm and collected demeanor, decision making and actions were impeccable and the finest display of professionalism.

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On October 16, 2016 at approximately 3:10 p.m., **Forest Ranger Luke Evans** received a call from Lewis County 911 requesting assistance for a woman who had been entrapped in her kayak near Knife's Edge on the Moose River in the Town of Lyonsdale. Knife's Edge is characterized by turbulent waters and rock ledges. Its difficulty ranges from a Class II to a Class V rapids depending on water flow. The woman and seven friends were participating in Moosefest 2016 when she missed her line and became submerged in her kayak facing upstream pinned against a large boulder. Her spray skirt was caught between the rock and the kayak. Her fellow kayakers fought just to keep her head above water.

Ranger Evans immediately responded and was on scene in a short time. He donned his rescue PFD and, carrying his throw bag, hiked upstream for a quarter mile. He assessed the situation, and quickly formulated a plan of action. Standing approximately 15 feet above Mahaney, Ranger Evans caught the attention of the people on the rock and motioned to them that he was going to throw the rope and urged them to tie it under her armpits. Two additional kayakers were told to wait in the eddy to catch her when she floated downstream. Once the kayakers were in place and the woman was successfully tied, Ranger Evans gave a pull, but the first try to free her from her kayak was unsuccessful. Forest Ranger Evans, an avid kayaker, reassessed the situation and made the decision to throw the bag to a Lewis County Sheriff's Deputy, who was downstream along the riverbank with at least four other people. He coordinated the next attempt giving direction to the others involved. This time the attempt was successful and the woman was plucked from her kayak and pulled to shore.

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On the afternoon of April 10, 2017, at 1:20pm, **Ranger Robert Piersma** was notified by Ranger Robert Coscomb of several people that had capsized their canoe in Chittning Pond on Tassel Hill Woodford Memorial State Forest in the Town of Sangerfield in Oneida County. Ranger Piersma responded and arrived at Chittning Pond at 1:25pm and could see two people still out in the lake. Chittning Pond had just recently opened up from winter ice and water temperatures were barely above freezing. Ranger Piersma learned from one capsized boat occupant that rescued himself and another boater that the two people still in the lake had been in the water close to thirty minutes.

Ranger Piersma called to the people in the lake but they were unresponsive. Without regard to his own safety, Ranger Piersma grabbed his throw-bag and waded out into the lake until the water was nearly chest deep but his one-hundred-foot throw bag still could not reach the victims. Both subjects were still unresponsive to Ranger Piersma's calling. Ranger Piersma exited the lake and ran back to his patrol vehicle, quickly donned his cold-water rescue suit, returned to the lake and swam out to the subjects. He found both subjects alive but completely unresponsive. Fortunately, both subjects were wearing life jackets. The two people had their arms tightly inter-locked as if frozen together. Ranger Piersma grabbed one subject's life jacket and with one free arm, swam pulling both subjects together at once against a stiff headwind. Arriving volunteer firefighter rescue personnel assisted Ranger Piersma getting the subjects onto the shore. Rescue personnel loaded and transported both subjects 30 minutes to the hospital where their body core temperature were reported to be only 87 degrees.

Often police officers put themselves in harm's way to serve and protect the citizens of this state. Ranger Piersma braved freezing water temperatures and a strong headwind and by himself rescued two people at the same time from certain peril.

Director's Commendation

The Director's Commendation is awarded to a sworn member who, over the preceding years, carried out the duties of a New York State Forest Ranger in an outstanding manner. This commendation is at the discretion of the Division Director.

Lt. Gary Friedrich's nine years as the Ranger Division's Aviation Liaison and Coordinator speaks to his commitment to the helicopter program with the Forest Rangers, N.Y. State Police and the U.S. Forest Service.

During his tenure, the Forest Ranger Crew Chief Program expanded beyond Regions 5 and 6 to encompass the entire state, increasing from 12 operators to 22. During this same time, Lt. Friedrich, with the help of his team, reissued Standard Operating Procedures for Ranger and State Police Aviation for hoist protocols and the development of the Hoist Assessment Guide.

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Forest Ranger Pete Liebig's accomplishments are many. He is a leader among Rangers for his Incident Command System knowledge and skills. Pete is currently one of the incident commanders on the NYS Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Services Incident Management Team. A sample of his most recent accomplishments include:

- Incident Commander for the NYS DHSES IMT deployment last year for Hurricane Harvey to Texas.
- Incident Commander for the NYS DHSES IMT deployment for Lake Ontario Flooding
- Incident Commander for the NYS DEC Hoosick Falls Incident
- Planning Section Chief for the Dannemora Fugitive Search
- Planning Section Chief for the Roosa Gap Wildfire
- Planning Section Chief for the NYS DHSES IMT deployment to Nassau County for Superstorm Sandy
- Planning Section Chief for the NYS DHSES IMT deployment to Breezy Point for Superstorm Sandy

Ranger Liebig has also been involved with the NYS Wildfire & Incident Management Academy for many years. Most recently as ICS mentor, Planning Section Chief and Incident Commander. He is a member of NYS Forest Ranger Search and Rescue advisory committee where he played a key role in developing and implementing a week-long emergency management in-service training for all Division members. Furthermore, Ranger Liebig has instructed numerous courses during Forest Ranger academies: including Land Navigation, Intermediate Land Navigation, Search and Rescue Field exercises and Firearms.

Ranger Liebig, please come forward and accept the Director's Commendation for your outstanding achievements in the field of incident management.

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Since 2002 **Cpt. John Streiff** has served as the Regional Captain for DEC's Region 5. In this capacity, he is responsible for the management of a third of all Ranger staff Statewide, as well as Ray Brook Dispatch. As the Captain covering the Adirondack Region, he manages a dedicated staff that is responsible for the care, custody and control of 2.6 million acres of state land. Yet these extensive duties are only a part of why we recognize Captain Streiff today.

As a manager, he does not hesitate to act decisively during the most stressful and difficult situations encountered in the north country. Frequently, along with the NYSP, County Sheriffs and our other partners, he willingly accepts the most difficult role of unified incident commander on some of the most recognizable and press-worthy incidents occurring on state land. He has assisted with or led efforts in such notable searches as Gillis, Boardman, Wallface, and Mt. Algonquin to name a few. He is as comfortable working behind a desk as he is responding alongside his staff to a backcountry search, rescue or law enforcement detail. Perhaps Retired State Police Major Charles Guess, author of "Relentless Pursuit, Inside the Dannemora Escape," captured Capt. Streiff's unified-leadership style best during that impactful event when he wrote, "...at the end of the day, I'll have to account for each acre covered and every building searched; and I'll have to do so with confidence. With that in mind, the only way to do this effectively and safely, is to fully implement and embrace ICS. I turned to the Forest Ranger Captain and said, 'John, can I ask you to handle that?' John immediately said 'Yes, Sir'."

Capt. Streiff, for many years you have set an exemplary example for your staff in fulfilling the Ranger mission.

Please come forward and accept the Director's Commendation recognizing your outstanding efforts and leadership as the Region 5 Forest Ranger Captain.

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In 2000, **Lt. Julie Harjung** approached the Division with a proposal to implement a new wilderness first aid program for its members. After a lengthy, comparative analysis of the various programs available, the Division accepted her recommendation and adopted a certified wilderness first aid program which was considered better suited for the backcountry work environment of a Ranger. Lt. Harjung single handedly worked with the agency medical director, course sponsors, and recruited additional instructors, guiding them in their studies. Since its inception, Lt. Harjung has provided instruction at every Basic School for Uniformed Officers, at every mandated annual first aid in-service, and at every seasonal Assistant Forest Ranger training. All totaled, Lt. Harjung has been responsible for the delivery of over 110 first aid courses, teaching over 2500 students. A measure of success of this program is recognized at every rescue when a Ranger provides medical treatment to an injured person. In the past 15 years, Rangers have conducted or assisted with almost 4,000 backcountry search or rescue missions. Her tireless dedication to this program translates to her having a helping hand in saving countless lives across all of New York State.

Lt. Harjung please come forward and accept the Director's Commendation recognizing your outstanding efforts for many years in this vital life-saving program.

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The New York Wildfire and Incident Management Academy (NYWIMA) was born out of the 1995 Long Island wildfires that devastated so much of the pine barrens

habitat of central and Eastern Long Island. Created to bring together two very different disciplines; tactics & techniques, and incident management - both predicate the way the Division and local fire departments manage wildland fires to this day. Since 1999, **Forest Ranger Bryan Gallagher** has worked tirelessly assisting with the running of the fire academy, both in the spring and fall of each year. The many successful years of the wildfire academy are never a one-person job, but Ranger Gallagher's contributions have frequently been recognized as integral to its' success. Beyond the Fire Academy, Ranger Gallagher is recognized for the passion, commitment and success that he has brought to the wildland firefighting community, and to the Division. Since those early beginnings, Bryan has achieved milestones in the field of incident management by becoming a member of the state IMT, a Type 2 Logistics Chief, and numerous other leader positions in the logistical field. During many of the largest State responses, he is often among the first called to set up the vital logistical support system upon which an incident response operates.

Brian is noteworthy in being the first Ranger in modern times to have spent his entire career in Region 1. In those 19 years, he has developed an experience and knowledge that has made him a mentor and leader to the past seven classes of Rangers to begin their careers on Long Island. His character, personality and tireless work ethic have also built countless relations among the enormous number of agencies and community groups on Long Island. The recognition the Division has gained among the Long Island community in his pursuits is a testament to his self-sacrifice, professionalism, and dedication to service, in keeping with the highest traditions of the Forest Ranger force.

Ranger Gallagher, please come forward and accept the Director's Commendation Award for your outstanding service the field of incident management, wildfire management and tireless dedication to the Division's mission.

Meritorious Service Awards

These Awards are presented to those Rangers who display noteworthy levels of achievement in a specific category or assignment. The award is presented to honor and recognize the special accomplishments achieved by the recipient. The award categories include:

- *Completion of noteworthy projects*
- *Outstanding efforts which impacts on the Division's image*
- *Innovative ideas that have increased the productivity and efficiency of the Division.*

The 2016 retirement of Captain Tim Taylor left the Division with a critical need to fill the important position of Use of Force Coordinator. This position assists the Division in helping coordinate the activities of members trained in the Firearms, Defensive Tactics, Physical Training, and Reality Based Training instructor disciplines. The Use of Force Coordinator position involves an enormous amount of time and dedication. This includes ordering supplies, keeping tactics, equipment, and training in line with current trends, being an adviser to the Division on matters of policy; and coordinating with the Division Training Officer to help schedule Use of Force staff for annual Division trainings and Basic Schools. These demands involve many long hours and countless phone calls, meetings and travel; often spending many days each year away from home and the needs of their District.

Forest Ranger Joe LaPierre began his career in 1999 with the 12th Basic School at SUNY Oswego. Since that time, he has become a Firearms Instructor, Defensive Tactics Instructor, Radar/Lidar Instructor, Standard Field Sobriety Testing Instructor, and Taser Instructor. When it came time to fill the Use of Force Coordinator position, this Ranger was highly praised among his peers as being the best one to carry on the work of Captain Taylor. While this position has historically been filled by a Lieutenant or Captain, this was the first time being filled by a Forest Ranger 1.

Ranger LaPierre has been instrumental in coordinating and instructing use of force topics at the 20th and 21st Basic Schools. Furthermore, while there were many Division members involved in the adoption of issued patrol rifles and

shotguns, Ranger LaPierre has been instrumental in the development of training for these weapons. This had a profound impact on the Division's image, when during the Dannemora fugitive search, Forest Rangers were able to lead law enforcement crews safely afield because they were trained and equipped with the best firearms available. His interpersonal skills among his peers and with Division management as well as working with other divisions, departments and agencies in the State, set him apart as a true leader. His team-oriented demeanor has earned him tremendous respect from Rangers in the Use of Force program, and has helped build depth in numbers which has increased the Division's ability to deliver quality trainings for many years to come. In his short time as the Use of Force Coordinator, he has firmly established himself as a dedicated and compassionate leader with the characteristic Ranger "find a way to overcome" mentality. It is Ranger LaPierre's selfless and dedicated commitment to making a positive difference to the future of the NYS Forest Rangers that makes him deserving of the Meritorious Service Award.

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On the late afternoon of December 11, 2016, DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch was contacted by concerned family members regarding two overdue hikers on Mount Algonquin. The young couple, Blake Alois and Madison Popolizio left in the early morning and had not been heard from since noon. A Ranger located the subjects' vehicle at the Adirondack Loj shortly after 7 p.m. Search crews were quickly organized and as darkness set in the Rangers began searching the trails from the Loj to the Algonquin summit and Lake Colden. On Dec. 12, search efforts continued throughout the day and night in extreme weather conditions, covering over 40 miles of trails and drainages around Algonquin. Due to high winds and heavy snowfall travel was slow and difficult. Emergency cold weather shelters were deployed just below the summit to provide relief to the search crews stranded in deep snow.

As search efforts began on the third day, temperatures near the summit hovered near 0 degrees with excessive wind speeds and heavy snowfall from the previous day. Search organizers at the command post remained positive but with each passing hour concern set in for the young couple. Everyone knew this day,

December 13, would have to be the day to locate the pair if we were to expect a successful outcome. At just before 11 a.m., helicopter pilots, Lt. McLain and Sgt. Rumrill flew over the summit. As the helicopter passed over Ranger VanLaer and a climbing guide Don Mellor heard the faint cry for help on the southeast side of Algonquin Summit. Through heavy snow, the rescuers soon reached the two lost hikers huddled in a “spruce trap” just below the summit. Both were responsive but after spending 36 hours in the harsh environment they were suffering from severe hypothermia. Rangers provided food, water and warm gear. Immediately, fresh crews of Forest Rangers and State Police SORT members were put en route to their location as back up if the couple could not be airlifted. At about 12:30pm the first attempt at rescue by the State Police helicopter was thwarted by difficult weather conditions. However, as a small window opened up on the summit and the pilots’ heroic efforts to reach the couple was successfully realized as the young couple was hoisted to safety and transported to Saranac Lake Hospital.

As a footnote: There were many individual heroic efforts performed on this search and subsequent rescue mission. Some were assigned to search the summit, others worked diligently in the command post planning for the next operation. Many could, and have, easily been deserving of their own award. The weather conditions and terrain encountered by personnel was among the most challenging the Adirondacks has to offer. However, it was the collective effort of all the Forest Rangers, the pilots and cooperating agencies that resulted in locating and extracting these two hikers from the summit. It is this sense of teamwork and cooperation that epitomizes the Forest Ranger history and spirit amid tremendous adversity that allows the Division, time and time again, to meet these challenges.

Lt. Charles Platt on behalf of yourself and the 29 other Forest Rangers and Ranger Lieutenants that worked tirelessly on this rescue, please accept this Meritorious Service Award.

Colonel William F. Fox Award

The Colonel William F. Fox Award is presented, in memory of Colonel William F. Fox who is recognized by the Division as the “Father of the Forest Ranger Force”, to a sworn member who, over the preceding year, carried out the duties of a New York State Forest Ranger in an outstanding manner displaying the attributes of persistence, integrity, good judgement, devotion to duty and loyalty to the Division and its members, clearly distinguishing themselves from other persons in the same or like circumstances while in the performance of their duty.

The award recognizes the Forest Ranger as one whose performances helps to achieve the Department of Environmental Conservation and Division of Forest Protection goals and objectives and has inspired others to strive for excellence in work performance. Good relations with the public, other agencies, fellow Forest Rangers and supervisors are also required. This person consistently strives to excel in the duties and functions of a forest ranger. Finally, there is a special quality which routinely places this Forest Ranger at the pinnacle of their chosen profession.

Ranger Scott vanLaer is a man who is dedicated and enthusiastic about the Forest Ranger life and occupation. He has become the Division’s unofficial historian with a passion for the history of the New York State Forest Rangers. If anyone were to have a question about where we came from, Ranger vanLaer would be the one to ask. He would likely have the answer on the tip of his tongue and if not would be willing to spend the next year researching to find out.

More importantly, Ranger vanLaer’s dedication to the Forest Ranger mission is unwavering. Working in Essex County in the High Peaks of the Adirondacks, he is always available and willing to assist the lost, missing and injured that find their way into the wilds of the Adirondacks. Seemingly, he is on every rescue, big or small, whether it be working in 20 degrees in Indian Pass or up on Algonquin searching for a missing couple in the middle of December.

Colonel William F. Fox Citizens Award

The Colonel William F. Fox Citizens Award is presented to citizens, volunteers, organizations or other agency personnel for their efforts which in a significant way has been of extraordinary assistance to the Division in carrying out its mission.

Since first coming to Troop B in 2005 as a Zone Commander, then **Captain John Tibbitts** has been an ally and advocate for the Ranger force. Through numerous incidents, including the search for Colin Gillis, recovery of David Hawath and most notably, the 2015 inmate escape from the Clinton Correctional Facility, Major John Tibbitts and the Division of State Police have offered and given assets and resources to help the Rangers successfully complete our missions.

To this day, Major Tibbitts continues an open channel of dialogue between State Police Troop B and DEC Region 5. Major Tibbitts efforts have certainly been significant and of extraordinary assistance to the Division in carrying out its mission.

Major Tibbitts, please come forward and accept the Colonel William F. Fox Citizens Award for your longstanding support of the Forest Ranger Division.